Manx Wildlife Trust
Treisht Bea-Feie Vannin

Dead marine megafauna strandings annual report 2014

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Introduction

From 2013 Manx Wildlife Trust has collated all dead marine megafauna strandings from around the Isle of Man on behalf of DEFA. This is the second year of data collection following official training of volunteers. This report outlines the findings from the year 2014. The cetacean data also feeds into the CSIP-UK final report for the year of 2014.

Training

The new marine officer for MWT was the only trainee for this year.

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 27 individuals stranded and 4 different species stranded off the coast of the Isle of Man in 2014. Of these, 18 were Grey seals, 5 Harbour porpoise, 2 Common dolphins and 2 Minke whales.

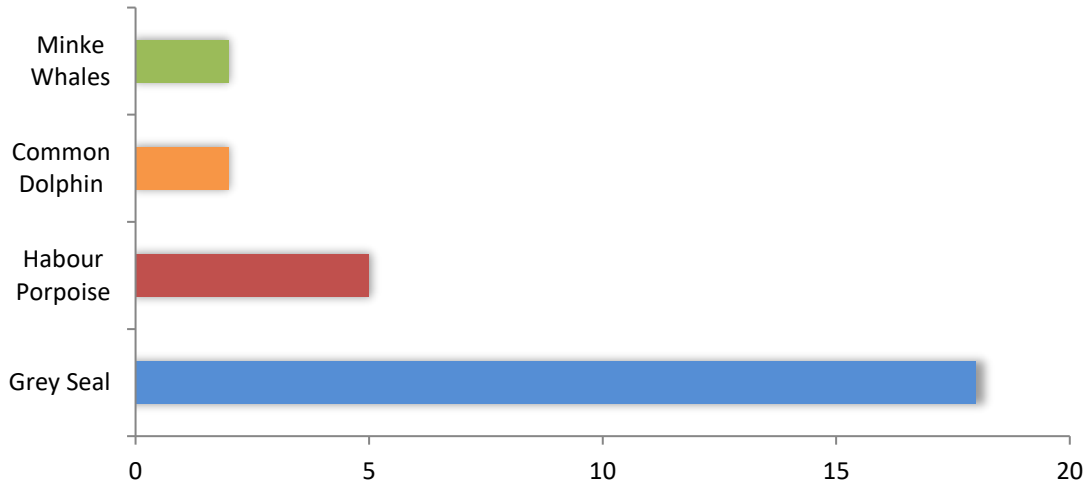


Figure 1. The species and number of strandings of marine megafauna in 2014.

From Figure 1 it shows that there were a greater number of Grey seals being reported stranding on the shores of the Isle of Man than any other species.

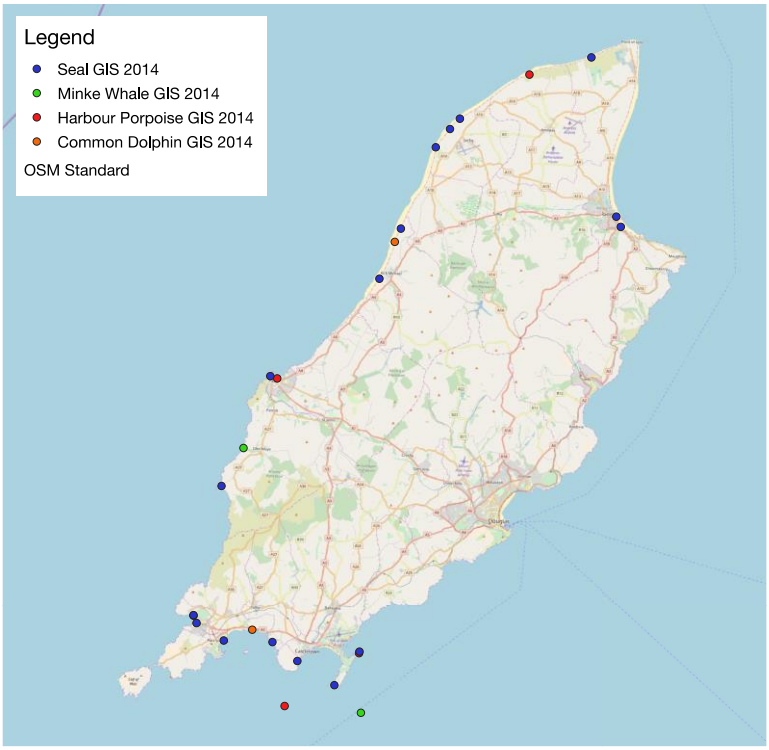


Figure 2. The locations of all marine megafauna strandings around the Isle of Man for 2014.

