

South Cardigan Bay Seasearch



Photo: Lyndon Lomax

2007 & 2008 Summary Report

Seasearch surveys from Newquay, South Cardigan Bay were organised by Kate Lock in May 2007 and 2008 with support of Cardigan Bay Marine Wildlife Centre's boat *Sulaire*, skippered by Steve Hartley. This area of coast is located within Cardigan Bay Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated for its population of bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*). Cetacean boat based surveys are conducted by the Cardigan Bay Marine Wildlife Centre and volunteers completed cliff top surveys. Dolphin 'hotspots' have been identified and Seasearch completed diving surveys at some of the inshore sites.

May 2007 Site 1. Mwnt. Sunshine and blue skies, we boarded in Newquay and headed south towards Mwnt just north of Cardigan. The sea was like glass and there were pods of bottlenose dolphin breaching all around us. Mwnt is an area that Janet Baxter completes cliff top cetacean surveys. Strong currents flow past the headland bringing plankton rich waters, bottlenose dolphins are regularly recorded feeding at the site. The aim of the dive was to try and establish whether the dolphins were feeding from the seabed or if they are just following migratory fish. At 14m a flat seabed sediment plain was found, mainly sandy with ripples interspersed with mud patches covered in worm casts. Species records were limited to dragonet *Callionymus lyra*, lesser spotted catshark *Scyliorhinus canicula*, masked crab *Corystes cassivelaunus*, harbour crab *Liocarcinus depruator* and hermit crab *Paguridae indet.* There could be some limited foraging in the habitat for the dolphins but we concluded that they were primarily following shoaling fish in the currents.

Site 2. Ynys Lochtyn is not a dolphin feeding site but a good dive site as sheltered. A shallow rock reef was found interspersed with giant truck sized boulders close to shore leading away to a sandy seabed. The tops of the reef were covered in kelp forest with thick red seaweed rich meadows in the deeper areas. Crustaceans and fish were hidden in the weed, lobster *Homarus gammarus*, edible crabs *Cancer pagurus*, spider crabs *Maja squinado* and velvet swimming crabs *Necora*



