Manx
Wildlife Trust
Treisht Bea-Feie
Vannin

Dead marine megafauna strandings annual report 2025

Zac Hanlon and Dr Lara Howe – Marine Officer

Introduction

On behalf of the Isle of Man Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFA), Manx Wildlife Trust (MWT) have collated information regarding dead marine megafauna strandings since 2013. The present report summarises the annual findings from 2025. Cetacean data obtained is additionally utilised in the annual UK Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme (CSIP-UK) report.

Training

During 2025, a further two volunteers were trained to attend marine mammal strandings and were added to the database. There are currently 116 trained volunteers, and each possesses a 'stranding pack' which contains all necessary equipment to effectively and safely record data in the field.

Methodology

Dead marine megafauna strandings observed around the Isle of Man are reported to Dr Lara Howe (Marine Officer, Manx Wildlife Trust) via phone, email or social media. Details obtained from the reporter, including location and any other available information, are passed on to a trained volunteer who will attend the stranding.

Following location of the stranded individual, volunteers must report findings on the appropriate recording form (Appendix 3, 4 & 5). We have now migrated to digital forms however they still cover the same information that is provided in the paper recording forms. Initially, date, time and site details (name of location, six-figure grid reference or GPS coordinates) must be recorded. Following this, details of the stranded individual are recorded including species, sex, age, carcass condition (e.g. fresh, decomposed, advanced decomposition), identifiable markings, presence of trauma and presence of tags or markings. Additionally, measurements are taken. The measurements required vary, depending on whether the individual is a cetacean, pinniped or other. Finally, photographs are taken of the body and head, and any notable features including evidence of trauma or entrapment. In some circumstances it may not be possible to obtain all of the required data to complete the recording form due to levels of decomposition, however volunteers are asked to record as much information as possible. Forms are submitted online and photographs are submitted to the marine officer and subsequently added to the stranding database. Cetacean and pinniped stranding records are also sent to CSIP-UK.

Results

In total there were 75 stranded individuals recorded around the Isle of Man in 2025 (Figure 1). Of these, 56 were pinnipeds (47 grey seals, *Halichoerus grypus*, one common seal*, Phoca vitulina*, and eight individuals for which the species was unknown), 18 were cetaceans (12 harbour porpoise, *Phocoena phocoena*, two Risso's dolphin, *Grampus griseus,* one common dolphin, *Delphinus delphis,* one unknown whale, two unknown dolphins), and one Tope, *Galeorhinus galeus*.

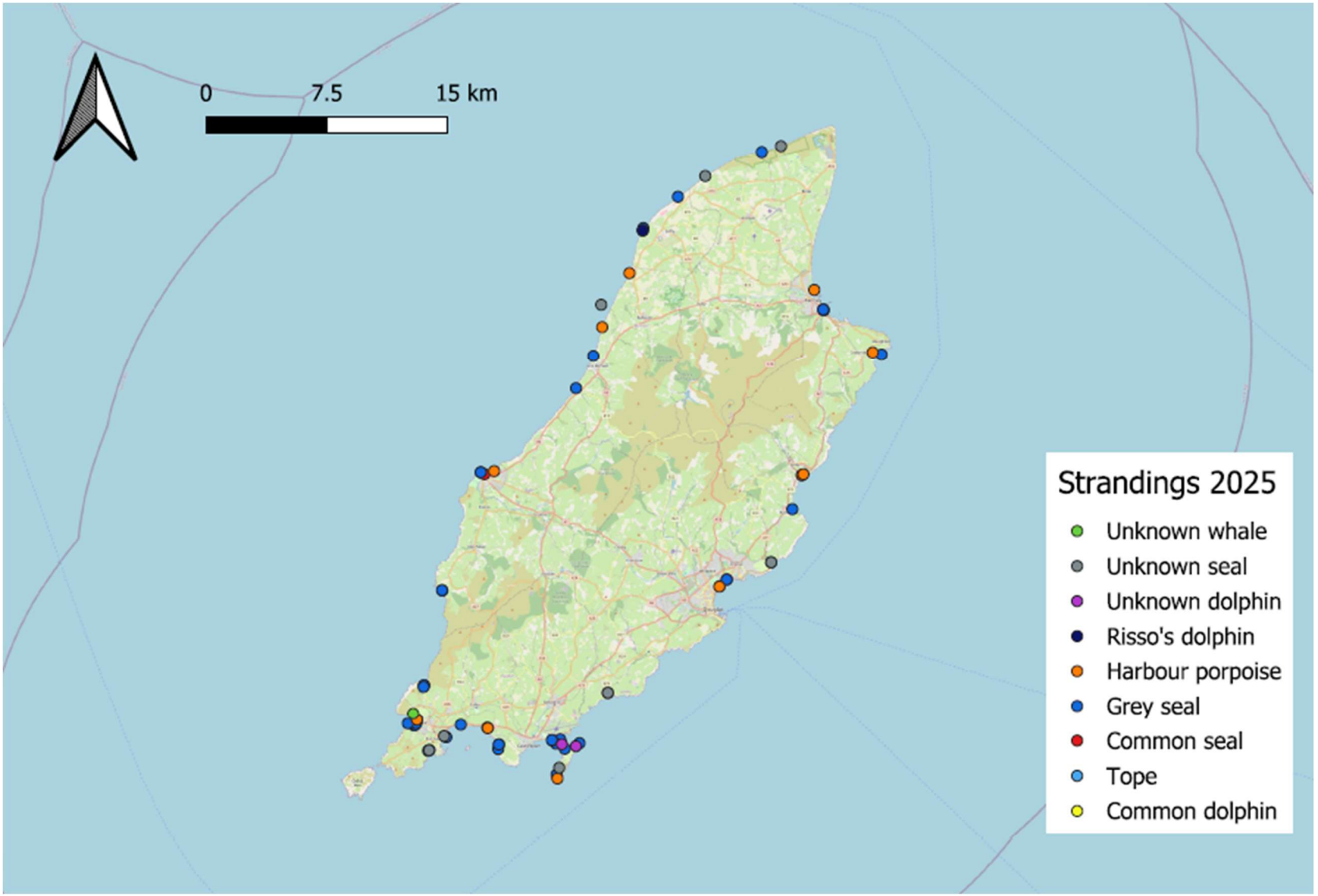


Figure 1 – Strandings reported around Isle of Man in 2025 (n = 75).

