

Hebridean  
Whale &  
Dolphin  
Trust

# 2018 ANNUAL REPORT

*Year to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018*



# Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>CHAIR'S FOREWORD</b>                     | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>A MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR</b>          | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>OUR YEAR IN SUMMARY</b>                  | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>SPECIES MONITORING &amp; RESEARCH</b>    | <b>6</b>  |
| SILURIAN RESEARCH EXPEDITIONS               | 6         |
| SIGHTINGS SUMMARY                           | 7         |
| ACOUSTIC MONITORING                         | 9         |
| WINTER SURVEYS                              | 9         |
| WHALE TRACK: COMMUNITY SIGHTINGS NETWORK    | 10        |
| PHOTO-IDENTIFICATION                        | 11        |
| SCOTTISH ENTANGLEMENT ALLIANCE              | 12        |
| DATA SHARING                                | 12        |
| RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS                       | 12        |
| <b>CONSERVATION &amp; POLICY</b>            | <b>14</b> |
| SCOTLAND'S NOISY SEAS                       | 14        |
| SCOTTISH ENVIRONMENT LINK                   | 15        |
| <b>ENGAGING COASTAL COMMUNITIES</b>         | <b>16</b> |
| HEBRIDEAN MARINE EXPLORER SCHOOLS PROGRAMME | 16        |
| THE FLOATING CLASSROOM                      | 17        |
| RURAICH BIAST-MHARA INNES GALL              | 18        |
| YOUTH TRIPS                                 | 18        |
| EVENTS & TRAINING COURSES                   | 19        |
| DISCOVERY CENTRE                            | 20        |
| THE HEBRIDEAN WHALE TRAIL                   | 21        |
| <b>FINDING THE MEANS</b>                    | <b>23</b> |
| OUR SUPPORTERS                              | 23        |
| VOLUNTEERS                                  | 24        |
| COMMUNICATING OUR WORK                      | 25        |
| PARTNERSHIPS                                | 25        |
| FUNDERS                                     | 26        |

# Chair's Foreword

**This year's report showcases the numerous ways in which we are working to conserve whales, dolphins and porpoises in the Hebrides. 2018 has been a tremendous year during which the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT) has enjoyed a number of notable and innovative achievements.**

One of the highest points of my year was my first sighting of the published Hebridean Marine Mammal Atlas. It is a tangible demonstration of the contribution that citizen science can make to our understanding of the natural world, and it is that understanding that, critically, allows us to influence and contribute to the development of policies that bring about effective conservation.

Following UK wide publicity and subsequent interest in both Whale Track and the emerging Hebridean Whale Trail I am really heartened to see both a massive increase in community sightings and a heightened interest in, and understanding of, our Hebridean environment. I am also delighted that HWDT had the opportunity to work with Gaelic-speaking communities, allowing us to explore and showcase the natural and cultural heritage of our Hebridean Islands. It is of vital importance that these often overlooked, and very human stories, which connect the Hebridean people to their maritime setting, occupy a more prominent position in our educational activities.

Crucially, these new initiatives highlight the importance of working in collaboration with diverse communities who share our values. By bringing together so many organisations, communities and individuals, these projects mark what I believe will be the start of an incredible decade to come with many more sightings and a greatly increased understanding of our seas.

All of these achievements have been supported, driven, guided and often made possible by the tireless, and often unrecognised, work of our Director and my personal thanks goes to her for her excellent work.

It is with tremendous excitement, anticipation and indeed pride that I look forward to the coming year.

Dr Juliana Butler, HWDT Chair



*Dr Juliana Butler, HWDT Chair*

## **Trustees at December 2018:**

Alexa Kershaw  
Andrew Melville (Treasurer)  
Denis Mollison  
Leanne Blair  
Juliana Butler (Chair)  
Philip Cheek  
Peter Evans  
Jonathan Gordon (Science Committee Chair)  
Tom Walmsley

# A Message from Our Director

**We strive for healthy Hebridean seas for whales, dolphins, porpoises and people. Over the last twelve months we have worked to achieve this through robust science, inspirational education and meaningful engagement with both residents and visitors to the Hebrides.**

The launch of HWDT's first Hebridean Marine Mammal Atlas brings together all three streams of our work; conservation, education and community. The publication showcases the results of 15 years' of conservation research, carried out on board *Silurian* by our inspirational community of volunteers, and brings together all the information in to one beautiful educational resource. I encourage you to download the Atlas (it's free) and discover how extraordinary Hebridean seas truly are.

This year we celebrated the first anniversary of Whale Track with an award nomination and record numbers of community sighting reports. My own experience of using the Whale Track app has added a satisfying, and somewhat obsessive, data recording element to my weekend coastal dog walks, although I've yet to make the 'top contributors' list!

With an all new crew at the helm of our much loved research vessel *Silurian* we undertook extensive maintenance towards the end of 2018 as we prepared to embark on an adventurous new programme of winter acoustic survey work. From January 2019 a newly trained and hardy bunch of volunteers will join our science team to survey in the icy sea air. I can't wait to report back our findings.

Thank you to everyone who has supported and contributed to our conservation work this year. I hope this report inspires you to get involved and help us to protect our incredible Hebridean seas.