From Figure 2 it shows that the densest area of strandings was the southern tip from Castletown to Port Erin whereby at least one of each species was reported within this area. There were no strandings reported for a section of the east coast from south of Ramsey to just before Castletown.

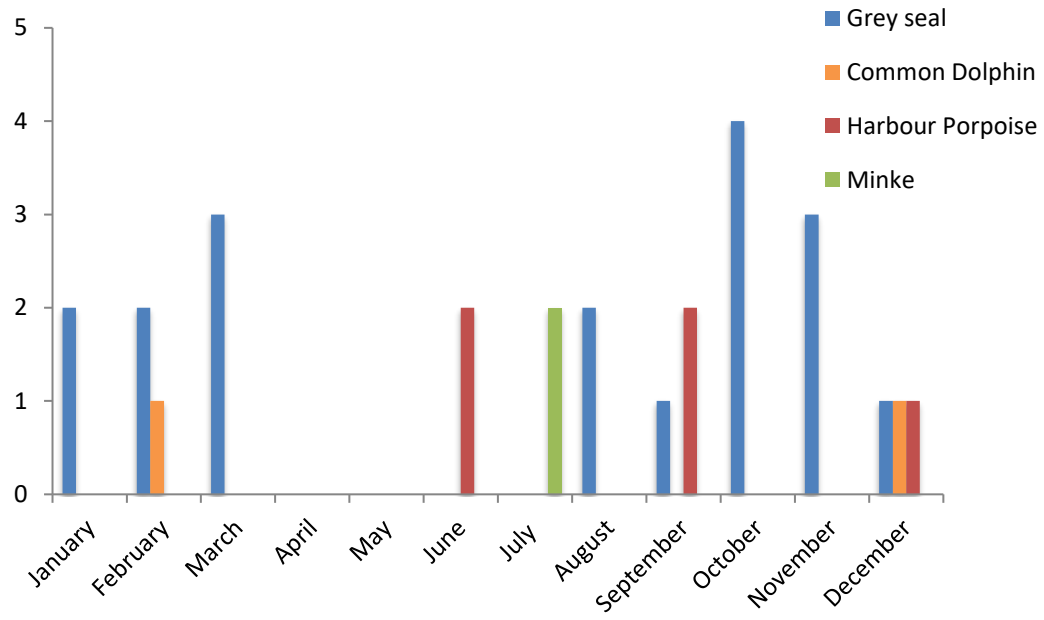


Figure 3. The month each strandings were reported throughout the year.

Figure 3 shows that for the middle part of the year, April and May, there were no reported strandings. Seal strandings were reported for the start and end of the year, along with Harbour porpoise and Common dolphin. However, both Minke whale strandings occurred in July. The higher number of strandings during the winter months could be related to stormier conditions and that it is the breeding season for Grey seals.

Cetaceans

All 9 cetacean strandings had complete carcasses and were attended by four different volunteers. The two Common dolphins found comprised of one adult male and one juvenile female. The locations of the stranded Harbour porpoises can be seen in Figure 2 with the one individual out to sea where it was reported off Scarlett point.

Of the stranded cetaceans individuals there were three found fresh, one female adult Harbour porpoise was reported via the phone as alive but trying to beach itself but when attended it had died. The remaining four individuals were all heavily decomposed with one showing significant signs of head trauma.

Both of the Minke whale stranded individuals were recorded in July, four days apart from one another. The first was reported on 8th by Holyhead coastguard 20nm SE of Port St Mary until it washed up severely decomposed on Langness (figure 2). Unfortunately, no size measurements were taken.
The second on the 12th July was a freshly deceased juvenile female on Glen Maye beach (figure 2) whose carcass was still mostly intact. Measuring 6.35m long, the only obvious trauma was two holes under the chin, a cut under the right flipper and some rope marks where it was initially towed in having died at sea.