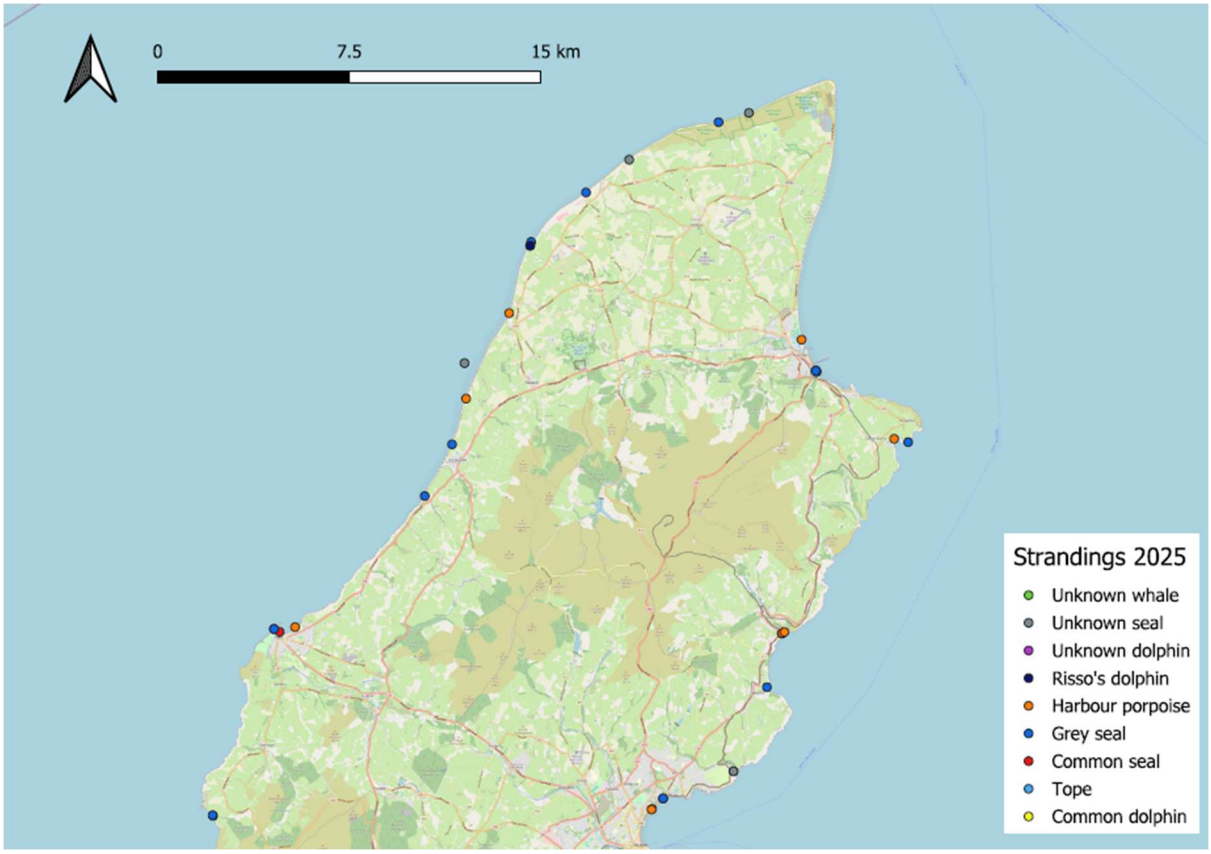


Figure 2 – Closer view of the North of the Isle of Man, depicting strandings in this area during 2025.

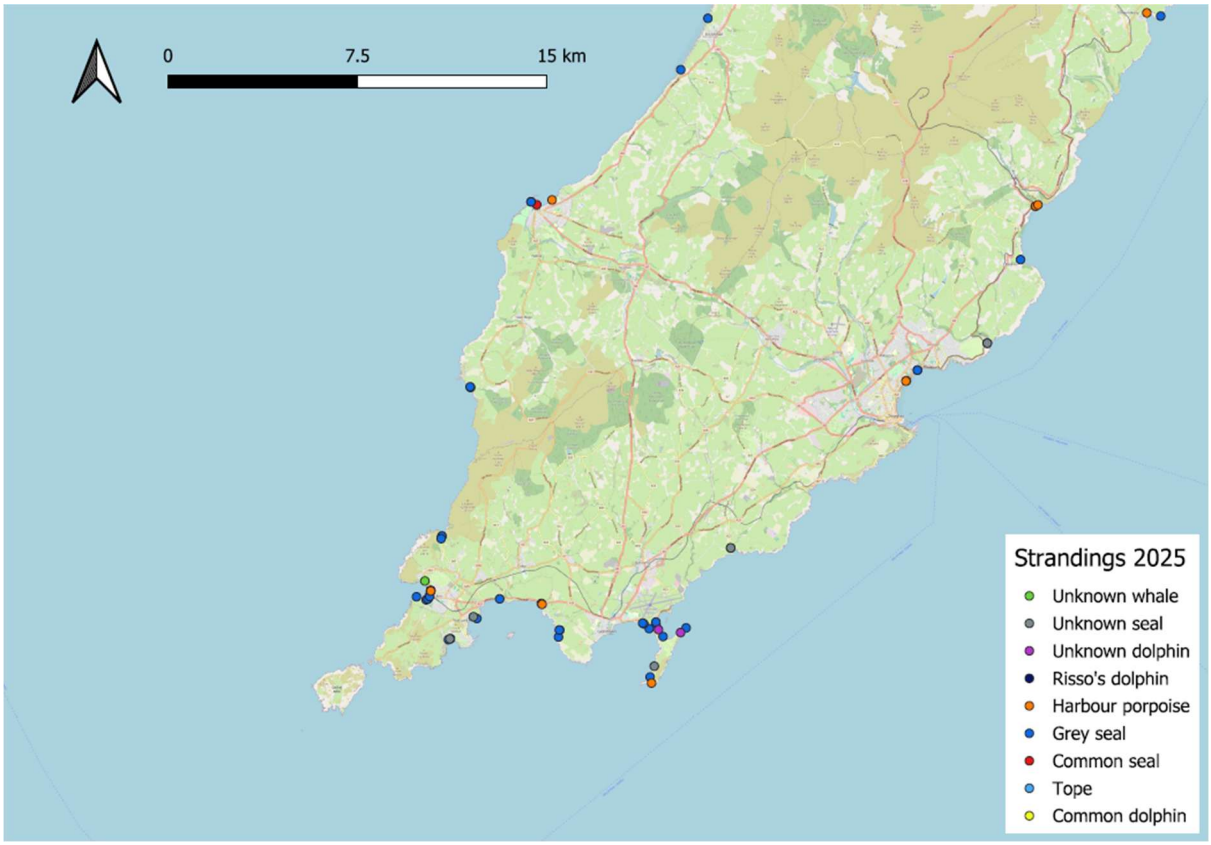


Figure 3 – Closer View of the South of the Isle of Man, depicting strandings in the area during 2025.

