

Marine megafauna of Devon – whales and dolphins



Devon



Bottlenose dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*

- 2.2 - 4m
- Large, stocky, plain grey colouring



Common dolphin *Delphinus delphis*

- 1.6 - 2.6m
- Slender, torpedo shape & 'hourglass' pattern



White-beaked dolphin *Lagenorhynchus albirostris*

- 2.5 - 2.8m
- Tall dorsal fin with pale 'saddle' behind, indistinct beak



Risso's dolphin *Grampus griseus*

- 2.6 - 3.8m
- Tall dorsal fin, scarred body, no beak



Harbour porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*

- 1.3 - 1.9m
- Small, no beak, triangular dorsal fin



Atlantic white-sided dolphin *Lagenorhynchus acutus*

- 1.9 - 2.8m
- Yellow patch near tail, indistinct beak



Striped dolphin *Stenella coeruleoalba*

- 1.8 - 2.5m
- Slender, torpedo shape with pale 'V' shoulder blaze



Long-finned pilot whale *Globicephala melas*

- 3.8 - 6.3m
- All black body, bulbous head & low, wide dorsal fin



Minke whale *Balaenoptera acuturostrata*

- 6.9 - 10.5m
- Pointed head, white band on flippers, dorsal fin two thirds along back



Orca (killer whale) *Orcinus orca*

- 3.8 - 9.8m
- Large size, tall dorsal fin, distinct black & white colouring

Illustrations not to scale

Please report sightings to the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre as soon as you can on **01392 279244** or at **dbrc@devonwt.cix.co.uk** or online at **www.devonwildlifetrust.org**

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Key features to look for

Whales and dolphins (cetaceans) are our largest native mammals but very difficult to identify in the field. This guide gives some key features to help you.

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- Harbour porpoise** *Phocoena phocoena*
- **Small size** (adult 1.3 - 1.9m) but chunky
 - Small, blunt and **triangular dorsal fin**
 - Blunt head, **no beak**
 - **Dark grey/black back** with paler patch on flanks
 - **Quietly rolls through water**, rarely jumps
 - Often alone or in small groups
 - Most common cetacean in our inshore waters but very shy
 - Only porpoise found in northern hemisphere, not a dolphin
- Bottlenose dolphin** *Tursiops truncatus*
- **Large, stocky** (adult 2.2 - 4m)
 - Tall, curved dorsal fin
 - Short, stubby beak
 - **Plain grey colouration**, with possible muted colour pattern
 - Often jumps or breaches and bow rides
 - Usually in small groups close to shore
 - **Most commonly seen** dolphin around Devon
 - South-West population of 20-30 animals is one of only 3 in British waters
- Common dolphin** *Delphinus delphis*
- **Small, slender, torpedo-shaped** (adult 1.6 - 2.6m)
 - Curved, dark dorsal fin, often has pale grey centre
 - Long, **narrow beak**
 - Clotted cream or yellow patch on sides near head forms part of distinct **hourglass pattern**, creating dark V-shape under dorsal fin
 - Very active and agile, often jumping/somersaulting
 - Sometimes travels in large groups of 50-1,000
 - Seen regularly all-year off Devon
 - Can be confused with: striped dolphin and Atlantic white-sided dolphin
- Striped dolphin** *Stenella coeruleoalba*
- Small, **slender, torpedo-shaped** (adult 1.8 - 2.5m)
 - Curved, dorsal fin
 - Long, well-defined beak, prominent forehead
 - **White/light grey V-shape 'shoulder blaze'**, swept back and up toward dorsal fin
 - Very active and agile, often jumping and bowriding
 - Sometimes travels in large groups of up to 1,000
 - **Rare visitor** from southern waters
 - Can be confused with: common dolphin

- White-beaked dolphin** *Lagenorhynchus albirostris*
- Medium-sized, robust body (adult 2.5 - 2.8m)
 - **Tall, dark dorsal fin**
 - Short, stubby beak, often white but not always
 - Obvious pale **grey 'saddle' behind dorsal fin**, otherwise body is variable dark grey with greyish white blazes
 - **Thick tail stock**
 - Powerful swimmer. Active and acrobatic
 - Usually travels in groups of 5 to 50
 - Occasional visitor to Devon's waters from further north, perhaps under-recorded
 - Can be confused with: Atlantic white-sided dolphin
- Atlantic white-sided dolphin** *Lagenorhynchus acutus*
- Medium-sized dolphin, robust body (adult 1.9 - 2.8m)
 - Tall, curved dorsal fin
 - Short, stubby beak, black on top, pale grey/white lower jaw
 - Body has colourful, bold markings. Entire dorsal surface is dark grey or black. Long white then **yellow/ochre blaze on flank**
 - **Thick tail stock**
 - Active and acrobatic
 - Can travel in groups of up to 1,000 but generally in smaller groups of up to 30 closer inshore
 - Rare visitor to Devon from north, perhaps under-recorded
 - Can be confused with: common and white-beaked dolphins
- Risso's dolphin** *Grampus griseus*
- Large, robust (adult 2.6 - 3.8m)
 - **Tall (sometimes very tall) curved dorsal fin**
 - Rounded head, **no beak**
 - Dark grey back and flanks, often **heavily scarred**, especially the head. Older animals look almost white
 - Surfaces slowly but can be active (spy-hopping, breaching and head/tail slapping)
 - Usually seen in groups of up to 15
 - Occasional visitor but perhaps under-recorded
 - Can be confused with: bottlenose dolphin
- Long-finned pilot whale** *Globicephala melas*
- **All-black**, large (adult 3.8 - 6.3m)
 - Low, rounded, swept-back and **wide-based dorsal fin**
 - **Bulbous, rounded forehead** (melon), no obvious beak
 - Long, thin flippers