Alison Lomax, HWDT Director



*Alison Lomax, HWDT Director*

## **Staff 2018:**

Alison Lomax, Director

Becky Dudley, Marine Biodiversity Officer – from March '18

Emma Burgess, Skipper & Boat Manger

Ella Potts, Centre Coordinator – until March '18

Frazer Coomber, Marine Biodiversity Officer – until Feb '18

Gemma Paterson, Head of Fundraising and Communication

Karen Denoon, Finance Officer

Karl Stevens, Hebridean Whale Trail Manager

Kenny Rankin, Gaelic Project Assistant

Lauren Hartny-Mills, Science and Policy Manager

Lauren Macmillan, Media and Communications Officer – maternity cover until Dec '18

Lynsey Bland, Research Assistant – from Oct '18

Morven Russell, Media and Communications Officer – maternity leave

Pauline Massey, Centre Manager

Pippa Garrard, Community Engagement Manager

Simon Van Dam, First Mate

Siobhan Moran, Hebridean Whale Trail Officer

**Contract Boat Crew:** Brian Morrison, Charlie Triggs, Ed Humphries, Jonathan Biddle, Phil Sommerville, Quentin



# Our Year in Summary

The HWDT marked its 24<sup>th</sup> year of operation in 2018 by compiling 15 years' of survey effort and sightings from our unique long-term monitoring programme in order to publish the Hebridean Marine Mammal Atlas, part 1: *Silurian*. This is the first in a series of publications that aim to celebrate the contribution that hundreds of volunteers have made to HWDT and to showcase what we have learnt from the data that has been so diligently collected.

HWDT's flagship *Silurian* is now in her 16<sup>th</sup> year and as we sailed through the spectacular Hebridean seascape, we surveyed nearly 8,000km and recorded over 3,000 whales, dolphins, seals and sharks during more than 1,200 sightings events. Notably, we logged, with great excitement, our very first encounter with long-finned pilot whales and recorded a mystery group of nine killer whales. Despite securing good photos of the killer whales and doing some detective work, it has not been possible to find a match with any known individuals; the pod remains an enigma. This yet unexplained sighting highlights how much there is still to learn about the remarkable marine life in Hebridean waters and the need for long-term monitoring of cetaceans.

It was a record breaking year for our Whale Track sightings community. Marking one year since the launch of the Whale Track app and website, the project was nominated for a national award. Sightings from our community have flooded in at an unprecedented rate. In a single month this summer more sightings were submitted than in an entire year through our old website. With over 800 registered users the platform now holds over 5,000 sightings of 15 species – a staggering public effort.

Staying true to our roots, this year we announced our official Gaelic name 'Urras Mhuc-mara nan Eilean', which translates literally to English as 'Whales Trust of the Isles'. This, alongside the launch of our pioneering Gaelic education project, has really given the language and culture of the Hebrides an ever more prominent position in our activities. We've reached out to over 20,000 people across the west coast of Scotland, supported by 85 passionate and inspiring people who've donated more than 1,300 volunteer days. We've run 45 headland watches, visited 20 schools, held 52 stakeholder meetings, and ran 70 community events and talks, delivered three accredited training courses, and welcomed visitors and local residents alike to our Discovery Centre in Tobermory.

We also worked with our fellow members at Scottish Environment LINK to voice our concerns, provide evidence and offer recommendations across a broad range of issues in 2018 including the environmental impacts of salmon farming and the emerging UK Dolphin and Porpoise Conservation Strategy.

We would like to wish a warm and heartfelt thank you to the volunteers, donors, members, partners and funders who have supported and contributed to our work in 2018, and towards our vision of healthy Hebridean seas for whales, dolphins, porpoises and people.

# Species Monitoring & Research



A rare sighting of an unknown group of killer whales from *Silurian* off Barra – 21.06.2018

## SILURIAN RESEARCH EXPEDITIONS

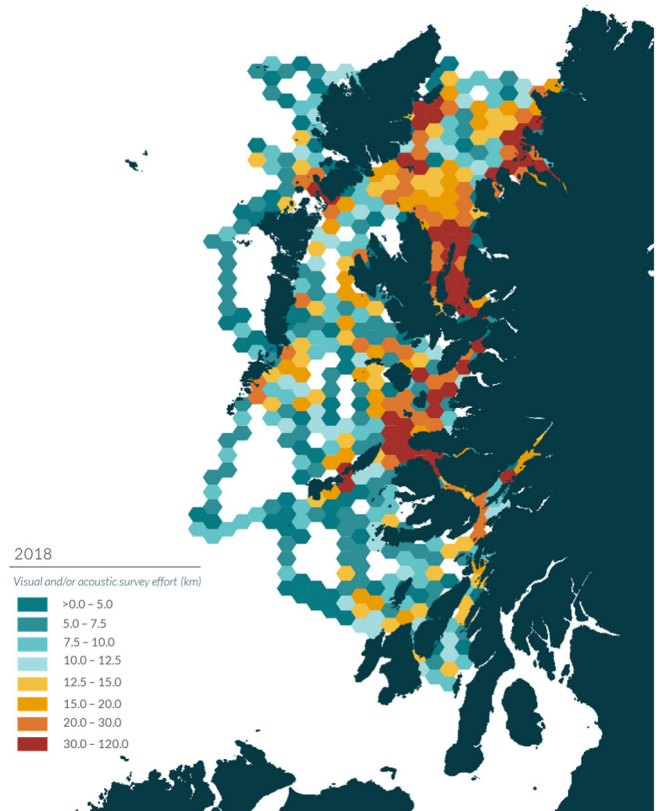
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HWDT operate dedicated research expeditions between April and October each year. We have used the same rigorous survey methodology for the last 16 years ensuring that the data collected are consistent and comparable between years. We travel in straight lines at a constant speed conducting visual and acoustic surveys (using underwater microphones) throughout the diverse waters off Scotland's west coast. We take a different route each trip in order to survey a wide variety of fine-scale environmental variables, (sea temperature, depth, tidal flow, salinity, etc.). Doing so provides a wide scale assessment of cetacean distribution through which HWDT is able to answer questions about population size, habitat preference, site usage, and through our photo identification work, animal behaviour.