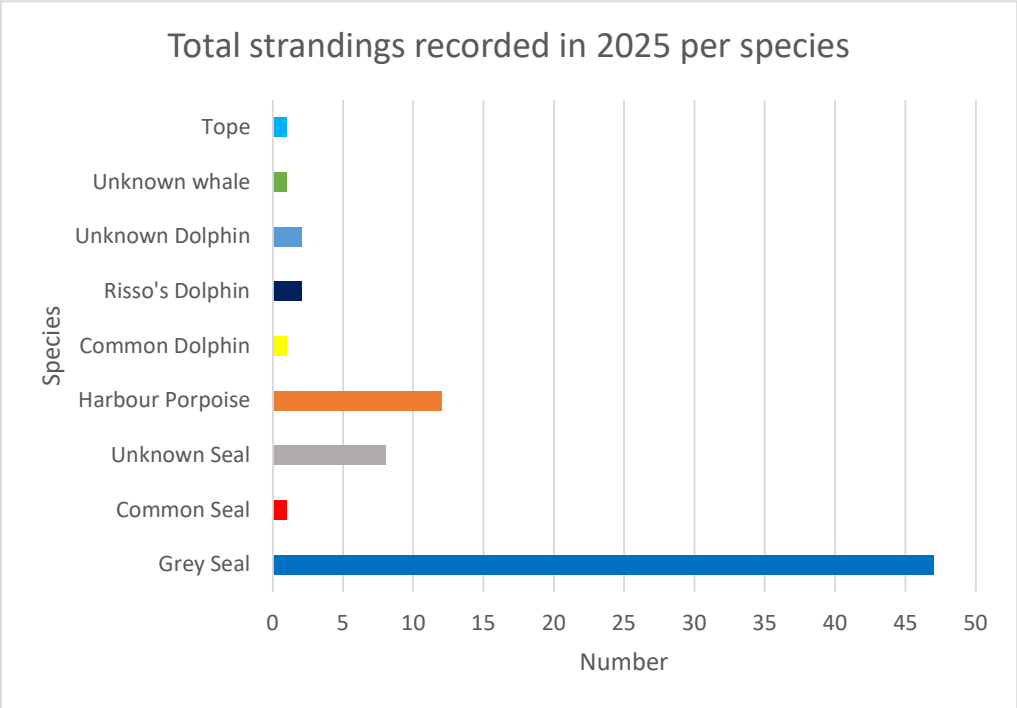


Figure 4 – Total number of stranded individuals (per species) recorded around Isle of Man in 2025.

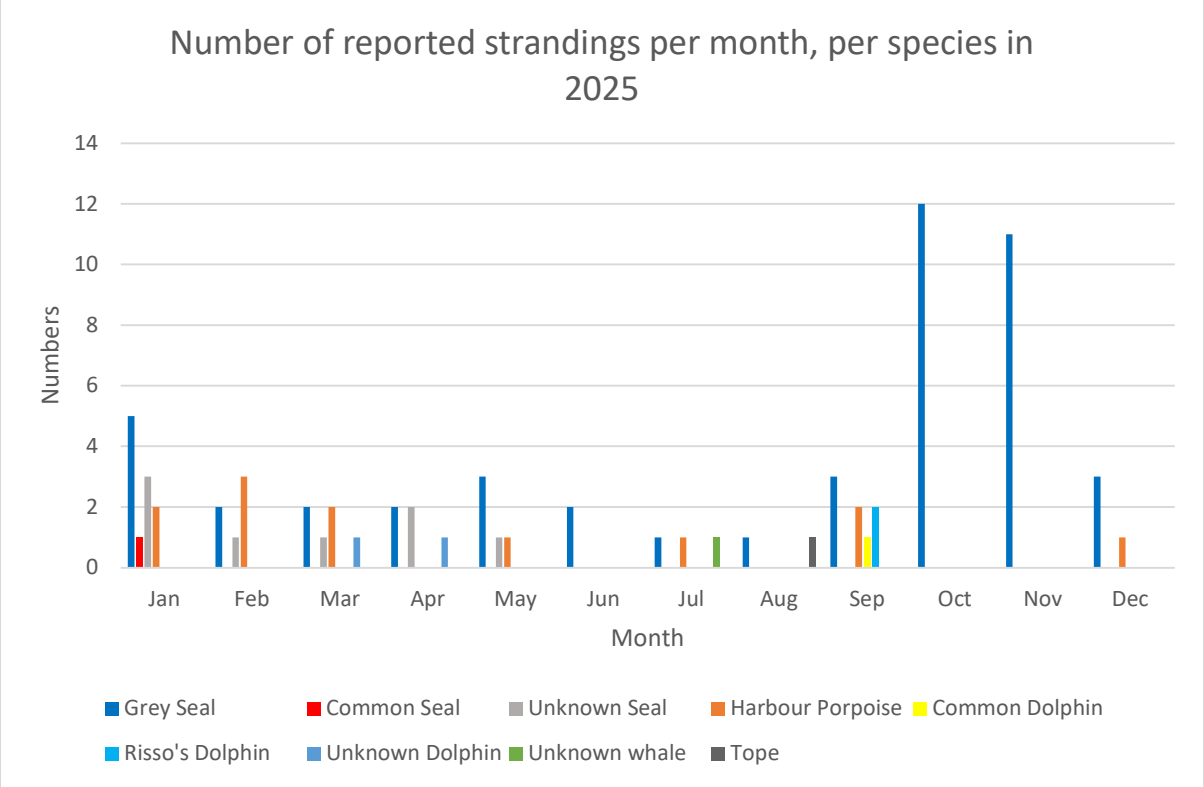


Figure 5 – Number of strandings reported per month around Isle of Man in 2025.

Figure 5 depicts the pattern of strandings reported, per month, during 2025. The number of reported grey seal strandings was highest in October (n=12), with an average of 3.9 reports each month. There was at least one grey seal stranding every month in 2025. One Common seal was reported in January, whilst the eight unknown seal species were recorded within the first five months of the year.

Cetaceans were only reported for three-quarters of the year. There were no strandings in June, August, October or November for cetaceans. September (n=5) had the highest number of strandings, comprising of two harbour porpoises, one common dolphin and two Risso's dolphins.

One tope was recorded in August.