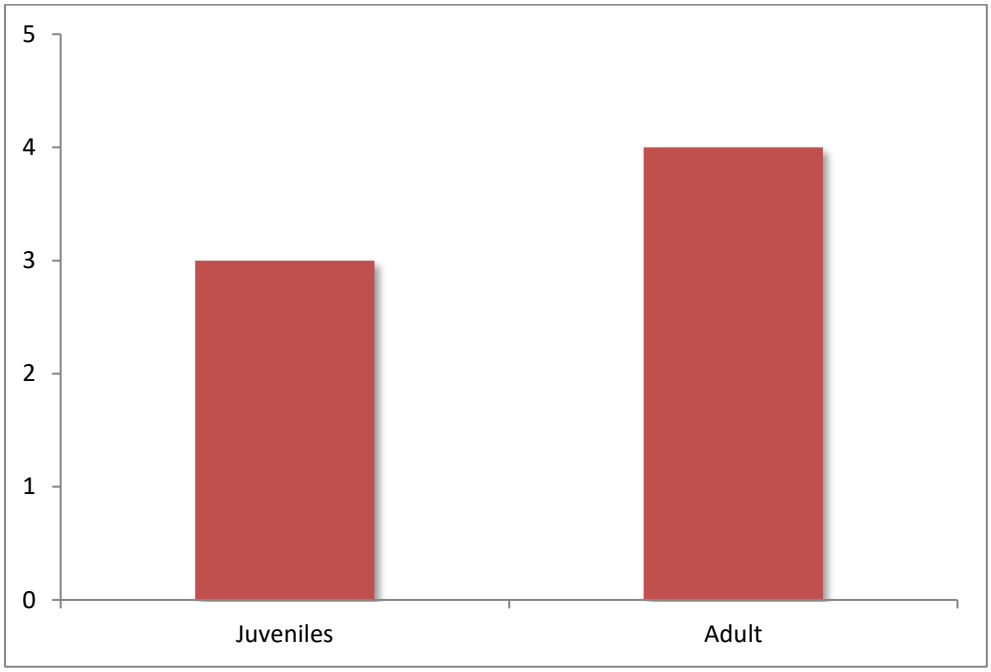


Figure 4. The age range of the stranded cetaceans.

From Figure 4 it shows that similar numbers of adult and juvenile cetaceans were found stranded, with one individual unable to be identified and one at sea.

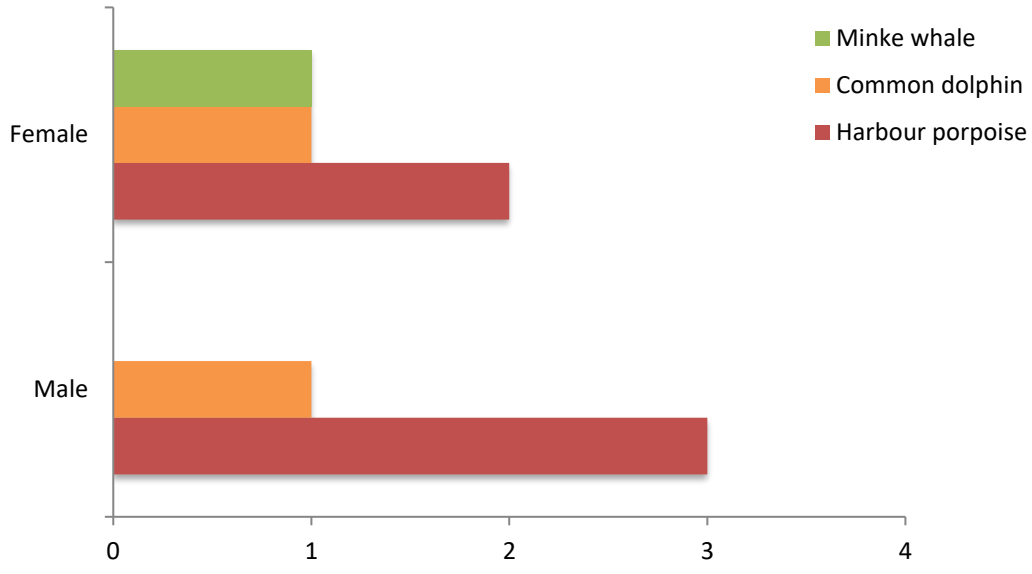


Figure 5. The different sexes of stranded cetaceans.

From Figure 5, it shows that in total there were 3 males and 2 female Harbour porpoise and one of each sex were found to be Common dolphins. The other Minke was at sea so was unable to be sexed.