*We ran 18 Silurian research expeditions in 2018, surveying nearly 8,000km of Hebridean seas, over 111 days.*



Silurian and volunteer crew surveying Hebridean seas – 07.05.2018



Visual and/or acoustic *Silurian* survey effort (km), April - October 2018. Displayed on a grid of 50 km<sup>2</sup> cells (base maps © OpenStreetMap Contributors, openstreetmapdata.com).

## SIGHTINGS SUMMARY

Collectively we recorded 1,206 sightings of cetaceans and other marine megafauna, documenting 3,125 individual animals. Ten marine mammal species, one shark species and 36 bird species were recorded.

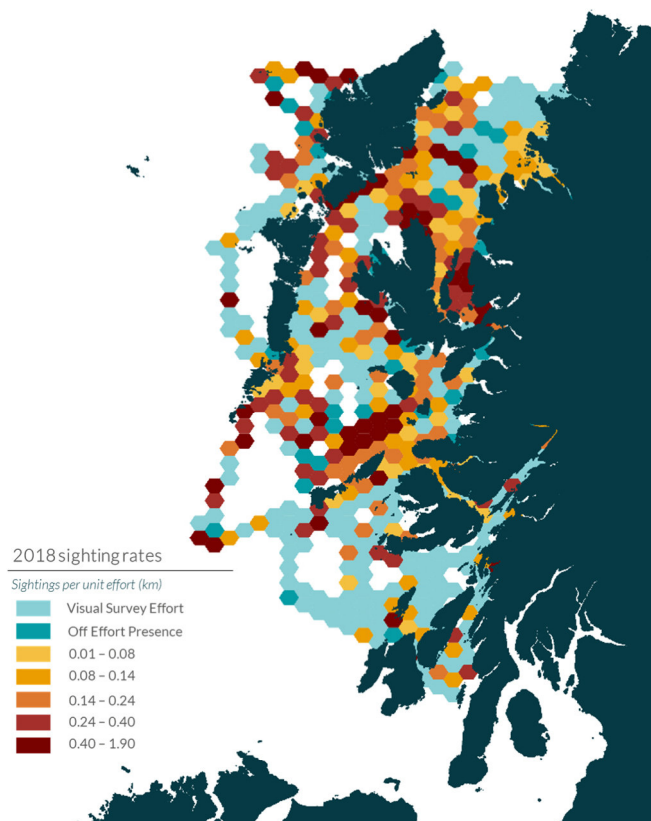
*In October 2018, we recorded long-finned pilot whales for the first time during a dedicated Silurian research survey.*

There was a 19% increase in harbour porpoise sightings compared to 2017, with 448 sightings of 777 individuals. As in every previous survey year, porpoise was the most commonly encountered species. The number of minke whales recorded remained consistent with 62 sightings of 78 individuals. Recent years have seen record breaking numbers of common dolphins, however this year sightings plateaued at 91, compared to last year's all time high of 93. A total of 1,324 individual common dolphins were recorded – similar to the 1,340 animals logged in 2017. Surveys in 2018 encountered the lowest number of basking sharks since we began surveying with just 12 animals recorded. A programme first sighting of long-finned pilot whales and a rare sighting of killer whales, the first sighting since 2014, were amongst the season's highlights.





A common dolphin swimming towards *Silurian* near the Summer Isles  
– 08.09.2018



2018 *Silurian* sighting rates. Sightings per unit effort (SPUE) was calculated for each cell as the total number of encounters per km travelled during visual survey effort.