Greater pipefish *Syngnathus acus*. Ian Williams



Elegant sea slug, *Okenia elegans*. Ian Williams

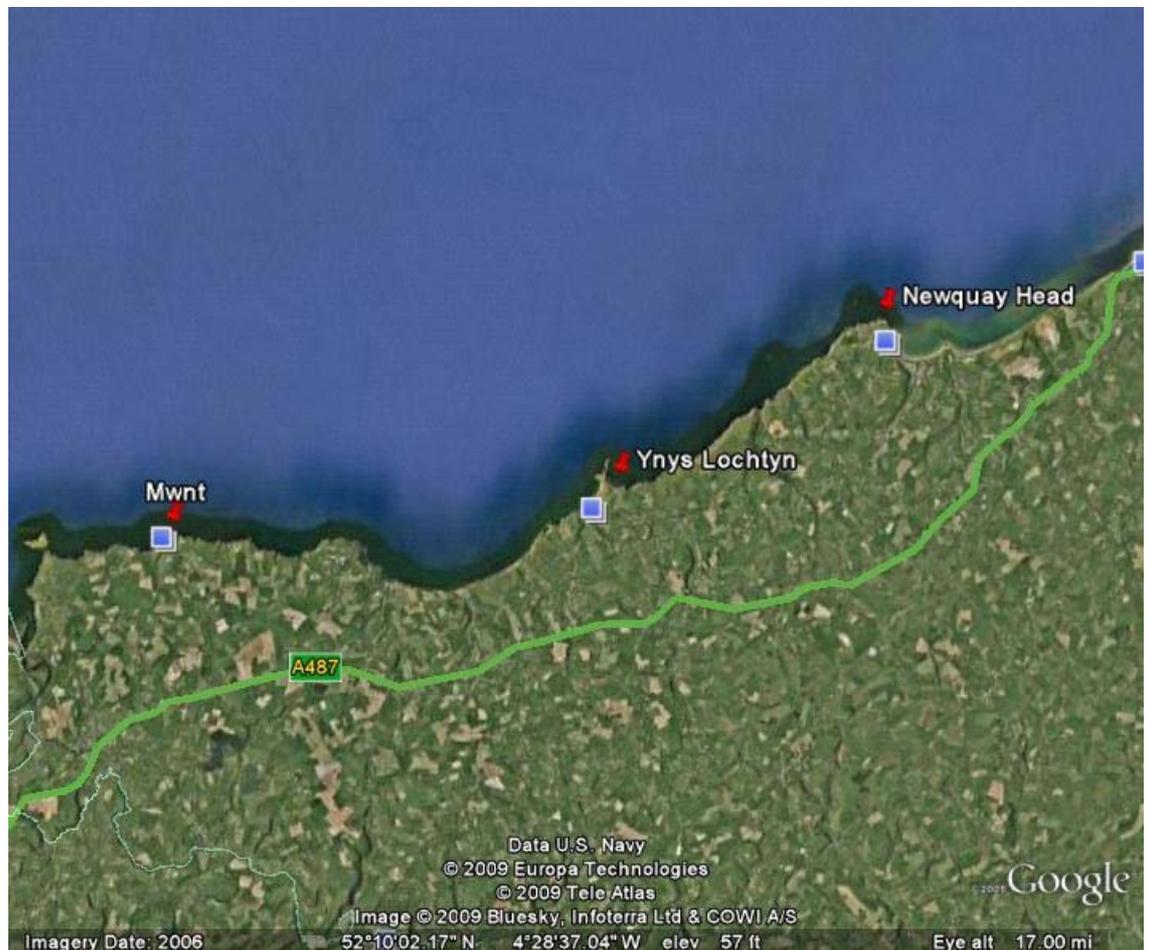
puber were all recorded. Greater pipefish *Syngnathus acus* lurked in the weeds along with long spined sea scorpion *Taurulus bubalis*. Swimming between the boulders were bib *Trisopterus luscus* and pollack *Pollachius pollachius*. Nudibranchs were also spotted, including the nationally rare species the elegant sea slug *Okenia elegans*. This is a first record of this species in Cardigan Bay and in Wales it has only previously been recorded in the Skomer Marine Nature Reserve, Pembrokeshire.

May 2008 Site 3. Newquay Head. Mirror calm seas and light sea fog greeted the day, but despite calm weather the divers were limited to less than one

metre visibility. However Seasearch forms were completed. A sandy rippled seabed was found with a few worm casts and an occasional masked crab. We concluded that the dolphins must have been feeding on migratory fish!

Site 4 Ynys Lochtyn Head.

The divers were rewarded with a massive two metres visibility. A sand rippled seabed led to a shallow reef near shore with a common mussel *Mytilus edulis* bed, and mixed red seaweeds, large dahlia anemones, *Urticina felina* were found with both spiny spider crabs *Maja squinado* and velvet swimming crabs *Necora puber* common.



Divers: Jo Porter, Alex Burton, Georgia Robson, Sarah Lister, Ian Williams, David Kipling, Sarah Bowen, Howard manning, Carolyn Waddell, Kate Lock, Kerry Lewis, Simon Ward, Sheena Davies, Leon Hopkins, Joe Moxon and Lucas Tiffany. Boat and cetacean surveyors: Steve Hartley, Sarah Perry, Janet Baxter, Lyndon Lomax. Report compiled by Kate Lock, photos by Ian Williams and Lyndon Lomax. Full survey results and species list available on the JNCC NBN Gateway.

Seasearch is a volunteer underwater survey project for recreational divers who wish to contribute to conserving the marine environment.

Financial support for the project during 2007 and 2008 has been given by:

