

PNHS Clyde Cetacean Watch, Largs

Saturday 17th October



Watching cetaceans from Largs looking over to Cumbrae (photo by Gordon Phillips)

We had a perfect day for our outing to look for Cetaceans at the Clyde estuary. The sun was shining, the temperature was mild, and there was very little wind. Based on intelligence from the Cetacean watching community, we had a last-minute change of meeting point from Greenock Esplanade to Broomfield Park, south Largs. A group of 16 gathered on the rise above the shore, armed with binoculars, scopes and cameras, and we were assured that we would have a much better chance of seeing cetaceans from there. We were not disappointed. Within 5 minutes of arriving, a Minke Whale was breaking the surface of the water just south of the ferry heading towards Cumbrae Pier.



Minke whale (photo by Bill Gray)



PNHS group (photo by Michael Amos)

With the calm seas it was much easier to see the backs and fins breaking the surface of the water, although you never knew where they would pop up next.

The Minke disappeared for a while then re-appeared again, heading further south, then returning north again, feeding in areas where there were also flocks of birds feeding. A good sign that there were plenty fish to be had! We also saw Porpoises in the same area. The Minke is the UK's smallest whale at 7-9 metres length, but once you get your eye in, easy to distinguish from the Porpoises, which are small and chunky with a triangular fin on the centre of its back. Minkes are much longer and have a more angled, curved fin three-quarters of the way along the back. For those interested in birdlife there were Cormorants, Gulls and Eiders in the water or standing on buoys.



Common Bottlenose Dolphins (photo by Gordon Phillips)



Common Bottlenose Dolphins (photo by Bill Gray)

Our group gathered a lot of attention from passers-by who were unaware that there was a whale and porpoises nearby, and wondering if we were looking for a rare bird. Some joined in our group for a while, keen to see the whale and asking lots of questions. We were very fortunate to have Sophie Shields and Michael Amos on hand to give us detailed information about the different species. As people were thinking about heading home we heard that there was a pod of Dolphins at north Largs heading in our direction. Sure enough, a while later, we saw five dolphins dipping in and out of the water as they rounded the headland and headed south. It was mesmerising watching them and as they moved past fairly close into shore and then south into the gleaming sunlit waters. Even when they were some distance away you could still see their spouts (jets of water from their blowholes) backlit against the sunshine.

Kirsty Menzies