| Category     | Species                   | Scientific name                   | Sighting | Individuals |
|--------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| Identified   | Basking shark             | <i>Cetorhinus maximus</i>         | 12       | 12          |
|              | Bottlenose dolphin        | <i>Tursiops truncatus</i>         | 4        | 31          |
|              | Common dolphin            | <i>Delphinus delphis</i>          | 91       | 1324        |
|              | Grey seal                 | <i>Halichoerus grypus</i>         | 245      | 281         |
|              | Harbour porpoise          | <i>Phocoena phocoena</i>          | 448      | 777         |
|              | Common seal               | <i>Phoca vitulina</i>             | 150      | 160         |
|              | Killer whale              | <i>Orcinus orca</i>               | 2        | 10          |
|              | Minke whale               | <i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i> | 62       | 78          |
|              | Long-finned pilot whale   | <i>Globicephala melas</i>         | 1        | 25          |
|              | Risso's dolphin           | <i>Grampus griseus</i>            | 10       | 46          |
|              | White-beaked dolphin      | <i>Lagenorhynchus albirostris</i> | 14       | 170         |
| Unidentified | Unidentified baleen whale | N/A                               | 2        | 2           |
|              | Unidentified dolphin      | N/A                               | 20       | 59          |
|              | Unidentified seal         | N/A                               | 124      | 127         |
|              | Unknown                   | N/A                               | 21       | 23          |
| Total        |                           |                                   | 1,206    | 3,125       |

*Silurian* monitoring programme sightings summary by species, April – October 2018.



## ACOUSTIC MONITORING

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Passive acoustic monitoring is a key part of our long-term monitoring programme. It provides an accurate and consistent way of detecting cetacean species, particularly the harbour porpoise. In 2018, 5,700 km of acoustic survey effort was conducted on board *Silurian*. During this survey effort volunteer citizen scientists carried out over 2,000 'listening stations'; a minute of active underwater listening to record identifiable, audible sounds. Dolphin whistles and clicks were recorded on 79 occasions and snapping shrimp 654 times. Manmade sounds were also recorded on surveys, with noise from other vessels detected in 9% of listening stations and acoustic deterrent devices (ADDs) in 7%. There were also 43 detections of sonar activity.

Each year during our acoustic surveys a continuous broadband recording is made and passive acoustic monitoring software, PAMGuard, runs detectors for porpoise clicks. These recordings are then analysed by our team to identify harbour porpoise encounters.

*Since 2002, HWDT have compiled a comprehensive acoustic dataset comprising over 6,000 hours of underwater recordings – that's the same as listening to Spotify 12 hours a day for a year and a half.*

With the support of the True and Fair Foundation, HWDT appointed a temporary Research Assistant to analyse our porpoise acoustic recordings. Working alongside HWDT's Marine Biodiversity Officer and researchers at Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) the resulting acoustic porpoise encounters will be used to investigate if sound pollution caused by ADDs is effecting porpoise distribution on the west coast of Scotland. HWDT and SAMS will be working on this until 2021.

## WINTER SURVEYS

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This year we also began our preparations to extend the *Silurian* expedition survey programme to include winter monitoring. Currently, no substantive winter data exist for the region. This new three year programme of dedicated winter monitoring surveys, due to start in January 2019, will provide critical year-round acoustic monitoring for harbour porpoises and enable us to assess the year-round presence and distribution for the first time. The winter monitoring programme has been funded by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

Preparations for these new winter surveys included extensive boat maintenance in November and December; *Silurian* was fitted with a new rig, and the masts were steeped for painting and repairs. In December we also ran survey training courses in Oban and Tobermory for 40 new winter volunteers.

## **WHALE TRACK: COMMUNITY SIGHTINGS NETWORK**

August 2018 marked one year since the launch of Whale Track, HWDT's community sightings app and website. By the end of 2018, Whale Track had an incredible 842 registered users, who've collectively recorded 5,187 sightings of 15 species and counted 32,689 individual animals surveying some 27,000 kilometres of Hebridean seas - a staggeringly impressive public effort.

Whale Track was named as a finalist in the Best Environment project category in the 2018 National Lottery Awards, the annual search for the people's favourite National Lottery-funded projects. Whale Track beat off stiff competition from over 700 other projects to reach the public voting stage. As a result of the extra publicity 1,046 sightings were submitted in the voting month alone – that's more sightings than we received in an entire year through our old website!



The HWDT team were jumping for joy at being named as a finalist in the the 2018 National Lottery Awards. Tobermory Beach, July 2018

Leaflets were developed to encourage people to download the app, submit their sightings and critically log their excursions. We reached out to over 600 people; delivering 12 public talks, six training events, a community event, and we presented at two conferences. Whale Track has doubled the rate that sightings are reported to HWDT.

Every sighting is important and we'd like to extend a huge thank you to everyone who has downloaded the app and submitted a sighting or an excursion this year.

## PHOTO-IDENTIFICATION

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Photo-identification is a non-intrusive research method, which uses photographs to reveal natural markings or features on the animal's body allowing individual animals to be recognised. Thousands of photographs were submitted in 2018 by the Whale Track sightings community.

A placement student from Plymouth University joined HWDT as a winter research volunteer to process these photographs, detect the presence of identifiable individuals and add the images to HWDT's photo-ID catalogues. We are delighted to once again confirm two of our well-known and much-loved minke whales returned to the Hebrides in 2018.



Kasey the minke whale feeding just off Ardnamurchan Point – 25.08.2019

Kasey, was spotted off Ardnamurchan Point in late August, much to the delight of our Ardnamurchan volunteer stationed at the Lighthouse. Surfacing just 20 metres off the coast, Kasey was seen driving fish to the surface, enjoying an evening meal. Kasey is a regular visitor to the Hebrides, much like the famous Knobble, who was photographed in July, returning to the Hebrides for the 13th year in a row! These repeat sightings highlight the importance of Hebridean waters as feeding grounds for the species.

