

## Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation

### Annual Report 2010

During 2010 the SDWF continued to consolidate many of its activities while expanding its research. Turnover remained consistent with previous years at €43,230 with expenditure of €42,630. This left €7500 in the account at the end of the year with €4600 allocated to Basking Shark research funded by Save Our Seas Foundation.

#### Research

Research activity was increased again in 2010, through our relationship with the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT). The major work was the awarding of the Shannon Bottlenose Dolphin Survey by the NPWS to the SDWF in collaboration with GMIT. This was the first time we had won this prestigious contract and 12 transects were carried out in the estuary. The photographic data collected during the survey was used to derive an abundance estimate of  $107 \pm 12$ ,  $CV = 0.12$  (95% CI 83 - 131), which when combined with previous studies suggests the population is stable. SDWF also collaborated on a study of bottlenose dolphin genetics by supplying samples and this has shown the Shannon Estuary population is genetically discrete from a coastal population and putative offshore population in Ireland.

One full-time research scientist was based at the SDWF offices, working on the PReCAST project. Volunteers during the summer included Kerstin Voigt from the University of Portsmouth, Aoife Foley from GMIT and Florence Erbs from France. The SDWF also facilitated a visit by Lilian Lieber from the University of Aberdeen who was working on basking sharks.

The PReCAST project continued to collect Static Acoustic Monitoring data which when completed at the end of 2010 will provide a massive dataset from which to explore patterns of movement and occupancy around the estuary. The research project on basking sharks initiated in 2009 was continued with further tagging and sampling for genetics off Counties Donegal, Cork and Kerry.

A paper on the social structure of the bottlenose dolphins in the Shannon Estuary using data from tour boat monitoring was published.

#### Education

The Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Centre in Kilrush was kept open daily from June to September through the use of volunteers. This was the first time the SDWF has had to rely entirely on volunteers but it worked well. The centre continued to interest many people through its exhibits and showing of a 10 minute presentation on the dolphins and the work of the SDWF. Numbers to the centre was estimated at about 1500, which is consistent with previous years. A visit by students from the US on an exchange visit to Kilrush was organised and also visits by four local schools. The

SDWF participated in Feile Shona Festival in Kilrush and the Doonbeg Seafood Festival.

Two training courses on cetacean identification and live-stranding were delivered at the centre. SDWF also facilitated the National Biodiversity Data Centre by hosting an Advanced SeaSearch course in August. Bord Iscaigh Mhara also used the centre to deliver a sea survival training course for local boat operators.

### Conservation

The SDWF, and especially the centre in Kilrush, were featured very strongly during the making of Monty Halls Great Irish Escape. These six one hour programmes will be transmitted in January on BBC2 and although Monty was based in Conamara he carried out a number of visits to the Shannon Estuary. Included in the programme was a number of photo-id trips to the estuary and participation in a dolphin-watching tour from Carrigaholt. The conservation of the Shannon dolphins will also be featured in a programme made by SeaFever Productions based in Ennistymon and called Farraigh na Eireann, which is to be shown on TG4 in 2011.

The SDWF managed to reinstate during 2010 the collection of sighting records from the Shannon Ferries. This survey had ceased in recent years but the skippers of the ferries have started recording again which provides a very valuable dataset on dolphin occurrence upriver.

SDWF carried out dredge monitoring at Foynes on behalf of the Shannon Foynes Port Company to ensure any impact on dredge disposal was minimal.

### Monitoring

For the first time since 2000, the SDWF were not contracted to carry out tour boat monitoring by the NPWS. However to preserve the integrity of the dataset the monitoring was carried out anyway. This showed that there was a 20% increase in the number of dolphin trips compared to 2009, with the total of 290 near the 309 trips carried out in 2008.

SDWF were contracted by RPS to carry out a study of the inter-tidal area in Foynes as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment. As part of this study C-PODS were deployed at the jetty and surprisingly detected dolphins on a good number of occasions. It is likely the dolphins were in the approaches to the harbour rather than passed through, inside Foynes Island, and were detected by the acoustic monitoring devices.

### Merchandise

Merchandise continued to be popular in the SDWF centre. The SDWF for the second year facilitated the Kilrush Gateway Project by providing tea and coffee to visitors going dolphin-watching. Around 400 visitors took up this offer. They also brought

biscuits and merchandise. Profits contributed to the cost of public liability and contents insurance in the centre.

Overall, 2010 was another successful year for the SDWF. The centre continued to be open while relying on volunteers. The research programme continued to expand with the winning of the first Shannon Dolphin Survey contract. During 2010, a major research programme will end but as the relationship with GMIT continues to build its research programme is looking strong into the near future.

Dr Simon Berrow  
Project Manager