

Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation

Annual Report - 2003

This brief report summaries the activities of the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation (SDWF) during 2003.

Monitoring

SDWF were contracted to carry out tour boat monitoring on behalf of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPW). This is the fourth year of tour boat monitoring as part of the Special area of Conservation status. The total number of trips in the Shannon estuary (454 trips) was similar to 2002, which is encouraging given that one operator (Joe Aston) did no dolphin-watching in 2003 as he was out of the country. The number of trips from Kilrush decreased by 3% and Carrigaholt increased by 13%. An estimated 15-20,000 people went dolphin-watching during 2003. Recommendations from this monitoring included increasing the number of hours tour boats are permitted to be in the vicinity of dolphins from 200 hours and accepting a working definition of a group of dolphins.

Visitor Survey

A visitor survey was carried out on behalf of the Marine Institute to describe the visitor profile and compare with a similar survey in 1997/98. Visitors on the Kilrush dolphin-watching boat "Dolphin Discovery" were interviewed after a dolphin trip. Results showed that the dolphins were a significant factor in people coming to Kilrush (69%), County Clare (30%) but there was little penetration in the international market. When compared with the survey carried out 5 years ago, there was little change with dolphin-watchers comprising mainly Irish people holidaying in the area. This study provides a baseline for a marketing drive in 2004. The results of these studies are to be published by the Marine Institute in 2004 under the Marine Resources Series.

Research

The SDWF were awarded a large grant from Vodafone for their Soundwaves project. The objectives are to establish a system in the Shannon estuary with which we can transmit dolphin vocalisations through the Vodafone mobile phone network. This project will be carried out in collaboration with Hydraulics and Maritime Research Centre (HMRC) at University College, Cork. Field trials during 2003 have identified Kilcredaun Head off Carrigaholt as a suitable site for deployment of a permanent hydrophone, as a range of vocalisations were heard frequently (clicks on 30% of samples, whistles on 48%) during monitoring. Spectral analysis of a range of different vocalisation types was carried out showing the frequency range and data transfer rate required to transmit vocalisations through the network. During the winter trials will be carried out on a system to ensure the hardware will withstand the rigours of an Irish winter, while development of the transmission and receiving equipment will be carried out by HMRC. An operating system is hoped to be available for deployment in 2004.

The SDWF collaborated with the University of Bangor during the summer of 2003 when it facilitated two MSc students. One student worked on dolphin acoustics while the other carried out

photo-identification studies and analysed 10 years worth of data. The Shannon ID catalogue now contains images from 144 individual dolphins and is available on-line.

Education

The SDWF were awarded a grant from LEADER towards developing educational material in the Scatterry Island Centre, Kilrush, County Clare. This includes preparing and mounting cetacean skeletons and sourcing reference material for secondary and third level education. Interactive material for kids will be developed during 2004.

The SDWF launched a new website www.shannondolphins.ie on which a range of information, including papers and reports for downloading and the Shannon Dolphin Photo-ID catalogue is available on-line.

Media

There was a lot of media interest in the Shannon dolphins during 2003. Three film crews were facilitated, two UK crews making programmes for Channel 4 and BBC, due for transmission in 2004 and one Irish production. In addition Nationwide and TV3 covered the launch of Soundwaves and RTE covered the story of the deformed dolphin calf.

Coverage of the Soundwaves project was huge with coverage worldwide due to a number of key agencies covering the project including Reuters and CNN. Interviews were given to all Irish media and some overseas reporters including the BBC World Service and Radio Canada.

Administration

The SDWF had three meetings of the Steering Committee during the year. The personnel changed during the year with Bernadette Kinsella replacing Tom Carey on behalf of Clare County Council. Siobhan Curran replacing Leonard Cleary on behalf of Kilrush Town Council and National Parks and Wildlife Service representative, Dr Enda Mooney having to stand down due to promotion to a new region. The new Cork based regional marine ecologist David Lyons has been invited on the Committee.

As the Management Committee did not meet it was decided to dissolve this Committee and invite tour boat operators onto the SDWF Committee.

Simon Berrow, Project Officer

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