Monitoring of the famous West Coast Community killer whales also continued in 2018 thanks to sightings and photographs submitted by our Whale Track sightings community. However, only two of the group, John Coe and Aquarius, were positively identified and recorded in 2018.

## SCOTTISH ENTANGLEMENT ALLIANCE

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Entanglement is a global problem and a growing concern in Scottish waters. For minke whales it is the single largest cause of death (up to 40% of all recorded mortalities). To better understand the impacts and risks of entanglement in creel lines in Scottish waters, HWDT has partnered with five other organisations (Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme, Scottish Natural Heritage, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, British Divers Marine Life Rescue and Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation) to form the **Scottish Entanglement Alliance** (SEA). Launched on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 2018 and funded by the EU European Maritime Fisheries Fund until spring 2020, SEA will work closely with the Scottish inshore fishing industry to assess the scale and impact of marine animal entanglements in our waters.

HWDT will assess the interaction between large whales and manmade items in the marine environment by analysing photographs of live animals, assessing scars and injuries and taking new calibrated photos using specialist equipment from *Silurian*.

## DATA SHARING

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Sharing data is important for us to understand the long-term distribution of cetaceans around the UK and the implications of the threats they face. Each year HWDT shares its sightings data with the Sea Watch Foundation, to add to the national cetacean sightings database, and with the National Biodiversity Network, to contribute towards the knowledge of the UK's biodiversity. In 2018 we worked with students completing undergraduate projects at the University of Kent, Plymouth University and United World Colleges (UWC) Atlantic College. Data are also shared with researchers to tackle questions that are aligned with our research objectives. This year creel sightings and survey effort data were shared with the Scottish Inshore Fisheries Integrated Data System (**SIFIDS**); killer whale and seal sightings data provided for the **ECOPredS** project to investigate the energetic consequences of orca predation on seals in Scottish waters; and acoustic recordings made available to the University of East Anglia to support the development of better cetacean click detectors.

HWDT also request data from our marine science colleagues for specific projects. In 2018, minke whale photographs from Iceland, Norway and north-east Scotland were submitted to determine if individual whales are travelling between these countries and if Scottish whales are at risk of whaling by neighbouring countries. The photo analysis is in progress.

## RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

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In October we proudly launched the Hebridean Marine Mammal Atlas, the first in a series of publications. The inaugural edition provides a summary of the visual sightings data that have been collected during 15 years of surveys on board *Silurian* and reinforces the vital role of citizen science for cetacean conservation in the Hebrides. Printed copies were distributed to key stakeholders to showcase the data that are



available and a dedicated webpage was created to encourage the public to [download a free electronic copy](#) or purchase a printed copy.

*The Atlas celebrates the contribution hundreds of volunteer surveyors have made and showcases what we have learnt from the data that has been so diligently collected.*

The data HWDT collect are not only vital for species monitoring, but are increasingly used to assess the impact of human activities. Acoustic data collected during *Silurian* expedition surveys was published in collaboration with SAMS this year. The study demonstrated for the first time the widespread and increasing use of acoustic deterrent devices (ADDs) on the west coast of Scotland, highlighting this as a significant and chronic source of underwater noise (Findlay et al. 2018).

Below are the HWDT published reports and peer-reviewed publications co-authored by HWDT staff in 2018. HWDT affiliated authors are highlighted in bold.

## **PUBLISHED:**

**Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust** (2018). Hebridean Marine Mammal Atlas. Part 1: Silurian, 15 years of marine mammal monitoring in the Hebrides. A Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust Report (HWDT), Scotland, UK. 60pp. <https://hwdt.org/hebridean-marine-mammal-atlas>

**Ryan, C., Bolin, V., Shirra, L., Garrard, P., Putsey, J., Vines, J. and Hartny-Mills, L.** (2018). The development and value of whale-watch tourism in the west of Scotland. *Tourism in Marine Environments*, 13, 17-24. <https://doi.org/10.3727/154427317X14964473293707>

Findlay, C.R., Ripple, H.D., **Coomber, F., Froud, K., Harries, O., van Geel, N.C.F., Calderan, S.V.**, Benjamins, S., Risch, D. and Wilson, B. (2018). Mapping widespread and increasing underwater noise pollution from acoustic deterrent devices. *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 135, 1043-1050. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpolbul.2018.08.042>

## **CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS:**

In April 2018, we attended the 32<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the European Cetacean Society in La Spezia, Italy to present a poster displaying the initial results from Whale Track. This generated a lot of interest in the project from research organisations and individuals across Europe.

# Conservation & Policy



Denis Mollison (second from right), at the campaign launch for the #FightforScotlandsNature campaign - 13.11.2018

## SCOTLAND'S NOISY SEAS

HWDT's policy work in early 2018 was dominated by an inquiry, by the Scottish parliament, into the environmental impacts of salmon farming in Scotland. The inquiry brought with it an opportunity to raise concerns about the unregulated use of ADDs and the licensed shooting of seals by the salmon farming industry. Submissions made by HWDT to both the [Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform \(ECCLR\) committee](#), and the [Rural Economy and Connectivity \(REC\) committee](#) - along with many other groups and individuals who shared our concerns - resulted in a number of [recommendations for industry improvements](#). The findings of the enquiry include an acknowledgement that ADDs are potentially harmful to cetaceans and that the use of these devices needs to be fully assessed, and a recommendation that physical barriers should be used in the first instance (rather than ADDs) to protect fish in cages.