Seals

In total, 56 seal strandings were reported (47 grey seals, *Halichoerus grypus*, one common seals, *Phoca vitulina* and eight individuals for which species was unknown). This is higher than last year which reported 36 individuals, but similar to 2023 which reported 43 grey seals. Of these, 20 were unattended by volunteers. This is significantly higher than in previous years.

Over half of the grey seal strandings were observed in the south of the Island, with a concentration between Port Erin and Langness, the remainder are scattered around our entire coastline (Figure 6).

When considering the distribution of seal strandings, a high proportion are expected to be in the south around the coastlines of Port Erin, Port St Mary, Castletown and Langness due to the geography, prevailing winds, tidal patterns (See Appendix 1 & 2) and several main haul out sites in the south, including the Calf of Man. Although the Point of Ayre now forms an important haul out site, predominantly for grey seals, any mortalities are likely to be swept offshore.

In contrast the eight unknown seal strandings in 2025 were spread around the coast, with the common seal being sighted on Peel beach (Figure 7).

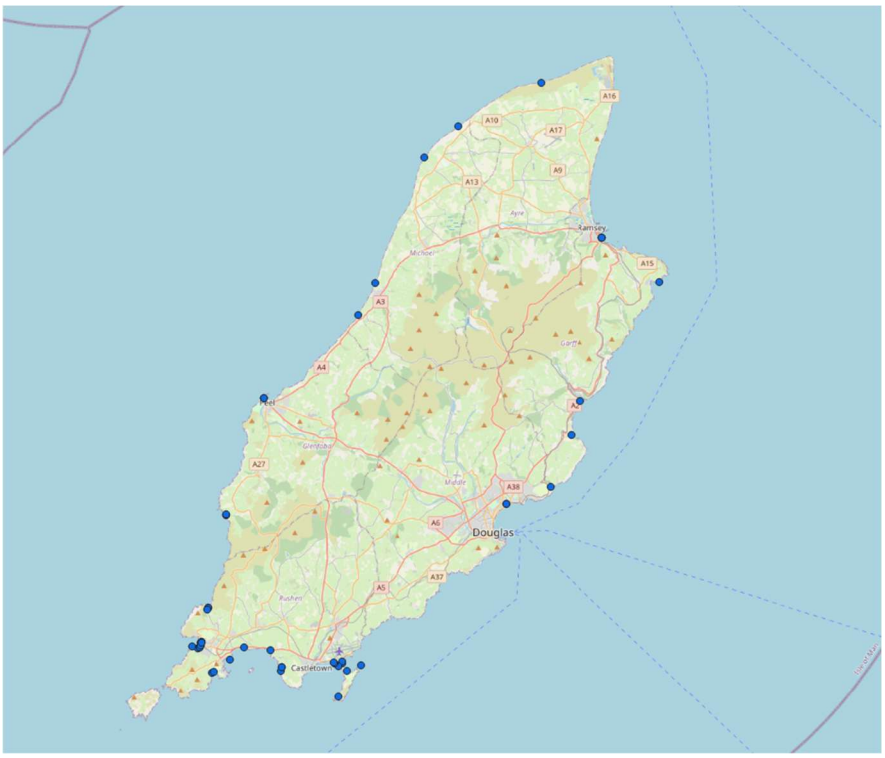


Figure 6 – Grey seal strandings reported around Isle of Man in 2025 (n= 47).

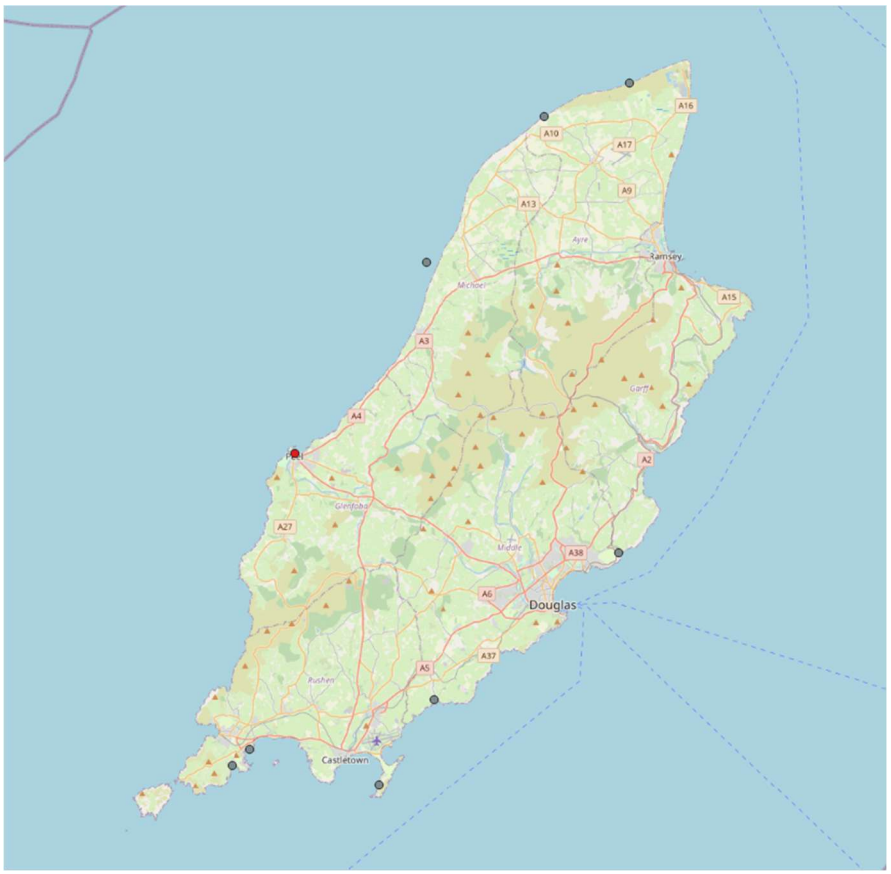


Figure 7 – Common seal (red) & unknown seal (grey) strandings reported around Isle of Man in 2025 (n=1 and n=8).

The condition of the recorded individuals varied with half considered to be either decomposed or advanced composition (n=28), whilst only 6 were classified as fresh.

The proportions of individuals belonging to each age group is displayed in Table 1 (including unknown age individuals). Pups and juveniles made up for almost half of total seal strandings (41.07%). Sex was unknown for almost all stranded grey seals, apart from seven individuals, with five determined to be male and two determined to be female. The sex for the single stranded common seal was not determined but was noted to be a juvenile.

Table 1 – Relative proportion (%) of stranded seals belonging to each age group (adult, juvenile, or pup).

