



Dolphin Strandings

Over the last three weeks, three stranded dolphins and one whale have been recorded on the beaches of west Scotland. A dead white-beaked dolphin on Benbecula, a juvenile male common dolphin at Loch Buie, Isle of Mull, another common dolphin at Carsaig, also on Mull, and a minke whale near Port Ellen on Islay have been reported to The Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT), which runs a Community Sightings Programme. This is likely to be due to the recent stormy weather, which brings plenty of flotsam onto the beach, including dead whales and dolphins.

Although whales and dolphins wash up on beaches both live and dead, most of the reports received by HWDT are of dead animals. Many Hebridean beaches are remote and infrequently visited, so it is likely that a significant number of strandings go unreported. Whilst some stranded animals have obvious signs of injury, illness or emaciation, it is often not possible to find a reason why a cetacean has died.



© S. Duffield/ Stranded White beaked dolphin, Benbecula

However, HWDT's Science Director, Dr Peter Stevick, says 'Post mortems on stranded animals can help us find out a great deal about whale and dolphin population structure, physiology and diseases, even when the cause of death isn't clear'.

The presence of some species, such as beaked whales, which are usually found far from land in deeper water, is mostly known about through the discovery of stranded animals. Strandings can also provide an insight into what animals are present in our waters over winter, when the weather means there fewer people out at sea.

HWDT's Community Sightings Programme is essential for finding out about strandings, so if you find a stranded whale, dolphin or porpoise, please contact the Trust as soon as possible. The organisation is also interested in receiving reports of sightings of live animals at sea. Tel: 0800 0858 110; email:sightings@hwdt.org

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