



Protecting *Manx Wildlife*
for the future

Dead marine megafauna strandings annual report 2015



Libby Fox – Marine volunteer

Dr Lara Howe – Marine officer





Introduction

Since 2013 Manx Wildlife Trust has collated all marine megafauna strandings from around the Isle of Man on behalf of DEFA. This is the third year of data collection. This report outlines the findings from the year 2015. The cetacean data also feeds into the annual CSIP-UK report.

Training

No new volunteers were trained during 2015.

Methodology

Any dead strandings of marine megafauna around the Isle of Man, are reported to the current Marine officer at Manx Wildlife Trust, either via phone, email or social media. This information is then given to a trained volunteer. Each volunteer is assigned a 'strandings pack' which comprises of everything needed to effectively record the data required (see appendix). On arrival the attendee will record all the necessary details on a printed recording sheet. Firstly, the time, date, location and number of individuals stranded. Secondly, the details of the carcass found, including; dead/alive, species, degree of composition, trauma or identifiable markings, sex and maturity. Once complete, using the tape measure provided, the measurements are taken, depending on whether the specimen is a cetacean, pinniped or other, the dimensions are taken accordingly. Photographs are also taken, especially of areas of trauma or damage. The form is then submitted to the marine officer where it is added into the database, along with the photographs. Cetacean forms are also sent to CSIP (UK Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme) for inclusion in their annual reporting.

Stranding results

In total there were 16 stranded individuals found on the coast of the Isle of Man during 2015 (Figure 1). They comprised of 13 Grey seals, one Harbour porpoise, one Minke whale and one Basking shark (Figure 2). Each stranding was recorded as a single individual at any one time. Figure 1 shows the locations of all strandings and the absence of any along the east coast from Ramsey to Castletown.



Figure 1. The locations of all the different species stranded on the coast of the Isle of Man.

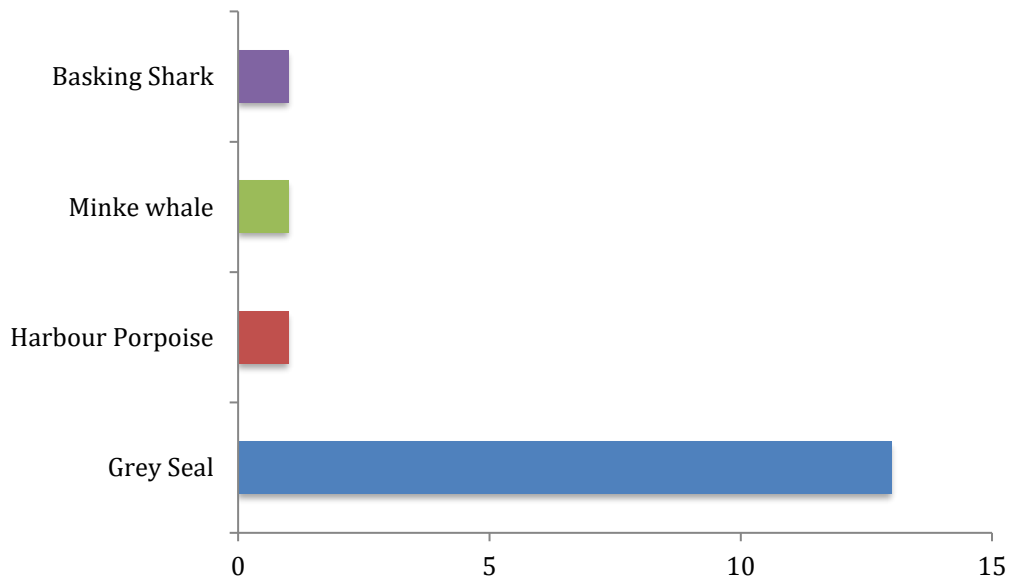


Figure 2. The total number of strandings in 2015 around the coast of the Isle of Man.