HWDT will continue to gather and provide evidence from our acoustic surveys to demonstrate the cumulative impact of ADDs on cetacean disturbance and distribution in Hebridean seas.

## SCOTTISH ENVIRONMENT LINK

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As a member of Scottish Environment LINK (SEL) we work alongside our marine conservation colleagues to champion the protection of the west coast marine environment and its incredible wildlife. In 2018 HWDT worked in collaboration with our SEL colleagues to voice our concerns, provide support and make recommendations across a broad range of issues. These including a Scottish deposit return scheme, wild seaweed harvesting, marine tourism management, and the National Marine Plan.

The future of Scottish environmental legislation post Brexit was high on the conservation agenda in 2018. HWDT joined with 37 other Scottish NGOs to **Fight for Scotland's Nature**, calling for a Scottish Environment Act to protect Scotland's nature and ensure that Brexit doesn't roll back crucial environmental protections. The campaign was launched outside the Scottish Parliament with HWDT in attendance - 22,000 people joined us in calling for a Scottish Environment Act.

Chemical pollution became a pressing concern as new research emerged in 2018, led by Aarhus University in Denmark, predicting more than half of the world's killer whale populations face collapse due to the effects of invisible toxic pollutants called PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). HWDT joined with our conservation colleagues in England and Europe to **call for urgent government action** to prevent further PCB toxic chemical waste entering our oceans and killing marine mammals. Here at HWDT, we have seen first-hand the devastating effects of PCBs on the UK population of killer whales, known as the West Coast Community, which our team have monitored since 2000.

There was a welcome opportunity to contribute to a new "UK Dolphin and Porpoise Conservation Strategy", in the form of a two-day workshop. This enabled HWDT to feed its expertise in to the draft strategy. A UK wide strategy will help to protect cetaceans from pressures such as climate change, entanglement, pollution, underwater noise and habitat degradation in UK waters by setting out action for monitoring and management.

# Engaging Coastal Communities



Pupils from the Nicholson Institute scanning from Tiumpán Head Lighthouse, Lewis. – 12.09.2018

We believe in making the marine environment accessible to all. In 2018 we provided educational experiences for over 20,000 people. We ran a variety of outreach events at schools and for communities, welcomed visitors to our dedicated Discovery Centre in Tobermory and our research *Silurian*.

## HEBRIDEAN MARINE EXPLORER SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

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In 2018, we expanded our well-established schools programme to target high schools across the west coast. Cross-curricular activities were delivered in six high schools across the region over ten days, for 246 pupils. This included six new 'impact days', during which 114 pupils had the opportunity to visit local sites to watch and record marine wildlife. Sightings of cetaceans were fleeting, but we did record a harbour porpoise, several Risso's dolphins and hundreds of sea birds. Opportunities such as these create memorable and inspiring connections with nature, encouraging a new generation of islanders to take part in the study and protection of their local environment.



*“Our S1 class really enjoyed today, especially the sea watch. The pupils did not realise such amazing and interesting creatures were so accessible to them.” Ms Kennedy, Science Teacher, The Nicholson Institute*

## THE FLOATING CLASSROOM

Our acclaimed floating classroom sailed to eight island primary schools on the Small Isles, Coll, Tiree and Lewis – our first visit in a decade for some schools. Two-hundred pupils took part in sessions exploring the life of a marine mammal scientist on board *Silurian*. The workshops provided children in rural communities the chance to learn about local marine life, inspiring them to become ambassadors for our seas.



Pupils from Eigg Primary School, calling in a sighting on board our floating classroom. – 16.05.2018

*“My favourite part was looking for the seals and shouting SIGHTING! I never knew that whales had furry teeth (baleen) and that dolphins’ echolocate by clicking. Now I know how many whales and dolphins live around us.” P7 Pupil, Stornoway Primary School*

## RURAICH BIAST-MHARA INNES GALL

An additional development this year was the launch of our new Gaelic Education Programme, thanks to the support of our temporary Gaelic Development Intern. This pioneering project was a huge success, with Gaelic sessions delivered to more than 100 pupils, from five of the fourteen schools visited in 2018. Sessions included the floating classroom and the high school impact days, and represent the first time that a member of HWDT staff has taught in schools through the medium of Gaelic.

*“I enjoyed this project and am immensely proud of what we achieved. Most importantly, young Gaels had the opportunity to learn about whales through the medium of Gaelic, and HWDT is now equipped to provide this in other places in the future.”* **Kenny Rankin,**  
**HWDT Gaelic Development Intern**

## YOUTH TRIPS

To tackle social exclusion, we ran a three-day Youth Trip, free of charge to any young person aged 15 to 17 living in and around the remote and rural Coigach and Assynt landscape. Five adventurous young people joined us on board, as well as their teacher from Ullapool High School. This *Silurian* trip taught a mixture of practical teamwork skills, sailing experience, and marine mammal science, whilst highlighting scientific career opportunities available for young people growing up in coastal communities.



