

River Forth's whales, porpoises, dolphins and seals mapped by citizen scientists

April 26 2023



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

A 10,000-strong Facebook group has helped Heriot-Watt scientists

document the whales, porpoises, dolphins and seals that visit the Firth of Forth.

Over two years, more than 450 people have reported sightings of a variety of different species in the Forth and posted them on the Forth Marine Mammals Facebook page.

Humpback, minke and [killer whales](#) are among the [marine animals](#) that have been spotted, as are common and [bottlenose dolphins](#) and harbor porpoises.

The data collected from April 2021 to April 2023 has been turned into an [interactive map](#) by Emily Hague, a marine mammal researcher at Heriot-Watt University.

Hague said, "Thanks to the hundreds of people who post on Forth Marine Mammals, we're able to show the wealth and variety of marine life seen from our shores along the Forth.

"Until quite recently the Forth was thought of as being pretty void of marine life, but this group of citizen scientists has helped prove that's really not the case.

"This project has raised awareness about the Forth's marine life among the people who work, live and visit our shores, but it will also contribute to science and marine policy that in future might help better conserve and protect this magnificent location."

One of the group's most prolific members is Ronnie Mackie (69), who can see the Forth from his home in Kinghorn. As a recreational fisherman and local volunteer with Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC), Ronnie often posts sightings on the group.

Ronnie said, "I've always been a wildlife enthusiast and it's still exciting to me when I spot a whale or dolphin in the Forth.

"Facebook groups like these are great because when you can alert people that something's on its way, and it gives them the opportunity to head to the shore or a good viewing point to spot something.

"More people are becoming aware of all the animals that are swimming past us, and we set up a WDC Shorewatch site in Kinghorn where people can be trained in survey equipment. That's also helped raise awareness.

"I don't have a favorite marine [mammal](#), but I'm very interested in porpoises at the moment. I think they're underreported because they're small and hard to spot. But I'm keeping my eye out for them now!"

Emily Hague said, "We're incredibly grateful to everyone who has reported a sighting over the past two years. We encourage anyone visiting the Forth to keep their eyes peeled for its wonderful wildlife and report back to the Forth Marine Mammals Facebook page."

More information: Interactive map: storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0...4efcb1ca5c8392c15626

Provided by Heriot-Watt University

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