

# Penzance B.S.A.C. Conservation Officer's Report October 2008

The bodies of two highly unusual marine mammals have washed ashore in the Isles of Scilly recently, both were found on the western shores of St. Agnes within days of one another. The first was a very rare 12 ft Sowerby's beaked whale, a deep water species which feeds off Squid and Cuttlefish and just days later a

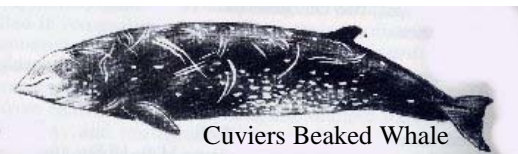
Risso's Dolphin calf less than a ¼ mile away. Despite the sad death of both animals it provided a unique opportunity for local scientists to examine them. The Sowerby's whale was too big to be taken for a post-mortem examination, but members of The Cornwall Wildlife Trust Marine Strandings Network collected

Sowerby's  
Beaked Whale



measurements, photographs and skin samples to be analysed by the Institute of Zoology. The dead calf was taken to the mainland for post-mortem tests at the Veterinary Laboratories Agency at Truro

Mr Ross Newham a keen "birder" from Maidstone in Kent, had visited the Isles of Scilly for pelagic bird watching trips on several occasions, but he had a pleasant surprise on his recent trip when he was aboard MV Sapphire just 2 miles off the Islands with camera ready for unusual birds. There was a slight disturbance in the flat calm water not far from the boat and a Humpback Whale surfaced and dived. "We were waiting for it to surface again when it did a series of three dives." said Mr Newman "We were all looking at the right patch of sea, which was flat calm, when it leapt right out of the water. Fortunately I was the lucky one who pressed the button at the right time".. Humpbacks are migratory species that feed on shoals of small fish. They can reach 50 years of age, 18 metres in length and weigh up to 40 tons



A Cuvier's Beaked Whale was seen off St. Martins Isles of Scilly on the 28th August, by the crew of MV Scillonian III. They are found both in the Atlantic and The Pacific but strangely they are grey or blue-grey in the Atlantic but mustard to dark rust brown in the Pacific.

A 3 ft Lobster was caught off The Eddystone Reef in early September. The fisherman was so impressed by its huge claw, which is 18" long, that instead of taking it to the market he donated it to The Blue Reef Aquarium at Newquay . The curator said the claw is so heavy, Eddy, named after his previous home area, struggles to lift it. All lobsters are born with a cutting and a crushing claw. Their prey includes crabs which are grabbed by the legs using the cutter claw while the crusher breaks open the shell. Other prey includes mussels, clams, sea urchins, starfish and marine worms. They are also cannibalistic.



There were 139 reported sightings of Basking Sharks during September, all between St. Ives and The Lizard The largest group was of 33 off Land's End on the 13th. Harbour Porpoises came second in the number of sightings with 52 between Pendeen and The Lizard, the largest group being 18 off Gwennap Head on the 19th. It's unusual to find Minke Whales in third position with 17 sightings, all but one were off Gwennap Head where three were seen one day, the other was off the Brisons. Next came 16 reports of Grey Seals off Gwennap and Cape Cornwall, and 15 reports of Bottlenose Dolphins which were seen from Penzance to St Ives except one, when a pod of 10 were seen in The Carrick Roads Falmouth. There were also 15 reports of Ocean Sunfish between Land's End and Penzance. Common Dolphins were seen 14 times, the largest pod being about 50 off Gwennap Head and Risso's Dolphins were reported 5 times, 4 of these sightings were also off Gwennap Head, the other was off The Manacles. A Portuguese-man-of-War was seen off Prussia Cove and a Moon Jellyfish off Carn Guthensbras Three strings of the siphonophore, *Apolemia uvaria* also turned up for the first time this year off Cape Cornwall on the 13th of the month.