Pup	Juvenile	Adult	Unknown
32.14	8.93	30.36	28.57

Cetacean Strandings

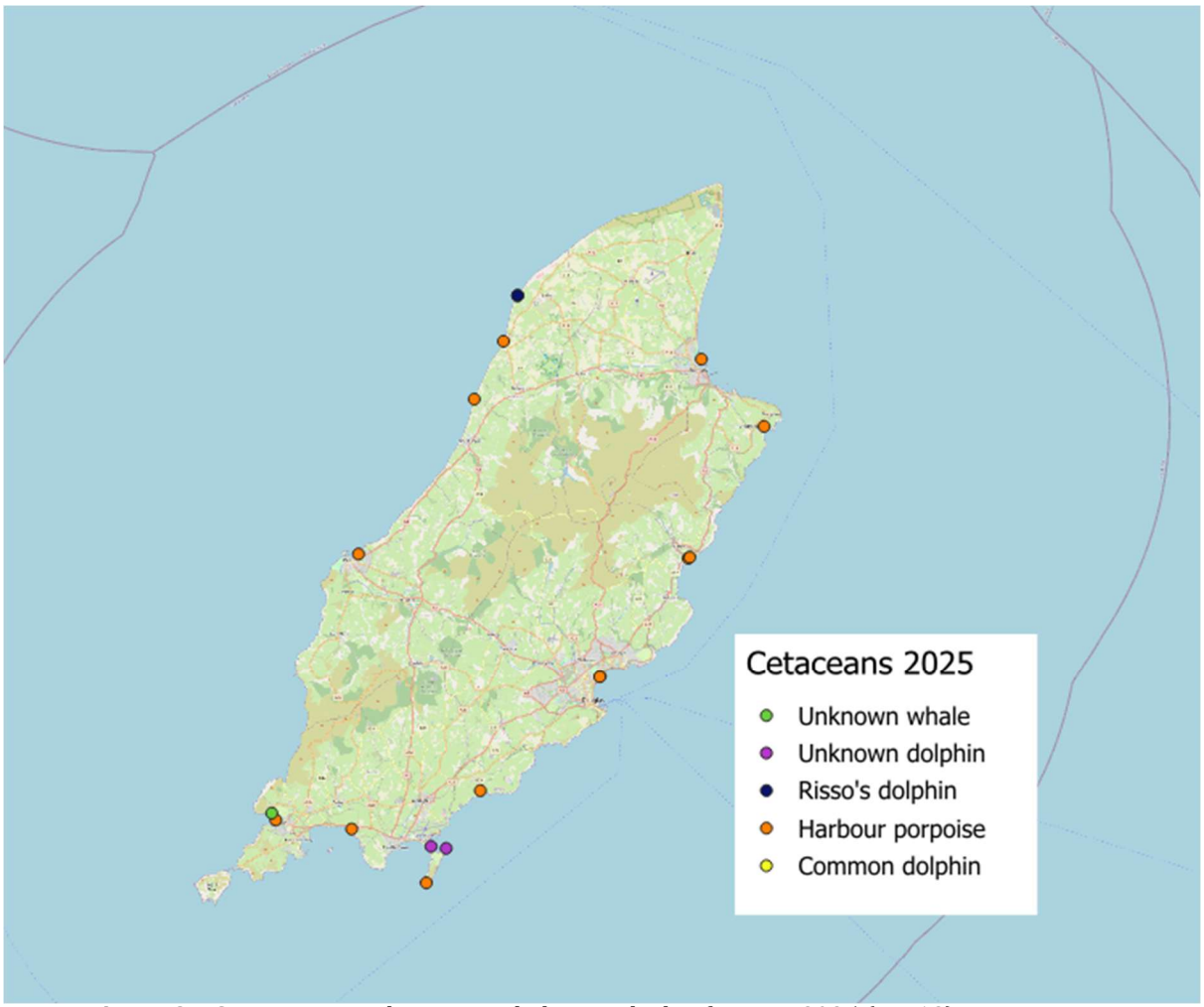


Figure 8 – Cetacean strandings recorded around Isle of Man in 2025 (n = 18).

All cetaceans

In total, 18 cetacean strandings were recorded in 2025: two Risso's dolphin, 12 harbour porpoise, one unknown whale, two unknown dolphins and one common dolphin.

Harbour Porpoise

In total, 12 harbour porpoise strandings occurred in 2025, compared with 10 in 2024 and 16 in 2023 (Figures 8 & 9). Harbour porpoise strandings accounted for two thirds (66.67%) of all cetacean strandings in 2025 compared with 48% in 2024. This proportionate increase is likely due to the significant decrease in common dolphin strandings in 2025 (n=1) compared to 2024 (n=9). The twelve harbour porpoise in 2025 is not out of line with the annual average during 2013-2025 (9.48 per annum).

All 12 individuals were scattered around the entire coast, with no clear pattern (Figure 9).

Of those recorded, six were reported to be freshly deceased with the remaining in a state of decomposition or advanced decomposition. One of the individuals was identified as male, and three individuals as female, with the remaining not able to be identified as either female or male. Three harbour porpoise individuals were recorded as adult (the remaining classified as unknown). Measurements taken for six of the strandings ranged from a total length of 132cm to 178cm with a mean of 154cm.