- Light grey streaks over eyebrow and saddle behind dorsal fin
 - Slow swimming. Groups can be synchronised. Often floats on surface (logging) and spy-hops.
 - Seen in family groups of 5-20, can be spread out
 - Seen occasionally throughout year off Devon, generally offshore in deep water off south coast. Strandings each winter on both of Devon's coasts
- Orca (killer whale)** *Orcinus orca*
- Largest member of the dolphin family, **extremely robust body** (adult 3.8 - 9.8m)
 - **Very tall, erect dorsal fin**, more prominent in adult male (1-1.8m tall). Female and juvenile's dorsal fin is smaller and curved
 - Conical head with indistinct beak
 - **Distinctive black and white body**, oval white patch above and behind eye, grey saddle behind dorsal fin
 - Large rounded, paddle-shaped flippers
 - Fastest dolphin (30knots). Highly active, breaching, tail-slapping, spy-hopping and logging
 - Usually seen in tight family groups of 2-30
 - Rare visitor to Devon's inshore waters
- Minke whale** *Balaenoptera acuturostrata*
- Smallest baleen whale in Atlantic (adult 6.9 - 10.5m)
 - Sickle-shaped **dorsal fin two thirds along back**
 - Slender, **pointed head** with single central ridge
 - Distinct **white band on flippers**, dark grey/black head and body with grey areas on flanks
 - Fast swimmer. Blowhole and dorsal fin visible at same time when surfacing
 - Usually solitary
 - Occasional visitor to Devon's waters
 - Can be confused with: other baleen whales (bigger, no white patch on flippers)

Other cetacean species recorded in Devon's waters, as either sightings or dead strandings, include:
Sowerby's beaked whale, northern bottlenose whale, Cuvier's beaked whale, pygmy sperm whale, fin whale and humpback whale.

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Marine megafauna of Devon – seals & summer visitors



Devon



Grey seal *Halichoerus grypus*

- 2.1 - 3.3m
- Flat profile, male even has hooked nose, nostrils parallel, blotchy coat

Common or harbour seal *Phoca vitulina*

- 1.2 - 1.9m
- 'Dog-like' face, V-shaped nostrils (joined at base) and spotty coat



By-the-wind-sailor *Verella verella*

- Up to 10cm across
- Upright 'sail', blue-purple colour, occurs in vast swarms

Portuguese man-of-war *Physalia physalis*

- Float is up to 30cm long
- Gas-filled float, very long trailing tentacles. Strong sting. DO NOT TOUCH



Moon jellyfish *Aurelia aurita*

- Up to 40cm across
- 4 rings in bell, short tentacles. Mild sting

Leatherback turtle *Dermochelys coriacea*

- Up to 3m long
- Ridged soft shell, black with white spots



Compass jellyfish *Chrysaora hysoscella*

- Up to 30cm across
- V-shaped markings on bell look like compass points. Stings. DO NOT TOUCH



Blue jellyfish *Cyanea lamarckii*

- Up to 30cm across
- Blue bell with radial lines. Mild sting

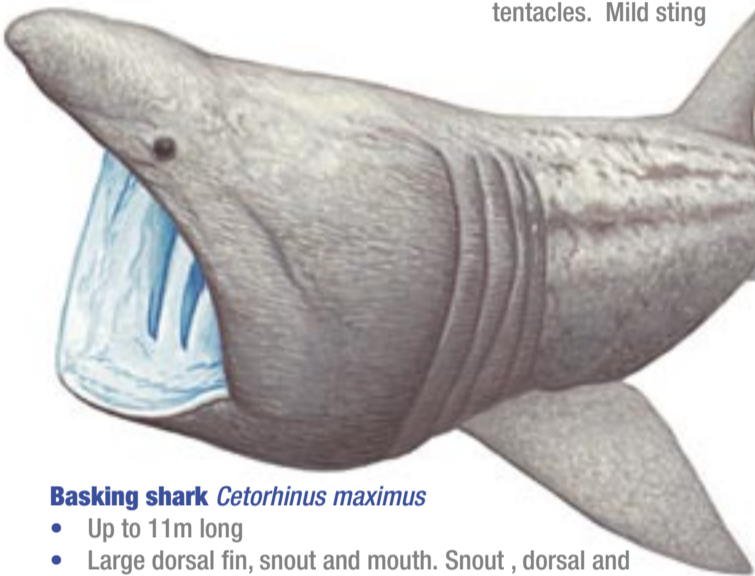
Dustbin lid, barrel or root mouth jellyfish *Rhizostoma octopus*

- Up to 1m across
- Solid, rubbery bell and thick, frilled arms.