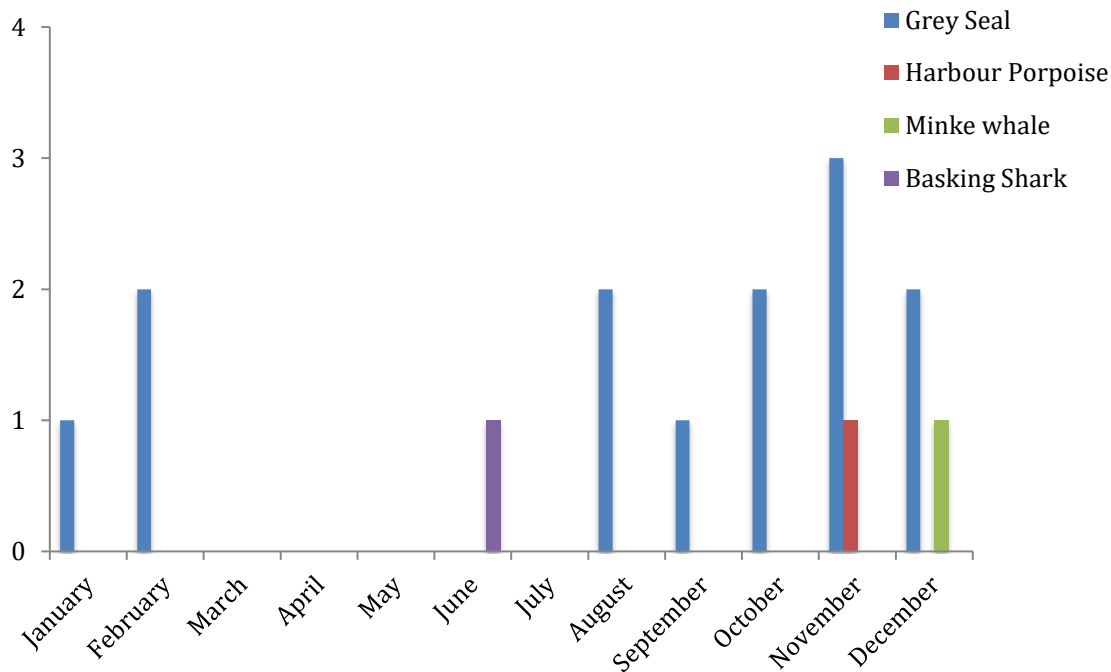


Figure 3. The monthly distribution of stranding reports of all species throughout the year.

From Figure 3, it shows that during a portion of the year, March – July, there was only a single Basking shark reported in June, whereas the remaining months had one or more Grey seal strandings being reported. Seals were the most commonly found stranded individuals with one or more found across seven months. The winter months of November and December had the most reported strandings with a maximum of four. In November there were three seals, one Harbour porpoise and December had two seals, one Minke whale was stranded.

Cetaceans

During 2015, there were only two cetaceans found stranded on the Isle of Man. There was a single stranded male, adult Harbour porpoise reported and attended on the 4th of November. When it was called in, it was freshly stranded at Gansey point being recorded as 'still warm' with no obvious signs of trauma. Liver and blubber sampled were taken for examination but results are **not yet available**.

The second cetacean found was a stranded adult Minke whale of over 7m that was reported and attended by a volunteer on the 1st December. It was found heavily decomposed at Glen Wyllin. The genital area was badly decomposed meaning the sex was unable to be determined. It had no obvious signs of trauma.

Grey seals

In total there were 13 seals reported and all were Grey seals. Out of the 13, 12 were attended and data was collected, however a single pup was reported to DEFA in February but was unable to be found.

Nearly half (n=6) of the individuals were freshly stranded, six were in a state of decomposition, three of which were advanced. All were reported as dead strandings



apart from one juvenile female in the November who was first seen alive on the same beach but a few days later it was reported as deceased and removed by ManxSPCA. Of the 13 stranded, only one adult female was recorded as having obvious signs of trauma to the birth canal area. None of the Grey seals found possessed a flipper tag. The reported individuals were wide spread over the island with no obvious location with a higher density of strandings. There was absence of any reported from Ramsey to Castletown along the east coast.