Plankton Party on board *Silurian* during the Youth Trip – 21.10.2018

*"I can't praise this trip highly enough. The young people were engaged with every aspect. Not only did they learn a vast amount about the marine animals living on their shores, different pollutants, and the scientific methods of counting and recording them, but also the vital skills of working together in a small space, encouraging each other, and resilience.*

*I think one of the most heartening things about the trip was that the young people could see, and spoke about, careers in science and sailing after they finish school, and the word they all used to describe the work of HWDT was "important".* **Ruth Thompson, Teacher, Ullapool High School.**

## EVENTS & TRAINING COURSES

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HWDT delivered three training courses in Oban, Fort William and Stornoway, to equip seafarers with skills, and a nationally recognised WiSe Scheme accreditation, in responsible wildlife watching. In total, 25 people living on the west coast attended, including 16 boat operators from 12 different whale-watching or marine tourism related businesses, seven students and two lecturers. These courses provide skippers and crew with guidance on how to approach wildlife and minimise unintentional disturbance to any animals they encounter on their excursions.

Whilst visiting Coll, Eigg, Stornoway and Tobermory with our floating classroom, we opened *Silurian* to the public, running five events for 180 people. These events provide local people with a great opportunity to explore the research vessel, ask questions about our surveys and learn more about Hebridean cetaceans. Following each event, local people went away with a greater understanding about they can contribute to science and get involved in conservation.

## DISCOVERY CENTRE

The Discovery Centre opened seven days a week from 31<sup>st</sup> March – 29<sup>th</sup> September, and two days a week from 9<sup>th</sup> October to 18<sup>th</sup> December, totalling 200 days that the public could visit, learn about Hebridean seas, and engage with our work.

### *Our Tobermory based Discovery Centre welcomed over 16,500 visitors in 2018.*

Of the 16,500 visitors, more than 2,500 participated in engagement activities such as bones box workshops, science talks, cruise ship talks, kids clubs, quizzes and escape games. We piloted a new visitor engagement partnership with cruise company, Majestic Line, delivering talks for small groups of guests from the company's 'Wildlife Holiday Tours'. Ten talks were hosted in the Discovery Centre, sharing our knowledge of Hebridean cetaceans with 60 Majestic Line guests.

Just in time for 'Plastic Free July' HWDT launched an 'eco shop' within the Centre to provide alternatives to single use plastic items for our island community. The shop provides a refill service of eco-friendly laundry liquids and cleaning products. We have dispensed nearly 114,000 ml refills, saving over 100 (one litre capacity) single use plastic bottles by customers choosing to refill their containers with us.



Discovery Centre eco-refill station launched in July – 28.09.2018  
Image ©Lucy Hunter



## THE HEBRIDEAN WHALE TRAIL

The Hebridean Whale Trail project celebrates the amazing diversity of wildlife, the rich culture and heritage, and the vibrant local communities here in the Hebrides through the development of a network of fantastic whale-watching and whale heritage sites. The Hebridean Whale Trail strives to be an inclusive project which brings together communities, businesses, conservation charities and tourism initiatives, around the sites and across the Hebrides. Together we aim to promote the opportunities that exist for low-impact and accessible land based whale watching across Scotland's west coast.

*In 2018 we identified over 30 amazing locations to form the Hebridean Whale Trail.*

The sites were identified in consultation with community groups, businesses and other stakeholders at each location. HWDT held 52 stakeholder meetings, and invited suggestions and feedback through web submissions during the site selection process. The sites will be officially announced when the project launches in 2019.



Sophie Crouch, HWDT Volunteer, hosting a headland watch at Glengorm – 04.06.2018

A key element of the Hebridean Whale Trail project is community and visitor engagement. In 2018 we provided educational and outreach activities for 631 people at potential trail sites including; 12 public talks, seven guided headland walks and two event stalls.

We aim to encourage participation in citizen science and Hebridean Whale Trail sites provide an excellent opportunity to conduct shore based cetacean surveys alongside public whale watches. Each site is unique so pilot citizen science activities were set up at three sites in 2018. Monthly watches from Duart Castle battlements and twice-monthly watches at Glengorm from April – September were delivered on Mull. A four-week volunteer placement was set up at Ardnamurchan Lighthouse, re-establishing the site as a field station to monitor marine life, and engage with visitors and the local community.



Craig Mackie, Ardnamurchan Lighthouse Volunteer, on his first watch – 13/08/2018

At Ardnamurchan Lighthouse, thanks to the support of the Ardnamurchan Lighthouse Trust, HWDT's residential Ardnamurchan Volunteer carried out a minimum of four hours of survey, five days a week from 13<sup>th</sup> August – 7<sup>th</sup> September 2018. The project logged more than 100 hours of effort-based monitoring data for our Conservation Partner the Sea Watch Foundation, and recorded 51 sightings of 175 marine mammals through Whale Track. Of these sightings one stands out above the others... a very close encounter with Kasey, a minke whale who has been visiting the area for over 15 years, feeding just by the shore.

