



# Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust

research education conservation

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## PRESS RELEASE

### **Bottlenose dolphins delight in first encounter of 2011**

Staff at the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT) were treated to a delightful spectacle when a pod of seven bottlenose dolphins arrived in Tobermory Bay on St. Patricks Day. The dolphins treated the gathered crowds to a two hour long aerobatic display, leaping clear of the water on numerous occasions. This is the first sighting of bottlenose dolphins off the west coast reported to HWDT in 2011, although the species is present year round in the area.

HWDT Sightings Officer, Sandra Koetter, has been analysing the images taken of the pod, using distinctive markings to identify individuals - a process known as Photo Identification (Photo-ID). Sandra explains "Photo-ID is a vital tool when monitoring cetacean populations, by identifying individual animals, researchers can better understand abundance, distribution and social interaction within groups".

As well as the 'Inner Hebridean' pod, there's also a separate population of about 15 animals found in and around the Sound of Barra. The bottlenose dolphins inhabiting the waters off the west coast are vulnerable in comparison to the larger populations found in the Moray Firth and Cardigan Bay and are therefore a conservation concern. Sandra continues, "You can get involved and help us better understand the cetaceans found in our waters by sending HWDT images you have taken of cetaceans, specifically their dorsal fin. Simply reporting your sightings online is also a great way to contribute to our research and better understanding of the area." Sightings can be reported online at [www.hwdt.org](http://www.hwdt.org). You can also help HWDT continue the valuable research and education programmes by sponsoring a cetacean, please see the website for more details.