



Name: Cliff Benson.

Date: January 2009.

Location: St George's Channel.

Title: Superpod of Common Dolphins, 2009.

Memory:

Cliff Benson is the Founder and Managing Director of Sea Trust, based in Goodwick. Over the years he has been involved in numerous surveys, including the one he recounts below.

Cliff asks that anyone wanting to use/cite this work contacts him beforehand to ask for permission. Cliff can be contacted at: seatrustwales@gmail.com.

“We had another similar experience again in July 2009, but the one that really surprised me was in January aboard the Stena Europe. We have been fortunate in being able to work from the bridge of the Stena Europe since 2004, and have developed a great relationship over the years with the captains and crews who allowed us access to the Bridge and Bridge Wings, giving us a fantastic forward facing platform to survey from. We have seen what appeared to be increasing numbers of Common Dolphin sightings during the winter months. None at all were seen in the first few years from 2004 to 2005, and then little by little we had odd sightings in December and January, but in 2007 we recorded them in every month of the year. This then became the norm and it seemed probable that here had been a shift in their distribution.

On a nice calm morning crossing back from Rosslare, we spotted dolphins ahead of us in the distance. It soon became obvious that it was a very large pod. They started approaching us to bow ride on the bow wave one group would come in, bow ride for a few seconds then fall off into our wake. They just kept on coming and coming. Again, it was difficult to count accurately but we decided on a minimum of 500 but probably a lot more!

I have been incredibly fortunate in being able to spend thousands of hours over the past two decades, following my passion for seeing, filming, photographing and scientifically recording the marine wildlife of the Celtic Sea, Southern Irish Sea, Bristol Channel and other parts of our interconnected oceans. I have friends who travel thousands of miles watching Blue Whales in Baja or the Southern Ocean or Great Barrier Reef, but I would not swap any of those locations for the ability to explore and discover the ocean and marine wildlife on our doorstep! They are still very much alive hosting everything from great whales to Blue Fin Tuna and Thresher Sharks! We need to work together to keep them living and try to gain meaningful protection for them all!”

You can learn more about the work Sea Trust do here - <https://seatrust.org.uk/>.