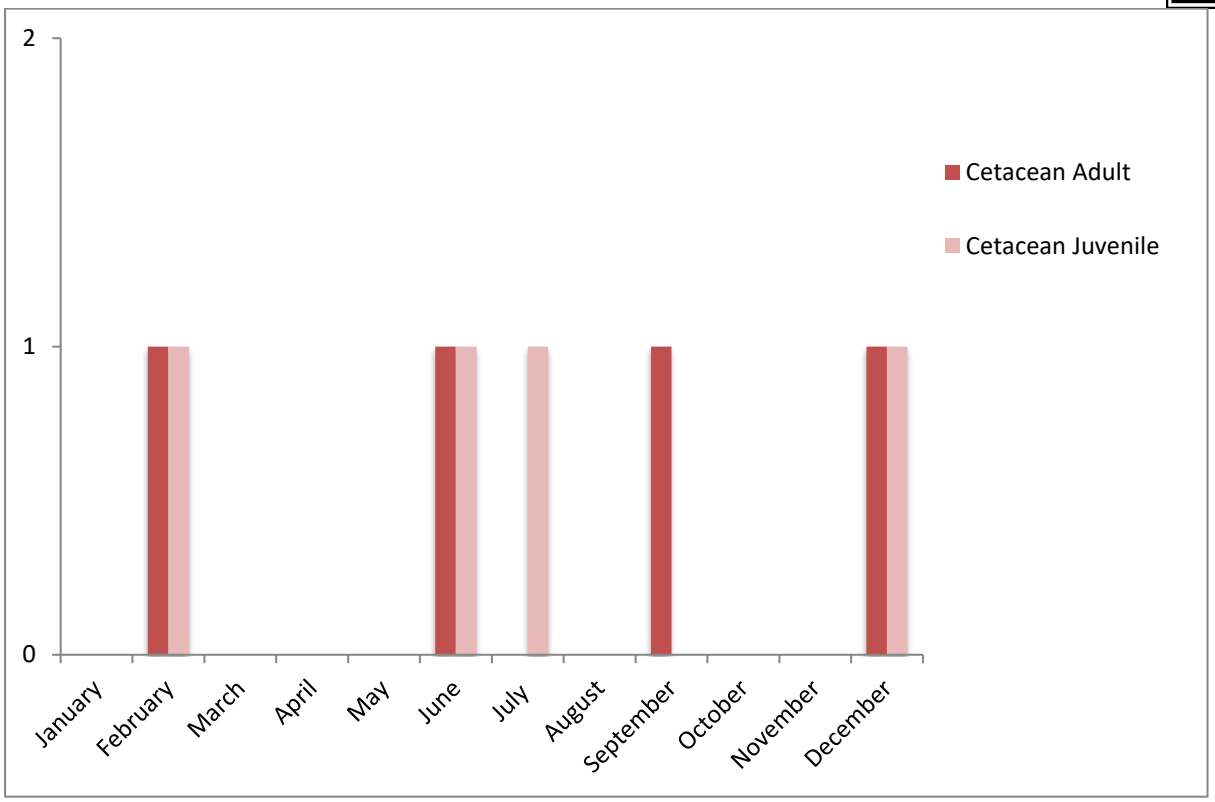


Figure 6. The distribution of cetaceans stranded of both age categories throughout the year.

Both of the Minke whale stranded individuals were recorded in July, four days apart from one another. The first was reported on 8th by Holyhead coastguard 20nm SE of Port St Mary until it washed up severely decomposed on Langness (figure 2). Unfortunately, no size measurements were taken and therefore no age was determined.
The second on the 12th July was a freshly deceased juvenile female on Glen Maye beach (figure 2) whose carcass was still in good condition. Measuring 6.35m long, the only obvious trauma was two holes under the chin, a cut under the right flipper and some rope marks where it was towed in having died at sea.

Seals

All seal strandings were identified as Grey seals and were attended by the same 2 volunteers. Of the 18 Grey seals all were dead strandings; 3 were reported as fresh and 5 were in a state of advanced decomposition.
There were only four Grey seals that showed no signs of trauma. 10 individuals had their heads missing, with some having other parts absent too. A couple with obvious trauma, including a puncture wound to the chest and one with bones exposed on a flipper and one covered in bruising. These are natural signs of early decomposition and typical signs of scavengers having been present. However, one seal did present with a large cut across the back of its head, almost severing it, which may suggest a collision with a propeller.
None of the individuals had any identifiable marks or flipper tags present.