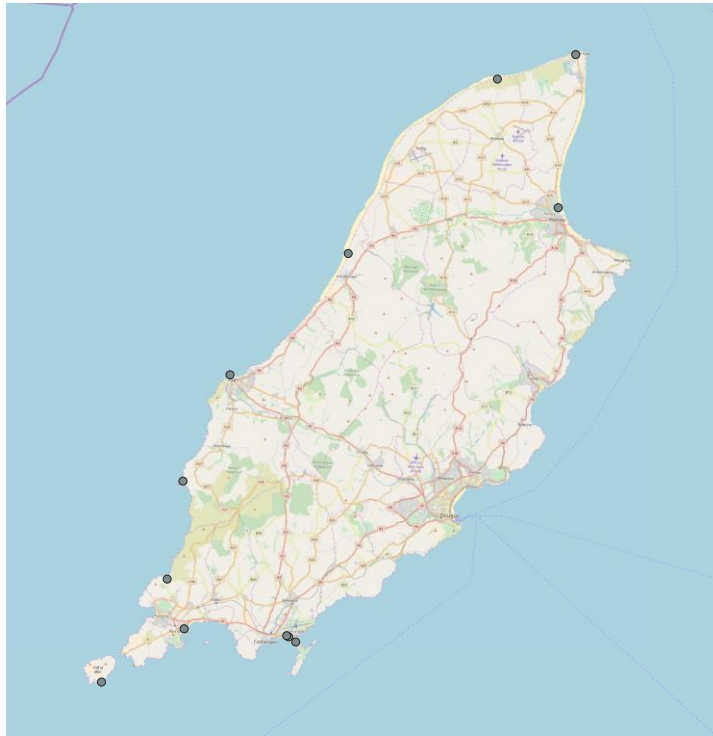


Figure 4. The distribution of stranded Grey seals around the coast of the Isle of Man.

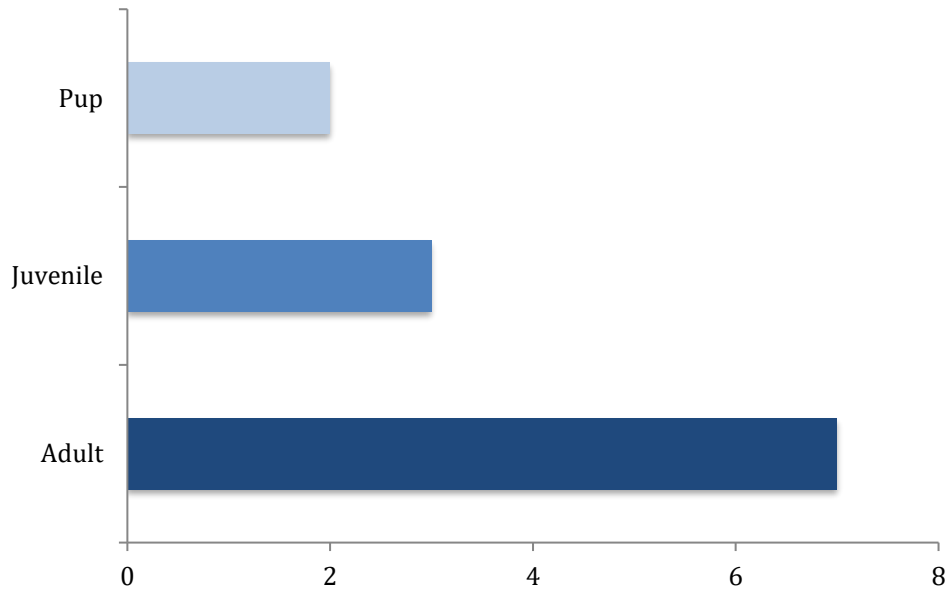


Figure 5. The age distribution of the reported Grey seals.

The data (Figure 5) shows that 7 out of 13 of the Grey seals stranded were adults. This is the opposite to 2014 where there were more pups than adults.