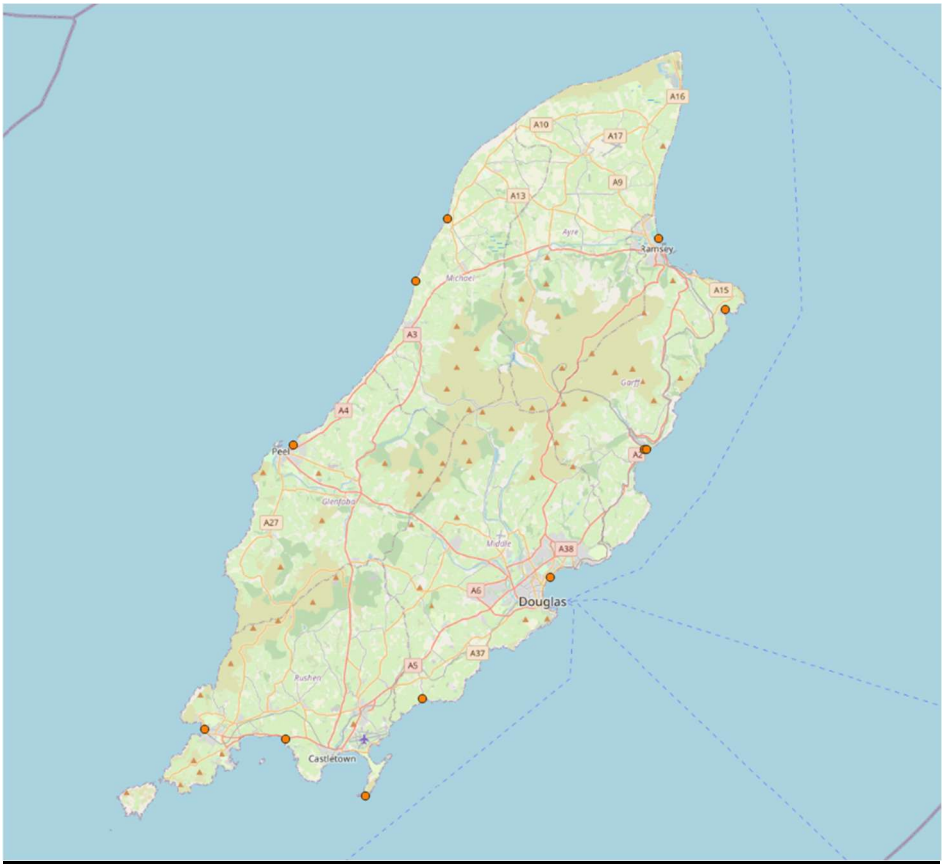


Figure 9 – Harbour porpoise strandings recorded around Isle of Man in 2025 (n = 12).

Figure 10 – All other cetacean strandings recorded around Isle of Man in 2025 (n = 1, n=2, n=2, n=1).

Common Dolphin

One common dolphin stranding was reported in 2025 (Figures 8 & 10), compared with the nine reported in 2024. The one stranding in 2025 follows the previous trend (excluding 2024) of low number of common dolphin strandings as reported in 2023 (n=1), 2022 (n=1), and 2021 (n=2).

The single common dolphin stranding was reported on Douglas beach in September (Figure 10).

The common dolphin was identified as an adult; however, the sex of the individual was classified as unknown. The carcass was complete, in a fresh condition, with no obvious signs of trauma.

Risso's Dolphin

Two Risso's dolphins were stranded 2025 (Figure 10) compared to one in 2024 and 3 in 2023. This was a mother and calf pair that was found on Jurby beach. The Calf was half protruded out from the mother. The mother was too decomposed for a necropsy, but the calf was taken away. The necropsy was undertaken on 23rd October, but the carcass was not fresh enough. Although, some samples were taken they are yet to be processed and therefore cause of death has not been determined. It is likely that a complication in birth is the likely cause of death for both the mother and the calf.

Over the last three years, six Risso's dolphin deaths have been recorded. Prior to this, no deaths had been reported since MWT took over stranding records in 2013. This apparent increase warrants continued monitoring.

Tope

One tope shark found in August at Glen Trunk, near Kirk Michael (Figure 11) in a state of decomposition. This is the second shark species recorded since logging of stranding data commenced in 2013 (Figure 11). However, the report in 2019, could not be confirmed but was likely a shark.

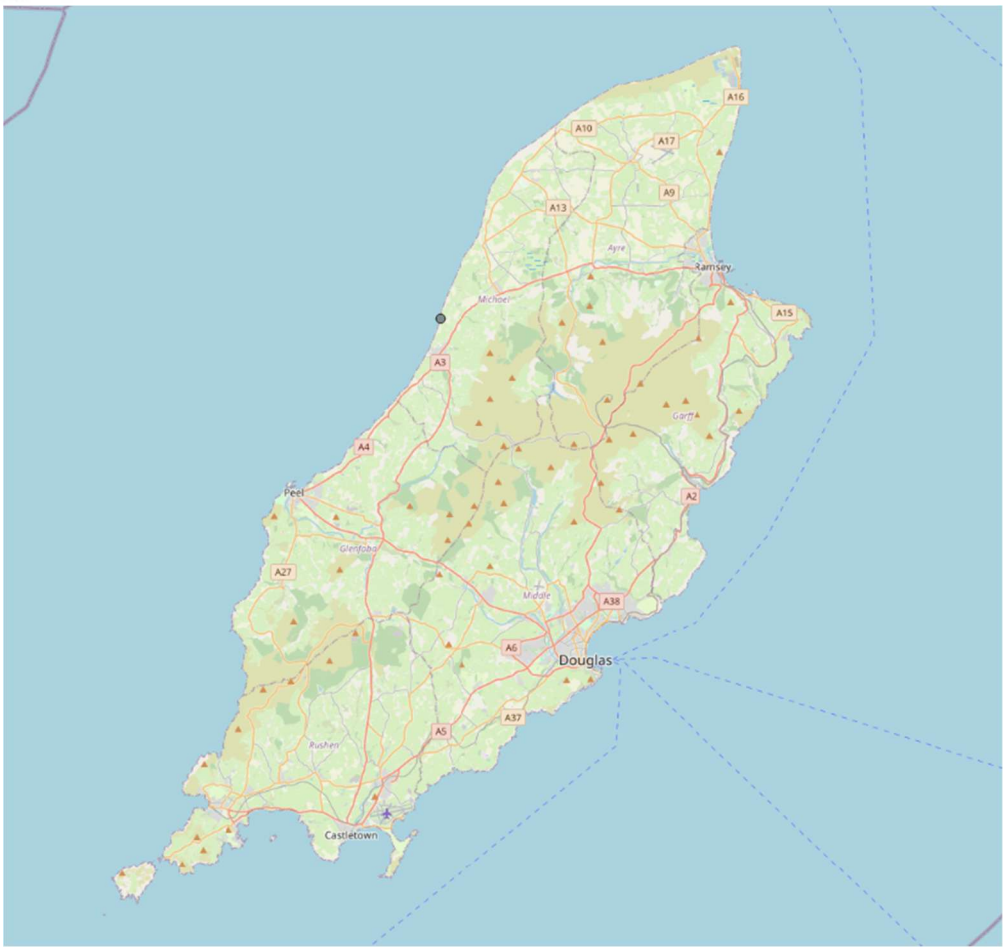


Figure 11 – Tope strandings recorded around Isle of Man in 2025 (n = 1).

Conclusions

In 2025, the total number of stranded individuals was recorded to be 75 compared to 64 in 2024 (Figure 12). However, since MWT took over managing strandings recording, generally numbers have been steadily increasing, except for 2015, 2019, 2022 and 2024 (Figure 12). It is likely that the primary cause for the positive trend in stranded individuals is the increased level of public perception, knowledge, and awareness of how to report a stranding. Additionally, as storminess continues to increase this may also play a part in the increasing numbers of individuals washing ashore. This does not necessarily mean more individuals are dying, rather that conditions enable the carcasses to wash ashore. Conversely, there is a direct correlation between storm conditions and seal pup mortality. This can be seen in Figure 5 where the majority of seal strandings occurred in the months of October and November, when grey seal pups are born.