Mauve stinger *Pelagia noctiluca*

- Up to 10cm across
- Deep bell with small 'warts', glows at night. Strong sting. DO NOT TOUCH



Basking shark *Cetorhinus maximus*

- Up to 11m long
- Large dorsal fin, snout and mouth. Snout, dorsal and tail fin often seen at same time on surface

Illustrations not to scale

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Marine megafauna of Devon

Grey seal *Halichoerus grypus*

- Large seal (adult 2.1 - 3.3m)
- Head has **flat profile** ie straight line from top of head to nose. In male exaggerated to give a hooked or 'Roman nose'
- **Variable grey coat is covered in thick blotches**, unique to each animal. Male usually dark with lighter blotches and female light with dark blotches.
- **Nostrils parallel to one another**, not always obvious
- Usually seen in rocky areas, but also in estuaries and bays
- Year round Devon resident. Do not usually occur much further up Channel than Devon
- Breeds on Devon beaches, pups are white
- South-West population of grey seals is globally important

Common or harbour seal *Phoca vitulina*

- Smaller seal (adult 1.2 - 1.9m)
- **Muzzle short** and concave. **Face has dog-like appearance**
- **Coat has mottled pattern of spots**, varies in colour from light grey to dark brown
- **Nostrils joined at base in 'V' shape**
- Frequents sandbanks in estuaries but also occurs on rocky coasts
- Occasional visitor to Devon from East England

Basking shark *Cetorhinus maximus*

- **Second largest fish in world** (adult to 11m)
- Large, angular dorsal fin
- Pointed snout over cavernous mouth (**white inside**)
- **Swims slowly at surface**, feeding
- **Often see snout, dorsal and tail fin together on surface**
- Seen most often in summer

Leatherback turtle *Dermochelys coriacea*

- **Largest turtle in world** (adult to 3m)
- **Distinctive, soft shell with longitudinal ridges**
- Black with white spots
- When at surface only back and sometimes head visible

Other species of sharks and turtles, as well as large fish - such as sunfish, *Mola mola*, do frequent Devon's waters.

All the jellyfish you are likely to encounter in Devon's waters are illustrated above.

Top tips for marine megafauna (mega=big, fauna=animals) sightings:

- Calm, still days with high cloud are best
- Circling and diving birds indicate shoals of fish, these attract dolphins and porpoises
- Cliff tops, headlands and boats provide the best views

What to do if you see a large marine animal?

ALL sightings are important, however uncertain. Please report any to the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre (DBRC) as soon as you can, on 01392 279244 or at **dbrc@devonwt.cix.co.uk** or online at **www.devonwildlifetrust.org** with the following information:

- what you saw (photos, video or a description are invaluable)
- where you saw it/them
- when you saw it/them (include time)
- who you are (name/address/email/phone)
- how certain you are of the identification
- how many you saw
- what it/they were doing

Plus, any other details eg weather, animal's condition including marks or scars etc

If you would like to learn more, become a regular dolphin surveyor or have marine mammal records to give, please contact DBRC.

Data Protection Act

All the information you provide will be added to the DBRC database. Wildlife information from this database may be passed on to third parties (eg Seawatch Foundation, Marine Conservation Society) for conservation and management purposes, or displayed on websites for educational purposes. Personal details (apart from names) will NOT be passed on without prior permission being given by the individual. Please contact us if you have any objections to this.

Code of conduct

Whales, dolphins and porpoises are highly intelligent animals and vessels can disturb, hit and injure them.

If they approach your boat or bow-ride, maintain a slow speed and course until clear. When watching dolphins, always let them decide what happens.

Please follow these guidelines:

- **Keep your distance.** Never go closer than 100m (200m if another boat is present)
- **Never drive head on to**, or move between, scatter or separate dolphins. If unsure of their movements simply stop
- **Do not chase or harass them**
- **Always allow a clear escape route** for them
- **Move away slowly** if they show signs of disturbance
- **Spend no longer than 15 minutes near the animals**
- **Avoid mothers with youngsters**
- **Maintain a steady direction** and slow 'no wake' speed
- **Don't call other vessels to the area**
- **Never try to swim with cetaceans** for your safety and theirs

Cetaceans and basking sharks are protected by law making it illegal to disturb or harass them. Report all incidents to the Police (08452 777444).

Purpose of ID guide

This ID Guide has been produced by the Devon Wildlife Trust as part of the Dolphin Protection Programme, which aims to monitor cetacean numbers in Devon's waters, and identify their habits and hotspots for conservation. The Dolphin Protection Programme works with all cetacean recording organisations including Seaquest South-West and the Seawatch Foundation and is supported by Brewin Dolphin Securities.