Figure 7. The locations of Grey seal strandings reported from around the Isle of Man.

Figure 7 shows that the strandings are relatively widespread along the south, west and northern coastlines. However, there are no reports along the mid-section of the east coast, between Maughold head and Derbyhaven.

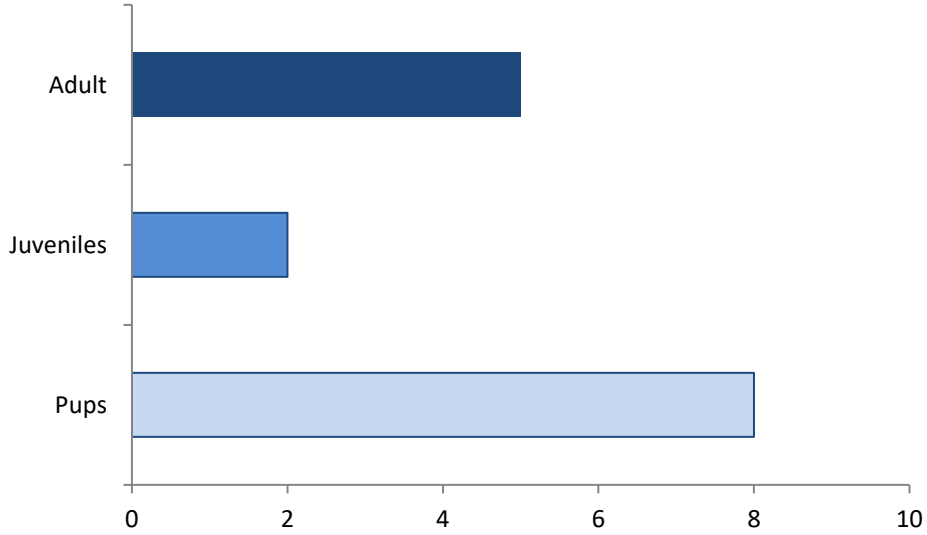


Figure 8. The age range of stranded seals.

Figure 8 shows that majority of the seals found stranded were pups, eight in total. One of which was found as developmental stage 1, three had only reached developmental stage 5 and three others appeared to be significantly underweight.

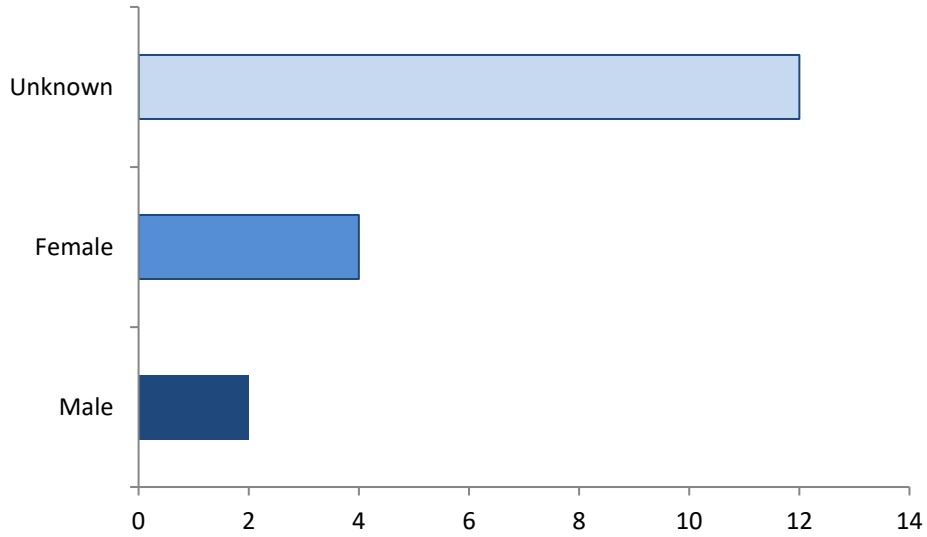


Figure 9. The different sexes of stranded Grey seals.

A greater number of females than males were found stranded (Figure 9) however, 12 individuals were unable to be sexed so accurate conclusions are difficult to be made.