These pilot citizen science activities at Hebridean Whale Trail sites proved popular with visitors, provided valuable engagement for local communities, strengthened partnerships at each site, and collected vital data for conservation programmes. Through these pilots 45 headland watch events were delivered, with 1,157 people taking part.

# Finding the Means



Scanning for cetaceans from the Isle of Mull ©Lucy Hunter – 28.09.2018

Each and every penny gifted to us, be it from project grant funders, our members and sponsors or one-off donations, helps us to make a big difference. We couldn't achieve all that we do without the help of all of our supporters.

## OUR SUPPORTERS

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Individual supporters make a big difference to HWDT. More than 250 members and animal sponsors are the heart of our supporter network paying regular annual subscriptions making our core work possible year after year. The financial contributions made by *Silurian* volunteers are crucial for the continuation of the long-term species monitoring programme. In 2018 *Silurian* volunteer payments raised over £85,000 for our survey and research activities. Over 2,500 visitors purchased items in the Discovery Centre gift shop, raising over £12,000 to support our work in 2018.

We ran our Christmas Challenge crowd-fund campaign with The Big Give for a second consecutive year and raised just over £5,000 for our Hebridean Marine Explorers programme from 60 individual donors. The British Photography Awards selected HWDT to be a charity partner again in 2018 raising just over

£500 for our cause. In October, Chris Sharples, Calum Branstone, Will Neal, Kieran Wragg and Graham Hill conquered Ben Nevis and raised more than £1,000 to support our work.

## VOLUNTEERS

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We quite simply couldn't achieve all we do without the amazing volunteers who give up their time and skills to help us deliver our research and education activities. This year 85 volunteers have collectively contributed more than 1,330 days to the charity. From volunteers who participate in *Silurian* surveys to professional scientists, HWDT is proud to work with a wide range of people who share our values.

Seventy-eight volunteers participated in *Silurian* research expeditions in 2018. Sixty-one volunteers joined us on expedition surveys, some returning for multiple surveys, and 17 teenagers joined one of our teen research expeditions. Volunteers contributed 752 days (18,048 hours) on board *Silurian* in 2018 – that's over two continuous years of voluntary time donated this year alone.

*“The personal experience that I have had has been quite incredible. I have rediscovered things that really fire my soul - sailing and experiencing the sea in particular. I love the people I have met and the friends made.”* **Bruce Crawford, Silurian survey volunteer, 2018**

Seven brilliant early career conservationists joined our unique volunteer placement programme, spending between one and six months with the HWDT team in Tobermory and Ardnamurchan; Sophie Crouch, Craig Mackie, Danny Miranda, Micheal Newman, Chris Page, Alexa Roditi and Alex Wilkins worked across many of our projects and objectives. As well as working on their own discrete projects (i.e. photo ID research) our volunteers welcomed thousands of Discovery Centre visitors; running daily workshops to communicate the results of our research. They also delivered public headland watches, collected hundreds of hours of land-based survey effort, joined our crew on-board *Silurian* to assist with the delivery of HWDT's long-running scientific surveys and provided support for our core research programmes.

*“Being part of the team, supporting the data collection and raising awareness among local communities has enabled me to develop skills and confidence to take the next step and pursue a conservation career.”* **Danny Miranda, Research & Outreach Volunteer**



## COMMUNICATING OUR WORK

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Partnering up with Charity Works, HWDT offered a paid 12-month placement for a Media and Communications Trainee. This role increased our capacity to engage with our supporters and promote our work. A subsidy of nearly £5,000 was awarded to HWDT by Charity Works which part funded the trainee salary and made the placement possible.

We published 79 online news articles, which resulted in a combined 278 items of press coverage (online and print) and nine TV and radio interviews, with a particular buzz around the launch of our Marine Mammal Atlas and the Hebridean Whale Trail. Our support and engagement on social channels continued to grow in 2018. We published an annual online supporter magazine, Wave, annual sponsorship e-updates for our minke whale and killer whale sponsors, and a monthly e-newsletter.

## PARTNERSHIPS

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In 2018 we introduced a Corporate Partnership scheme to provide opportunities for businesses to support our work. We are grateful to The Majestic Line, Treshnish and Haunn Cottages, Hebrides Cruises and Glengorm Castle who pledged their support to date, raising £1,875 to support conservation efforts.

*“I am delighted to be strengthening our partnership with Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust and we are honoured that the Majestic Line are their first corporate partner. We are indebted to the trust for the conservation work that they do and for the education sessions that they provide for both our crews and guests,”* **Andy Thoms, Director of The Majestic Line.**

We expanded our collaboration with Lord of the Glens cruise ship in 2018 by delivering nearly double the talks on board, 14 in total reaching over 400 people visiting Tobermory for the evening. Eight of these talks were held in collaboration with Lindblad Expeditions-National Geographic. Contribution forms were once again provided to guests by the globally-recognised charter company to inform passengers of our work and encourage donations. This fundraising partnership enabled HWDT to raise nearly £18,000 in passenger donations.

## FUNDERS

HWDT would like to acknowledge all of its funders, who provide essential grant monies for salaries, capital work, project work and core running costs.



John Ellerman  
Foundation



*“Tapadh leat!”*

