

Penzance B.S.A.C.

Conservation Officer's Report

September 2012



World's Sea Life is "Facing Major Shock" Marine Scientists warn. Life in the world's oceans faces far greater change and risk of large-scale extinctions than at any previous time in human history, a team of the world's leading scientists has warned. The researchers from Australia, the US, Canada, Germany, Panama, Norway and the UK have compared events which drove massive extinctions of sea life in the past with what is observed to be taking place in the seas and oceans globally today. Three of the five largest extinctions of the past 500 million years



were associated with global warming and acidification of the oceans, trends which also apply today Other extinctions were driven by loss of oxygen from seawaters, pollution, habitat loss and pressure from human hunting and fishing—or a combination of these factors.

Currently, the Earth is again in a period of extinctions and extinction risks, this time mainly caused by human factors. While the data is harder to collect at sea than on land, the evidence points strongly to

similar pressures now being felt by sea life as for land animals and plants.

Kate Stafford, an Oceanographer with University of Washington Applied Physics Lab. Set out to find if any endangered Bowhead Whales passed through the Fram Strait, an inhospitable ice-covered stretch of sea between Greenland and northern islands of Norway. Only 40 sightings of bowhead whales have been recorded there since 1970s. Stafford and colleagues put two hydrophones on moorings attached to the seafloor, leaving them there for nearly a year. Since the number of whales passing through was thought to be small, they didn't expect much interesting data, perhaps a few little grunts and moans, but to their surprise what they got was five months of straight singing. Not only did they record singing nearly every hour of the day and night, they picked up more than 60 unique songs. The variety of tunes was so surprising that the researchers compare the whales songs catalogue to that of birds. They have yet to learn why the whales sang so consistently last year.



Bowhead Whale

There were only 3 reported sightings of Bottlenose Dolphins during August, two of those were probably of the same pod in Mounts Bay, the other was of two animals off Donderry. Common Dolphins were seen 15 times all between Penzance and Cape Cornwall with pod sizes of 5 to 150. 21 reports of Harbour Porpoises were again in the same area with pods of 1 to 50. Basking Sharks were reported 47 times from Torquay to Pendeen. Largest number seen together was 15 off Pendeen and off Sennen Cove on different days. There were 36 reported sightings of Ocean Sunfish seen from The Rumps near Padstow on the north coast around to Mounts Bay on the south. 20 were seen in Mounts Bay on the 20th, but 7 were seen close together and 5 more within 400 metre off St Agnes on the 6th. 8 Leatherback Turtles were seen from Padstow on the north coast to Cadgwith on the south. A Minke Whale was seen in Mounts Bay and a Fin Whale was seen tail slapping close inshore at Hemmick Beach before heading out into deeper water, but there was a report next day of a whale stranding just along the coast