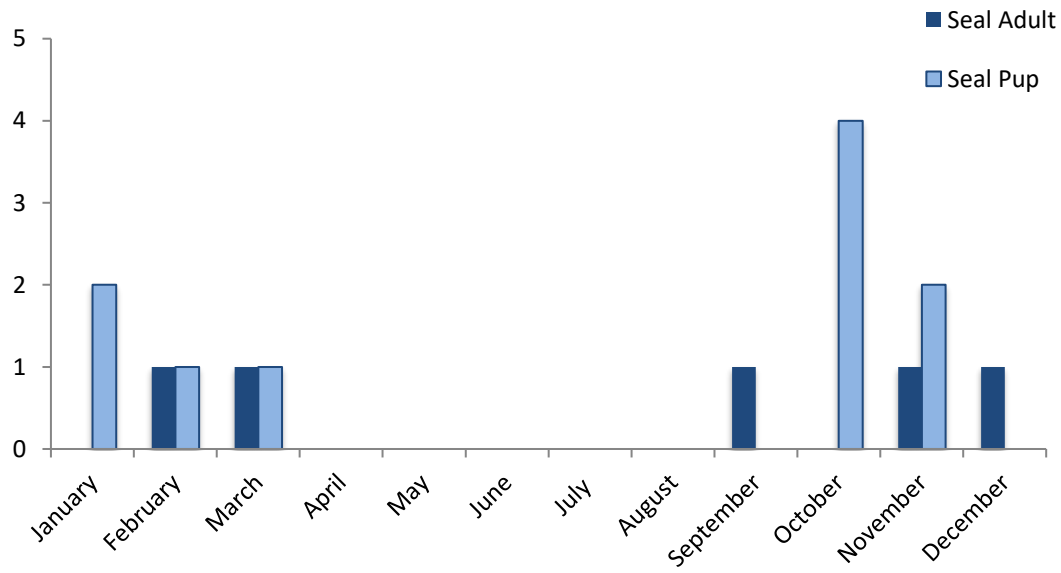


Figure 10. The distribution of Grey seals stranded of both age categories throughout the year.

From Figure 10, it shows that during each month where a strandings was reported, there were the same, if not more, pups being found. At most there was only ever a single adult stranding, whereas in January, October and November there were multiple pups recorded. The later, stormier months coincide with the breeding season of the Grey seal meaning that more pups are being born and exposed to the conditions.

CSIP reporting

During 2014, 594 cetaceans and 481 seals were recorded stranded nationally. The Harbour porpoise (n=336) was the most commonly stranded cetacean with Common dolphin second (n=93). Of the 481 seals that were found stranded, the most common species was the Grey seal with 303 in total. Across the Isle of Man there were 18 Grey seals, 5 Harbour porpoise, 2 Common dolphins and 2 Minke whales. This shows that the species being stranded on the Isle of Man within this report are consistent with CSIP findings.

-Harbour porpoise and Common dolphin

In 2014, there were 336 Harbour porpoise stranded around the UK, a number comparable to 2013 (n=417), with 4 from the Isle of Man.

The yearly distribution of strandings within this report shows no clear pattern, remaining relatively constant throughout the year, which is parallel with CSIP data from 2010-2014 as shown in their annual report.

The data showed that there was no discrimination between the sexes or maturity of the cetaceans found stranded, not mentioned in the CSIP reports.

The second most commonly found stranded cetacean, according to CSIP, is the Common dolphin (n=93) consistent with Isle of Man data. It was shown that the majority of UK stranding of both Harbour porpoise and Common dolphins is correlated with the distribution and abundance of the species in the adjacent and surrounding waters. Although the Common dolphins are seen in Isle of Man waters, they aren't common, as the name suggests.

From the data it showed that 2014 was the first year a Common dolphin was reported on the Isle of Man.

- Minke whale

In total there were 15 stranded Minke whales in the UK during 2014, two of those were found here on the Isle of Man. This is equal to the total found in England, with the remaining 11 found in Scotland.

-Grey seal

In 2014, there were 18 Grey seals found stranded on the Isle of Man, compared to 9 found in 2013. This is concurrent with a national rise as shown in the CSIP data from 288 (2013) to 303 (2014). Similarly, it has been shown that over the past 5 years there has been a general increase in Grey seal strandings being reported around the UK. This may be due to the fact that Grey seal population numbers are increasing and have been since 2008 according to IUCN Redlist.

