

# Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust

research education conservation

28 Main Street  
Tobermory  
Isle of Mull  
Argyll  
PA75 6NU

**Press Release (04 December 2014)**

## **Famous solitary dolphin travels from Ireland to Scotland**

A solitary bottlenose dolphin has appeared in the Sound of Mull in Scotland, sparking some detective work by researchers at the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT). Sightings of bottlenose dolphins are not unusual in the Hebrides, even during winter, however news of a lone bottlenose dolphin following the ferry between Oban and the Isle of Mull on 2<sup>nd</sup> December was a little bit odd. This species is normally a very social one, usually occurring in small groups and is rarely seen alone, The Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT) investigated; analysing photographs of the dolphin to see if had previously been recorded in the Hebrides. The dolphin's scarred dorsal fin was very familiar - it had recently made international headlines, as a result of unusual behaviour, when last seen in Ireland, some 600 km away in Galway, during September.

*"Bottlenose dolphins are usually considered to be resident to certain areas, so long-distance international movements such as this challenge our understanding of this species, and challenge our ability to protect them using Marine Protected Areas alone",* said Dr Conor Ryan, Sightings Officer at HWDT.

This male dolphin was named "Clet" by locals from Cap Sizun, Brittany in France, where he used to follow fishing boats between 2008 and 2010. From France, he went to Cornwall, Devon and Wales and was last seen in Penzance in April 2014. Next, he appeared in West Cork, Ireland where he spent a few weeks interacting with boats. The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group recorded his movements along the west coast of Ireland to Valentia, Co. Kerry (although he was not seen with Dingle Bay's famous solitary dolphin Fungi who lives close-by). The last record we know of him in Ireland was 28 September 2014 at Inis Óirr off Galway Bay, some 600 km from the Sound of Mull. Although not confirmed, he was thought to be responsible for the dolphin attack on a group of unsuspecting swimmers at a bathing area in Salthill, Galway. The RNLI intervened ensuring that the swimmers were able to get to shore without harm, but unfortunately the incident resulted in some sensational news headlines.

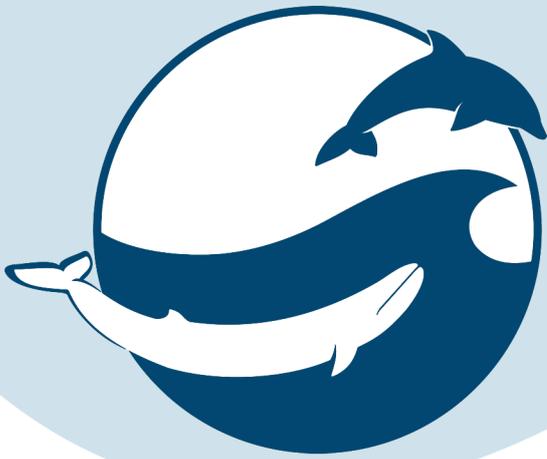
Pádraig Whooley, Sightings Officer for the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group said *"We think it's remarkable that Clet's movements can be tracked to the Irish south and west coasts from France via English and Welsh waters, using images from the general public. The addition of Scotland after a two month interval, brings his known tally of passport stamps to five countries and counting, and shows the need for international collaboration when trying to monitor these highly mobile marine mammals".*

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Solitary dolphins such as Clet do not pose a threat to people in boats, but can be aggressive towards swimmers. The biggest danger to solitary dolphins is injury from boats, as they appear to seek out vessels to interact with. Indeed, the deep gash on Clet's dorsal fin may be from coming too close to boat propellers. The dolphin was recently recorded close to shore from Craignure on the Isle of Mull by wildlife photographer Nic Davies. "I was out photographing otters when I heard a loud blow sound just out from the shore, and then I spotted the dolphin heading at speed towards a departing ferry", said Nic. Clet may remain in the area for weeks or even months, as he has done in other areas before. We would ask boat owners to be respectful and to give the animal the space it needs. We hope it may continue to enthrall onlookers from the shore and from the ferries as it rides the bows of the ferries that ply the water of the Sound of Mull. For those who wish to participate in whale and dolphin research in the Hebrides, HWDT is currently seeking volunteers to conduct surveys from their dedicated research sailing vessel *Silurian* next summer (see [www.hwdt.org](http://www.hwdt.org)).

##End##

## Editors Notes

The Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT) is dedicated to enhancing knowledge and understanding of Scotland's whales, dolphins and porpoises (cetaceans) and the Hebridean marine environment through education, research and working within local communities as a basis for the lasting conservation of local species and habitats. HWDT records sightings of cetaceans submitted by members of the public via their website. HWDT is a registered charity.

Address: Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust, 28 Main Street, Tobermory, Isle of Mull, PA75 6NU.

Tel: 01688 302620 Email: [sightings@hwdt.org](mailto:sightings@hwdt.org) Website: [www.hwdt.org](http://www.hwdt.org)

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) is dedicated to the conservation and better understanding of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) in Irish waters. The Group was founded in 1990 to establish an Irish stranding and sighting scheme and to campaign for the declaration of Irish territorial waters as a whale and dolphin sanctuary.

Address: Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, Merchants Quay, Kilrush, County Clare, Ireland.

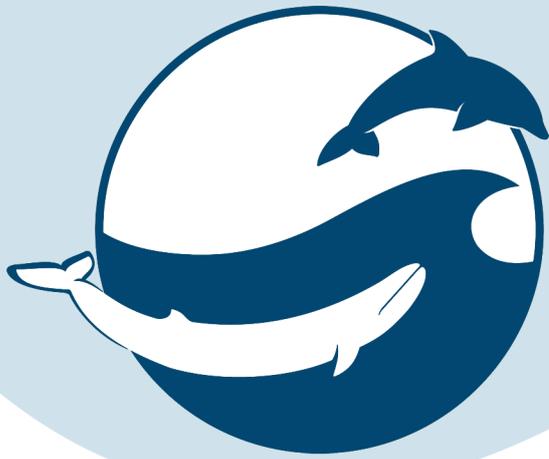
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The bottlenose dolphin is a familiar animal in the Hebrides. It is a highly protected species under EU law and the Hebrides marks the most northerly reaches of their geographical range. Some of the biggest bottlenose dolphins in the world have been recorded in Scotland: they usually grow to 3.5 m in length here. There are over 70 individuals recognised in the west of Scotland, and researchers monitor individuals' movements using a technique called photo-identification. This method works by recognising individuals by their natural scars which they accumulate during fights with other dolphins. HWDT asks members of the public to send them high quality images of bottlenose dolphins that they encounter in the waters of the west of Scotland. By building a photo-identification catalogue, conservationists can piece together the movements of individuals, determine population size and determine areas of important habitat for certain populations.

Clet is known from the Irish photo-identification catalogue curated by the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, but to our knowledge, this is the first time he has been recorded in Scotland. Indeed, this is the furthest north he has been recorded to date. There have been several other cases documented of bottlenose dolphins moving between Ireland and Scotland. A collaborative study between Cetacean Research and Rescue Unit, IWDG, HWDT and others was published in 2012 which detailed the movements of five bottlenose dolphins between the Moray Firth, the Inner Hebrides and Ireland (Robinson *et al.* 2012).

Robinson KP, O'Brien JM, Berrow SD, Cheney B, Costa M, Einfeld SM, Haberlin D, Mandleberg L, O'Donovan M, Oudejans MG, Ryan C, Stevick PT, Thompson PM, Whooley P (2012) Discrete or not so discrete: Long distance movements by coastal bottlenose dolphins in UK and Irish waters. *Journal of Cetacean Research and Management* 12(3): 365-371.

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