



Rare whales cause traffic jams

Over the last month a spate of northern bottlenose whale sightings in Scottish coastal waters has caused quite a stir. The Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT) has been receiving reports of sightings of this deep water species since Sunday 6th September from the waters around Mull and surrounding areas. The most recent sighting is of an individual in Loch Eil, which was reported to HWDT by local adventure centre Outward Bound.

Growing up to about 10m long, northern bottlenose whales are not a coastal species, preferring the deep offshore waters of the North Atlantic. However, although sightings of this whale are not common in the Hebrides, surveys in recent years have found northern bottlenose whales in the waters of the west coast of Scotland in August or September, almost exclusively in the vicinity of Skye where there are some deep channels and basins.



Northern bottlenose whales can be inquisitive, and may approach boats with interest. They may also stay close to injured or distressed companions. These characteristics contributed to the species being greatly depleted by whaling in the 19th and 20th Centuries.



Although northern bottlenose whales usually live in very deep waters, two animals spent some days in Mull's Loch Scridain in September of this year. The animal currently in Loch Eil also seems quite at home. HWDT's Biodiversity Officer, Susannah Calderan has been keeping watch on the shore of Loch Eil and comments "It's really interesting to see this offshore species in Loch Eil. At the moment, this whale seems quite lively, although

Loch Eil is a long way from the open Atlantic, so we just hope it will find its way out OK when it decides to leave."

Sightings such as these remind us that the waters off the west coast of Scotland really are special, playing host to a great variety of cetacean species. Reporting sightings to HWDT will contribute to our knowledge of cetacean distribution and abundance within the area. If you are lucky enough to encounter a cetacean, please report your sighting at www.hwdt.org or by contacting the research office on 01688 302859.

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