

Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation

Annual Report 2004

The last 12 months have seen major developments of the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation (SDWF) since it was established in 2000. This was made possible through generous funding from the Vodafone Group Foundation and LEADER.

Administration

The SDWF Committee met four times (February, April, May and October) during 2004. Dr David Lyons from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPW) joined the Committee in February, but Ogie Moran from Shannon Development in North Kerry had to stand down in October as Shannon Development no longer maintain a tourism remit in the area. This year also saw the full participation of the Shannon dolphin tour boat operators on the SDWF Committee.

The SDWF were granted charitable status (CHY 6671) to “develop and provide educational awareness and conservation of the Shannon dolphins and other wildlife in the region”.

Education

Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Centre

The SDWF have developed a partnership with the NPW on the use of the former Scatterry Island Centre at Merchants Quay, Kilrush. NPW are the new owners of the building and the SDWF now have access to the ground floor as well as the first floor. Following generous funding from LEADER, a wide range a range of educational, interpretive and reference materials on the Shannon dolphins for children, parents, teachers and schools have been developed. The SDWF have also created an extensive reference library and can now provide a base and resources for those wishing to study the Shannon dolphins and other wildlife in the area. These resources include a range of displays, information, interactive activities and games for the enjoyment of all, including: whole skeletons of whales and dolphins, skulls, teeth and other body parts. Children can goggle into a goggle box at an underwater scene, test their sensations in a touch box, make their own marine food chain prints and create a giant whale jigsaw. As part of the interpretive material, an acoustic presentation and DVD is shown on request. These presentations introduce people to the acoustic world of the Shannon dolphins and describe the innovative *Sound waves* project, funded by Vodafone.Group Foundation.

The center was officially opened in June by Síle de Valera TD, Minister of State at the Department of Education. This was followed by a live broadcast from the center of the RTE Radio 1 programme “Mooney Goes Wild”. During June to September nearly 1000 people visited the center including schools and specialist groups and feedback was very positive.

Shannon Dol-fun

In May, the SDWF organized the first Shannon Dol-fun. This aimed to raise awareness and interest in the Shannon dolphins and the marine heritage of the Shannon estuary and Atlantic coasts by organising a series of school visits in West Clare, West Limerick and

North Kerry followed by a weekend of dol-fun. During the week 25 schools were visited involving around 1200 students. The week was followed by a weekend of activities in the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Centre and an Art and Poetry Competition. Each school also sent a student to accompany join a whalewatch at Loop Head and report back to the school on what they learnt and saw.

Information boards

The SDWF contributed to an information board at Alyvaroo near Kilrush, in collaboration with the Kilrush Dolphin Gateway project.

Research

Sound waves

Research on the Shannon dolphins by the SDWF during 2004 has concentrated on the *Sound waves* project. *Sound waves* is a novel new project integrating dolphin research and conservation with the Vodafone mobile phone network. *Sound waves* aims to transmit bottlenose dolphin vocalisations from the Shannon estuary to a land station and the internet, in real time, through the mobile phone network. If successful, this project will not only provide essential information for monitoring and management but provide an imaginative facility to educate people about dolphins and the acoustic world in which they live. Four potential sites for the hydrophone were assessed during 2003 to determine their suitability for picking up dolphin vocalisations and intensity of ambient noise. Dolphin clicks and whistles were recorded at three of the four sites but at one site (Kilcredaun Point, near Carrigaholt) dolphin clicks were heard on 48.3% of samples and clicks on 30% (n = 60 hours). A permanent hydrophone was deployed at this site in August. A poster on *Sound waves* was presented at the European Cetacean Society conference in Sweden in April and the Irish Environmental Colloquium in Limerick.

The SDWF have raised concerns about the impact of trawling in the Shannon estuary. Communication with the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (DoCMNR) has continued throughout 2004 but no conclusion has been reached.

Monitoring

No dolphin tour boat monitoring was carried out by the SDWF during 2003, but a review of tour boat monitoring data collected from 1999-2003 was carried out. This showed that monitoring indices were sensitive enough to detect change. Significant variation was reported between the two main ports within a season and between seasons from each port. The factors driving this variation could not be identified but are likely to be a combination of weather, customer demands and dolphin behaviour. A paper on this monitoring has been submitted for publication.

The SDWF have continued to carry out dredge monitoring in compliance with DoCMNR Disposal at Sea licences. Monitoring was carried out on behalf of Shannon Foynes Port Company and ARUP Engineering at Kilrush Creek Marina.

Simon Berrow, 3 January, 2005