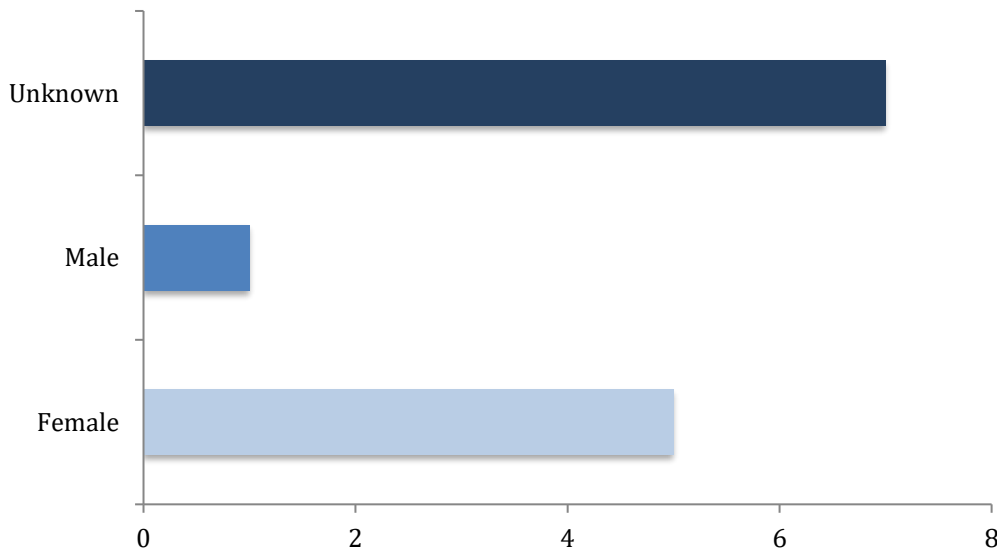


Figure 6. Sex ratios of the stranded Grey seals.

From Figure 6, it shows that of those individuals successfully sexed there were five females and one male. Of the seven unable to be sexed: five were too decomposed to be identified and one was never found. The higher number of females than males is likely due to the larger female population in Manx waters.

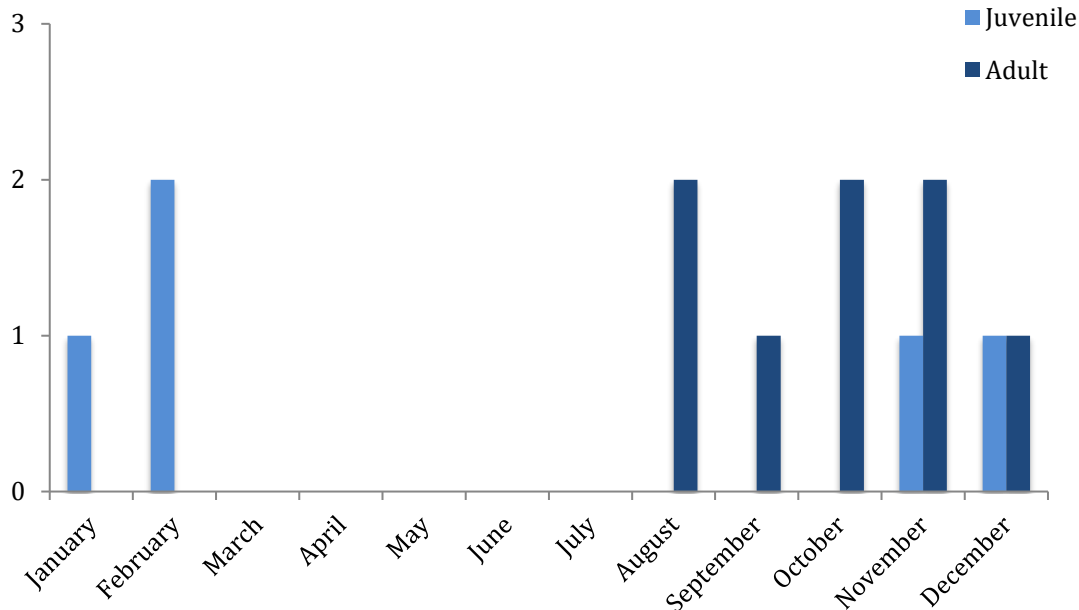


Figure 7. The monthly distribution of stranding reports, both adult and juvenile Grey seals throughout the year.

From the data (Figure 7) it shows that juveniles were recorded stranded at the start and end of the year, this coincides with the peak breeding/weaning season and increased stormy conditions. The strandings in January and February could be from those born in late 2014 and those in November and December from the 2015 cohort.

Adult strandings were condensed into the latter five months of the year, from August onwards. This may be due to more severe weather, which brings stormy conditions throughout Autumn and going into Winter.

Basking Shark

The single stranded adult Basking shark was reported and attended on the 4th June this year in a state of advanced decomposition. This male was found south of Orrisdale head and was over 7.5m long and had a mostly complete carcass with no signs of trauma.

CSIP reporting

During 2015 a total of 570 cetaceans and 533 seals were reported stranded according to data collated by CSIP. The most common species of cetacean found stranded was the Harbour porpoise (n=274) and of the seals, Grey seal was the most commonly found (n=376). Across the Isle of Man there were 13 Grey seals, one Harbour porpoise. This shows that the species being stranded on the Isle of Man are generally consistent with the CSIP annual report.

Comparing this year's data with 2014, there were 594 cetaceans and 481 seals reported as stranded. An overall decline in cetacean stranding numbers from CSIP data and Isle of Man findings is concurrent with the overall trend of the past 5 years.



- Harbour porpoise

As highlighted by CSIP, the distribution and abundance of Harbour porpoise strandings are largely correlated with the distribution and abundance of the species in UK and adjacent waters. This can explain the presence of strandings here in the Isle of Man, as Harbour porpoise are the most commonly sighted marine cetacean within its waters. Since 2011 – 2014 numbers of Harbour porpoises being stranded have been decreasing as shown in CSIP annual reports (mean = 351).

- Minke Whale

In total, there were 18 Minke whale strandings reported nationally in 2015 as quoted by CSIP, making it the fourth most commonly stranded cetacean. This figure is the highest recorded since 2011 (mean=14 for years 2011-2014).

The Isle of Man's historic data shows that there have been two Minke whales that have been stranded in 2008 (n=1) and 2009 (n=1). As Minke whales are sighted within Manx waters, having the occasional stranding is within normal parameters.

- Grey seals

According to CSIP, the total number of Grey seals stranded nationally has risen from 303 in 2014, to 376 in 2015. However, for Isle of Man data, it has seen a decrease from 18 Grey seals stranded in 2014 to only 13 this year (2015). This reports findings are not concurrent with the trend shown in CSIP as a rise in Grey seal numbers stranded from 2012 – 2015. This may be due to the fact that Grey seal population numbers are shown as increasing since 2008 according to IUCN Redlist. However, this variation is still within normal margins.

- Basking shark

As shown by CSIP, there was a total of 5 Basking sharks stranded in the UK, one in the Isle of Man, making 6, a value than the past four years (mean=4, 2011-2014). Basking sharks are commonly sighted live in Manx waters and there are two Basking sharks previously recorded historically as stranded in the Isle of Man back in 2009 (n=1) and 2011 (n=1). Therefore, although slightly more unusual stranding, it is still within normal parameters.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Isle of Man strandings data follows the trend in decreasing cetacean strandings as shown by CSIP for the past 5 years. It also shows that the most common cetacean found stranded nationally and in Isle of Man, is the Harbour porpoise.

Although a Minke whale and Basking shark stranding is unusual, they are species commonly sighted around the coasts and so it is not within normal parameters to find the occasional stranded ones.

For seal strandings, the Grey seal was the most commonly stranded species found both on the Isle of Man and nationally.

Therefore, overall the Isle of Man findings for 2015 seem to follow the overall trends as seen by CSIP for this year and previous years. Manx numbers of strandings have varied over the last three years but there appears to be no abnormalities in results and the data recorded is well within expected parameters for the Isle of Man.



7. Appendix

Form NHM136 w3/20010501

This form should be filled in and posted, immediately after telephoning or sending a fax, to:

Department of Zoology,
The Natural History Museum,
Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD
Tel: 0207 942 5155 Fax: 020 7942 5054



Stranded Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises

Note: Rubber gloves should be worn when handling cetaceans, alive or dead.

Place and date where carcass first seen
The position of a locality not likely to be given on an OS map should be indicated by its relation to some better known place, bay or headland.

Place _____ **Date** _____

County _____ **Grid ref.** _____

Name of Finder _____

Is the tail horizontal? If the answer to this question is 'No', it is not necessary to fill up the rest of this form as the animal is therefore not a whale, dolphin or porpoise.

Yes No

Is there a hole ('blowhole') on the top of the head? Yes No

Is it a single hole or a pair of holes? Single Pair

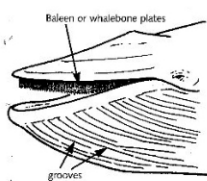
Does the mouth contain teeth/tooth sockets or baleen/whalebone plates? Teeth Baleen

If neither teeth nor baleen can be found, state whether the two halves of the lower jaw are:

(a) **Arched outwards and widely separated half way back** (In which case the specimen is a Whalebone Whale, and the baleen has been washed out); (a)

(b) **Close together in front, where the jaw is accordingly narrow** (A Toothed Whale in which the teeth are concealed beneath the gum). (b)

Whalebone Whales if baleen present, state:




(a) The colour of the baleen plates. If not everywhere alike indicate the arrangement; e.g. 'white for ... cm at front end of right side, the rest as stated' _____

(b) The colour of the hairy fringes of the plates _____

Grooves Is the throat marked by numerous deep grooves? Yes No

Grooves Is the throat marked by a pair of grooves? Yes No

Toothed Whales if teeth are present, state:



(a) Whether they occur in both jaws or in the lower jaw only. Both Lower

(b) The number of teeth and empty sockets of one side of the upper jaw. Teeth Empty sockets

(c) The number of teeth and empty sockets of one side of the lower jaw. Teeth Empty sockets

(d) If only few teeth & sockets present, their position in the jaw. Front Middle Back

(e) The diameter of one of the largest teeth. Diameter

(f) Whether teeth spade-shaped or conical/needle-shaped. Spade-shaped Needle-shaped

Appendix 1. The recording sheet used by volunteers when attending a stranded Whale, Dolphin or Porpoise.



