

Moray Firth Wildlife

The Moray Firth is home to a rich diversity of wildlife. Here are just some of the different species to look out for along the coastline.



Harbour Porpoise (Length: 1.4 to 1.9m)

- Little is known about their social structure but tend to be seen in small groups of 2-5 animals
- Shy and usually wary of boats, so more often seen from a distance or from land
- The worldwide population size is unknown but thought to be decreasing

DID YOU KNOW?

Harbour porpoises rarely jump out of the water, unlike their dolphin relatives

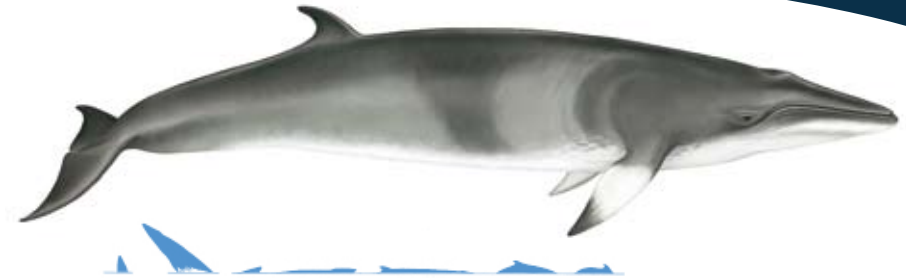


Bottlenose Dolphin (Length: 1.9 to 3.9m)

- The Moray Firth has the largest bottlenose dolphins in the world
- Only about 130 individuals live in the Firth - the population is vulnerable
- They are very sociable and seen locally in groups of up to 50 individuals. They are very active at the surface and can be seen bow-riding, surfing in the waves and breaching

DID YOU KNOW?

Individual dolphins can be identified by their dorsal fins.



Minke Whale (Length: 7 to 10m)

- They are filter feeders that use baleen plates to 'sieve' their food from the water
- Newborn calves swim to the water surface within 10 seconds for their first breath
- Minke whales are still hunted by some countries

DID YOU KNOW?

They can make loud sounds of up to 152 decibels (the equivalent of a jet taking off)



Grey Seal (Length: 1.8 to 2 metres)

- The first mammal to be protected by modern law (in 1940)
- The spotted pattern on their coats appears to be individually unique and has been used in population studies to identify individuals

DID YOU KNOW?

Two-thirds of their time is spent at sea, hunting and feeding



Common Seal (Length: 1.2 to 1.8metres)

- Tend to live year-round in the same areas, the Moray Firth is one of these important habitats
- Disturbance can cause mothers (cows) to abandon pups which constantly call for them, giving them the nickname 'howlers'

DID YOU KNOW?

Common seals use special muscles to close their ears, making them more efficient swimmers

The WDCS Wildlife Centre at Spey Bay has a free exhibition all about the local wildlife. It is also a fantastic place to see many of these species in their natural environment. The WDCS Dolphin and Seal Centre at North Kessock is a great place to learn about and spot dolphins. To find out more about the WDCS Visitors' Centres, call 01343 820339 or visit www.wdcs.org/wildlifecentre. WDCS is a registered charity No. 1014705.

This information was produced by:



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The Moray Firth

The Moray Firth offers fantastic opportunities to observe wildlife in its natural surroundings all along the coast. Home to a population of around 190 bottlenose dolphins, the Moray Firth is also subject to pressures from proposed oil and gas exploration, commercial shipping and tourism. The bottlenose dolphin population is considered 'vulnerable' due to being a small and isolated population at its northernmost range. Accordingly, in 2005, the Moray Firth became Scotland's first Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Watching wildlife is a wonderful experience but can also have negative impacts on wild animals and their homes. Whether viewing from a boat or on land, we can minimise any disturbance whilst ensuring we have the best possible encounter with our marine neighbours. Whales and dolphins are protected from harassment by Scottish law and this guide will help you stay within those laws.

How do I watch wisely?

LAND-BASED:

The Whale and Dolphin Society (WDCS) have two wildlife centres based at Spey Bay and North Kessock offering spectacular viewing points, education and information about watching cetaceans and other wildlife from land. Please email wildlifecentre@wdcs.org or telephone +44 (0)1343 820339 for opening times and information on how to see wild dolphins.

BOAT TRIPS:

If you would like to watch wildlife from the water, there are several boat trip operators along the coast of the Moray Firth. Please choose a responsible operator who has been accredited by the Dolphin Space Programme (DSP) and Wildlife Safe (WiSe) schemes. Contact details for these operators can be found at: www.dolphinspace.org, and www.wisescheme.org

Advice for boat-owners

Whales and dolphins are highly intelligent and very sensitive to disturbance. Disturbance can cause stress and increased energy use which can lead to impacts on health and ability to care for and raise young animals. Boat propellers can cause serious injury or death.

To ensure the best encounter for you and the animals, please follow these simple guidelines:

- Keep a safe distance, 50m is recommended (100m if a calf is present and 200m if another boat is present).
- During an interaction maintain a steady direction and slow 'no wake' speed. Do not make any sudden changes in speed or direction.
- If you approach, do so from an oblique angle, not from directly ahead or behind. Do not drive between or scatter groups.
- Please limit interactions to about 15 minutes.
- Take special care when calves are present.
- Do not try to swim with or touch wildlife. This is for your safety and theirs.
- Responsibly dispose of any rubbish, litter or contaminants at appropriate facilities on land.
- If dolphins or whales approach your boat or bow-ride, maintain a slow speed and steady course until they leave. Avoid chasing or repeatedly approaching animals.

For more information, see the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code (www.marinecode.org) or contact Scottish Natural Heritage for a copy. These codes are not law, but following them will help you to stay within the law. Find out more about wildlife crime prevention at www.defra.gov.uk/paw/

How can I help?

REPORT INCIDENTS:

If you see anyone harassing wildlife, whether intentionally or recklessly, please report it to the local police and ask to speak to the Wildlife Crime Officer (0845 600 5700 Grampian or 0845 6005703 Northern).

WHAT INFORMATION DO I NEED TO REPORT?

The police need as much information as possible. Please include the incident date, time and location; behaviour of the vessel; behaviour of the animal(s) before, during and after the event; species involved; distance between you and the incident and length of interaction; plus any identifying features of the person or vessel involved (e.g. boat name/ number, description of person). Photographs and videos are useful, video particularly; also contact details of any other witnesses.

REPORT STRANDINGS:

Stranded whales and dolphins have an important role to play in increasing our understanding of wildlife populations, their general health and the threats that they face. Information collected from stranded animals can provide us with an indication of a bigger problem within a population. WDCS supports the work of the UK's Marine Animal Rescue Coalition (MARC). If you find a stranded whale or dolphin in Scotland, you can help by calling:

Dead animals:

Scottish Agricultural College (SAC): +44 (0)1463 243 030

Live animals:

British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR): +44 (0)1825 765 546 or +44 (0)7787433412.