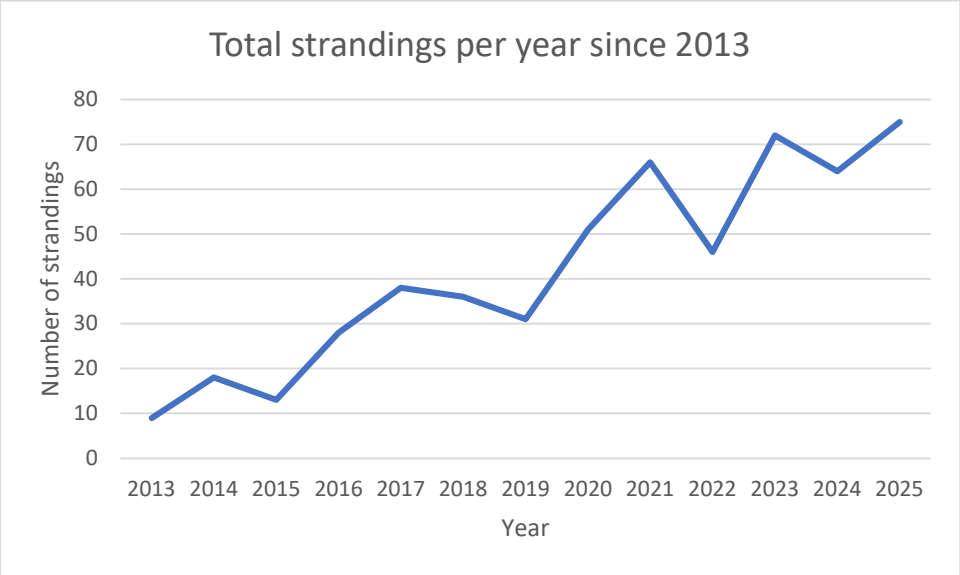


Figure 12 – Number of strandings reported each year since monitoring began in 2013.

The location of stranded individuals recorded was unremarkable in that there were no recorded concentrations of strandings in any particular area. However, locations are likely related to the geographical suitability of the terrain for stranding, public access for reporting of stranded individuals, prevailing wind directions, and the direction of the incoming and outgoing tides and localised wave patterns, particularly those following high-tide when strandings most frequently occur (Appendices 1 & 2).

It is unsurprising that the majority of strandings were either grey seal (62.67%) or harbour porpoise (16.00%) as these are the most common species of pinniped and cetacean, respectively, occurring in Manx waters. This trend is confirmed by the reports of previous years, for example in 2024, when 56.25% of total strandings recorded were grey seals and 15.62% of total strandings recorded were harbour porpoise.

The majority of strandings (68.00%) occurred during the autumn and winter months, between September and February. Adverse weather conditions typically occur during this period and thus it is possible that greater wind/wave action during this period resulted in a greater number of carcasses washing ashore. Increased storminess, as a result of climate change, may result in more strandings washing up in the future. Furthermore, autumn coincides with the grey seal pupping season where there is a greater chance of mortality during their initial months (as a consequence of usual infant mortality rate). Pups are less adept at swimming than adults and are more susceptible to drowning or death from exhaustion, exposure, and malnutrition. This is reflected in the reported seal strandings of October and November, with 17 of the 23 (73.91%) Grey seal stranded individuals identified as pups.

There was no substantial or abnormal evidence of trauma or injury that were thought to extend beyond the level expected for washed-up marine megafaunal carcasses. The three strandings of deep diving species (one unknown whale; Risso adult and calf) appear to

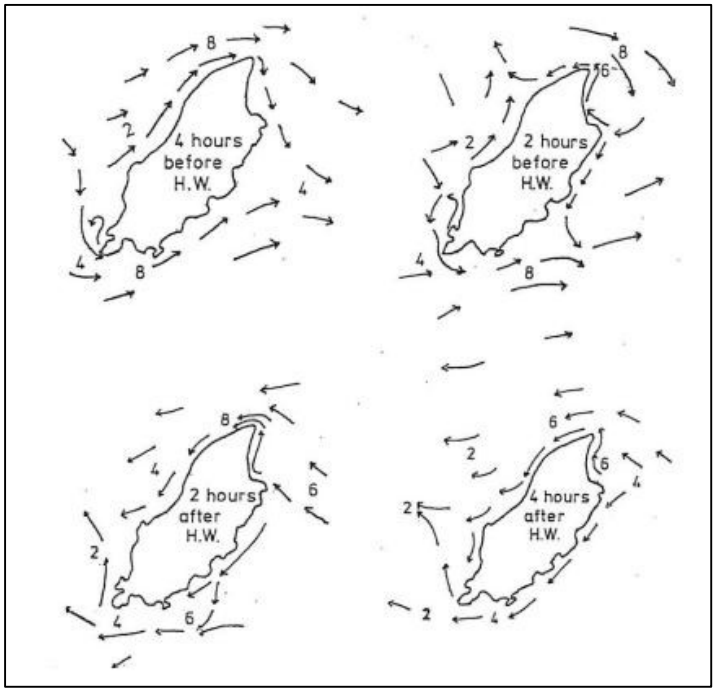
be isolated cases. However, this is the third consecutive year for Risso's dolphin strandings having not been seen before, raising future concerns around this species. The unknown whale was in an advanced state of decomposition, where signs of trauma were not observable, although did not raise any concerns given its isolated nature. The Risso dolphin adult and calf that stranded together can likely be attributed to complications during birthing.

Similarly to the 2024 report, there was no evidence to suggest that the Isle of Man's populations of pinnipeds and cetaceans were directly affected by avian influenza despite world-wide reports of some marine mammal species fatally contracting the H_5N_1 strain of avian influenza in 2023 and 2024. However, no samples were collected to confirm this (as individuals were generally not fresh enough).