Seal Stranding Recording Form

Please remember your own health and safety is paramount: watch for the tide, always wear gloves and do not lift heavy weights.	
Reported by: Telephone: Date/Time:	Recorded by: Telephone: Date recorded:
Location:	Grid ref:
Alive when stranded?	yes no
Species (see id notes below):	grey common harp hooded
Sex (male, female or unknown):	male female unknown
Age (adult, juvenile, pup or unknown):	adult juvenile pup unknown
Is carcass complete (head, tail, all flippers present):	yes no
Carcass condition (e.g. fresh, decomposed or advanced decomposition):	fresh decomp adv decomp
Obvious traumas other than scavenging (e.g. gunshot, net marks, etc.):	
Identifiable markings (scars, patterns on coat, missing claws, digits, etc.):	
Flipper tags, or hole between digits where tag may have been (if so please note which flipper, tag colour and any number or address):	
Hat tags (colour and number):	
Body Measurements: (cm)	
1. Head – hind flipper. Tip of the nose to the end of the hind flippers.	
2. Head – tail. Tip of the nose to the end of the tail.	
3. Girth. Taken beneath the flipper pits around the body.	
4. Head. Tip of the nose to the back of the head.	
5. Partial digit. Measured on the leading digit from the joint below the claw to the knuckle.	
Photos: If possible please take photos (digital are ideal) of the whole body and also close-ups of the left and right hand side of the head. If there are any unusual traumas such as gunshot, net marks, missing head, etc., please photograph those too.	
Seal Species Identification: There are two resident species of seal in the UK, the common seal and almost exclusively encountered around the Cornish coast, the grey seal. It is the head shape and its characteristics that offer most easily recognisable features: The common seal has a small head with rounded crown and a blunt nose which is sloping forming a concave bridge between the forehead and nose. The nostrils form a V shape, joining at the base. The grey seal has a large head with flattened crown and a straight long roman nose which offers a straight or convex profile. The nostrils are parallel and do not meet. Occasionally other species such as harp or hooded seals visit our waters. For identification of these and other species use a reliable reference book or id chart.	

Please return this form and your photos to:

Strandings Records Coordinator, c/o Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Five Acres, Allet, Truro TR4 9DJ
Email: records@cwtsstrandings.org Website: www.cwtsstrandings.org

CORNWALL WILDLIFE TRUST WORKING IN ASSOCIATION WITH C-SMOG, THE NATIONAL SEAL SANCTUARY AND THE GODREVY SEAL GROUP

Appendix 2. The recording sheet used by volunteers when attending a seal stranding.



Basking Shark Stranding Recording Form

Reported by: Telephone: Address:	Recorded by: Telephone: Date recorded:
Date first seen: Time first seen: Alive when stranded? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	Location: Grid ref:
Total length: _____ m	Claspers present? <input type="checkbox"/> YES (male) <input type="checkbox"/> NO (female)
Snout to 1 st dorsal length: _____ cm	Gill rakers present? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
1 st dorsal to caudal: _____ cm	Food in back of throat (orange paste)? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Snout to 1 st gill slit: _____ cm	Tissue samples taken (*where requested):
1 st dorsal height: _____ cm	Muscle for genetic analysis? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Pectoral length: _____ cm	Fin sample? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Girth (half way around x2): _____ cm	Skin sample? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Caudal height: _____ cm	Photos taken? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Natural scars/markings (take photos if possible):	By-catch evidence (take photos if possible):

Please return this form and your photos to:

Strandings Co-ordinator, Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Five Acres, Allet, Truro TR4 9DJ
 Email: coordinator@cwststrandings.org Website: www.cwststrandings.org



CORNWALL WILDLIFE TRUST IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE MARINE BIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



Appendix 3. Recording sheet template for a stranded Basking shark as provided by Cornwall Wildlife Trust.