As reported in this report, there were a number of individuals (n=10) who had their head missing, this is a common occurrence due to a combination of wave action at a naturally occurring physiological weak point.

Conclusions

In conclusion, Harbour porpoise and Common dolphins are the most common species of cetaceans found stranded both on the Isle of Man and nationally. Similarly, Atlantic grey

seals are the most commonly stranded pinniped found both on the Isle of Man and nationally. Therefore, the data found for stranded cetaceans and pinnipeds on the Isle of Man follows the same patterns found nationally and in previous years as shown within the CSIP reports.

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

THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Stranded Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises

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

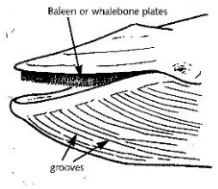
Place and date where carcase first seen
The position of a locality not likely to be given on an OS map should be indicated by its relation to some better known place, bay or headland.

		Date	
Place			
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:



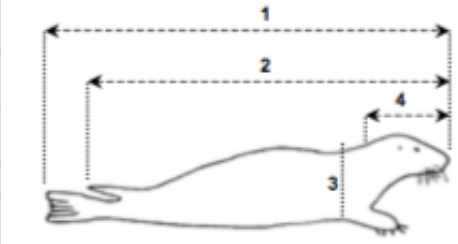
(a) The colour of the baleen plates. If not everywhere alike indicate the arrangement; e.g. 'white for ... cm at front end of right side, the rest as stated				
(b) The colour of the hairy fringes of the plates				
Grooves Is the throat marked by numerous deep grooves?	**Yes**		**No**	
Grooves Is the 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 provided by the Natural History Museum.

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:

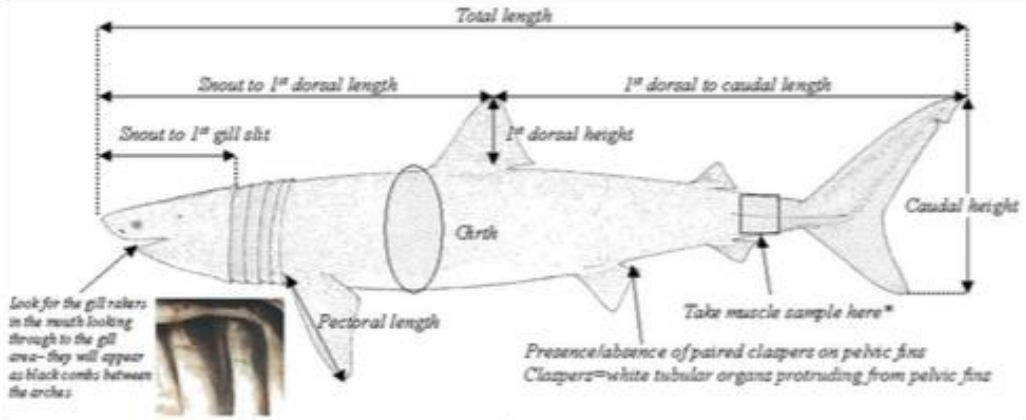
Strandings Records Coordinator, c/o Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Five Acres, Allet, Truro TR4 9DJ
Email: records@cwtstrandings.org **Website: www.cwtstrandings.org**

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 as provided by Cornwall Wildlife Trust.

Basking Shark Stranding Recording Form

Reported by: Telephone: Address:	Recorded by: Telephone: Date recorded:
Date first seen: Time first seen: Alive when stranded? ☐ YES ☐ NO	Location: Grid ref:



Total length:	m	Claspers present?	☐ YES (male) ☐ NO (female)
Snout to 1st dorsal length:	cm	Gill rakers present?	☐ YES ☐ NO
1st dorsal to caudal:	cm	Food in back of throat (orange paste)?	☐ YES ☐ NO
Snout to 1st gill slit:	cm	Tissue samples taken (*where requested):	
1st dorsal height:	cm	Muscle for genetic analysis?	☐ YES ☐ NO
Pectoral length:	cm	Fin sample?	☐ YES ☐ NO
Girth (half way around x2):	cm	Skin sample?	☐YES ☐ NO
Caudal height:	cm	Photos taken?	☐ YES ☐ 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@cwtstrandings.org Website: www.cwtstrandings.org

CORNWALL

CORNWALL WILDLIFE TRUST IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE MARINE BIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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