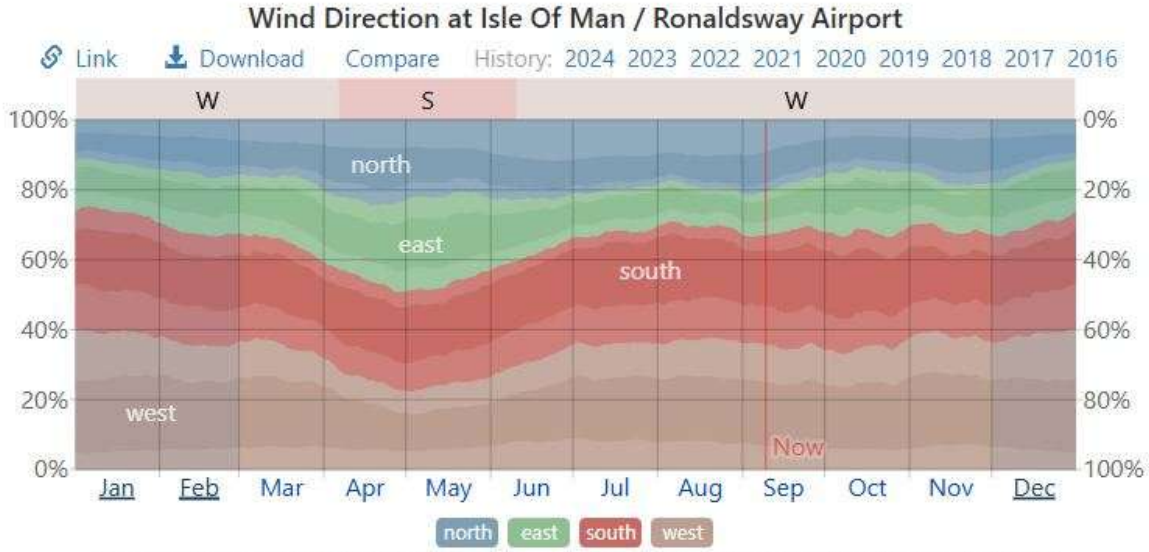
The findings of this year's annual report are consistent with the numbers and distribution of stranded individuals recorded in previous years. Although the stranding of the adult and calf Risso's dolphins appears to be an isolated incident, Risso's dolphins have stranded in Manx waters in each of the last three years, representing the first such occurrences since MWT began monitoring strandings. This apparent increase warrants continued monitoring.

Appendices

Appendix 1: General Tidal flow around the Isle of Man (Brown, 1951).



Appendix 2: The average prevailing wind direction for the Isle of Man (Ronaldsway Airport).



The percentage of hours in which the mean wind direction is from each of the four cardinal wind directions, excluding hours in which the mean wind speed is less than 1.6 kph. The lightly tinted areas at the boundaries are the percentage of hours spent in the implied intermediate directions (northeast, southeast, southwest, and northwest).

Appendix 3: Seal stranding recording form.

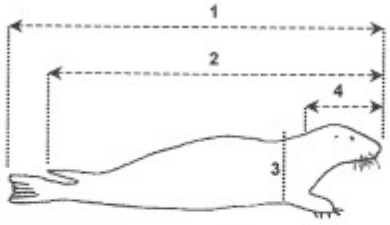
Seal Stranding Recording Form

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 4: Stranded whales/dolphins/porpoise recording form.

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

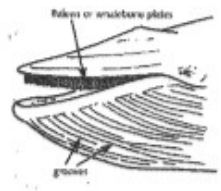
County | **Grid ref.**

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) ☐			

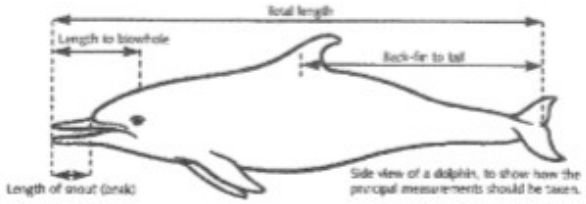
Whalebone Whales if baleen present, state:



(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 ☐		



Total length of the animal measured in a straight line (preferably in metric units) ☐

Length from the tip of the snout to the blowhole. ☐

Length from the middle of the base of the back-fin to the middle of the tail ☐

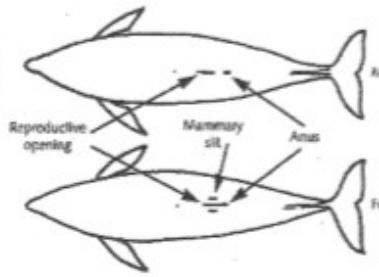
Length of one of the two flippers. ☐

Length, in the middle line, of the snout or beak if present ☐

Vertical height of the back-fin if present. ☐

Is the animal male or female? (In male, penis may be extruded. In female, mammary slits usually visible).

Male ☐ **Female** ☐



Shape of the head (for instance, 'beak absent' or 'beak six inches long, forehead much swollen').

Colour of the skin, calling attention to the position of any white parts or stripes observed.

Please fill in diagram at top of page.

Length of gap between Reproductive opening and The anus.

☐ cm

Condition of the animal when first seen: Live ☐ Dead ☐ Fresh ☐ Uncertain ☐ Decomposed ☐

Comments on condition (e.g. smelly, leaking body fluids, bones visible, penis extruded, small cuts, big wounds).

Is it lying in such a position that it could be secured for the Museum If wanted, either entire,or its head, flippers or complete skeleton? ☐

Additional Comments (if tangled in netting, please keep a sample).

Name and address (please print).

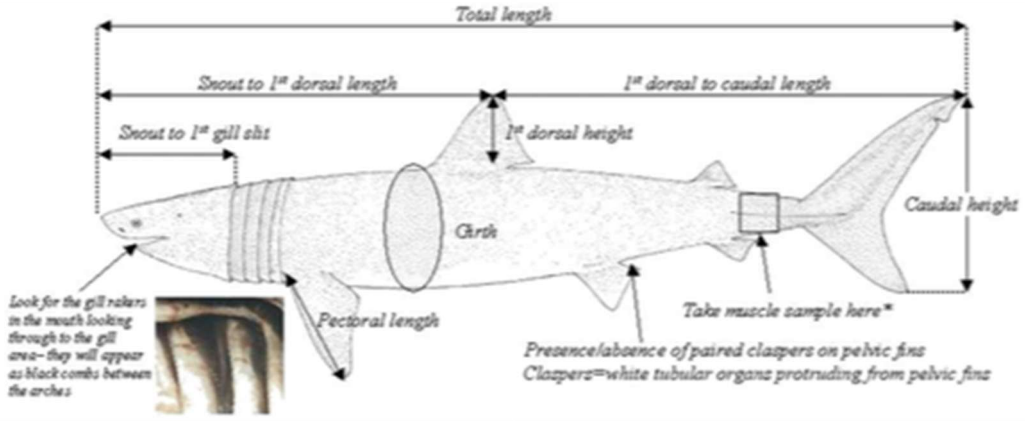
Tel. nos

Fax. nos

Appendix 5 – Basking shark stranding recording form.

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