



Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines

Iceland on Balmoral

Sightings Record

_Robin Petch - www.TheWhaleandDolphinMan.co.uk



Thank you for joining me on Deck 7 throughout the cruise and helping to spot and record whales, dolphins, porpoises and other marine life.

As the Chair of Trustees for the Sea Watch Foundation it is my great pleasure to share with you the sightings throughout this Balmoral cruise, from Newcastle to Iceland and back, along with a few of the photographs Kris and I have taken.

Sea Watch Foundation is the leading UK cetacean research charity and has been collecting sightings data since the 1970s to create Europe's biggest whale, dolphin and porpoise sightings database. This is used to inform EU and national governments, scientific and environmental agencies and NGOs, as well as independent research scientists who have an interest in studying and protecting cetaceans and the marine environment.

28/08/17 Leaving Newcastle

Lots of Gannets and Kittiwakes feeding as we sailed from Newcastle, as well as a few Guillemots and a Great Skua aka "Bonxie"

1920 Dolphins (probably Bottlenose or White-beaked) port side (by passenger)

29/08/17 At Sea

c.0900 2 or more possible Bottlenose Dolphins (by Morag) and a fin to starboard (by 4035)
Hundreds of Fulmars, with Gannets and Kittiwakes, feeding near Fair Isle but also others seen throughout the day as well as Puffins, Guillemots, Greater Black-backed Gulls and a few Great Skuas. Flocks of unidentified small birds also seen occasionally.

30/08/17 At Sea

Lots of Fulmars, with Gannets and Kittiwakes, over the wake. Sooty Shearwaters also spotted.

0928 Whale blowing c.0.5mile off starboard bow, probably a Humpback

1402 Big blow 2miles ahead, not seen again

1430 6+ Dolphins very briefly ahead then disappeared to each side. Possibly White-beaked Dolphins but my photograph shows one Orca-like fin so all may have been this species!

1440 Minke or Sei Whale, port side (by passenger)

- 1510 Sei Whale surfaced twice close to starboard bow then reappeared to port, further off
 - 1532 4-5 Northern Bottlenosed Whales surfacing repeatedly, c.1500m to starboard
 - 1600 Several possible blows to starboard (by passenger)
 - 1759 3 large, probably Fin Whales, surfacing and splashing 3miles ahead but then disappeared
 - 1920 5-6 unidentified whales to starboard (by passenger)
- We also had a few small birds on board, identified as Rock Pipits.

31/08/17 At Sea

- 0551 Whale blew at least x3, 800m port side, aft (from Deck 4 passenger cabin)
- 0740 Whale blew x2 then surfaced briefly, 200m to starboard (by passenger)
- 1003 Minke Whale surfaced x3, 500m to starboard, just ahead of Coast Guard vessel
- 1021 Unidentified whale surfaced to port
- 1805 One or more Orca, 500m to port (Ian, Morag & Kris)

01/09/17 Reykjavik

- 2 Minke Whales and White-beaked Dolphins seen on ship's whale watching tour
- 2040 Glaucus Gulls in Reykjavik harbour (by Jeremy Goodhall)

02/09/17 Leaving Reykjavik

- 1819 2+ Dolphins, probably White-beaked, ahead c.250m
 - c.1830 Minke Whale 200m to starboard (by passengers in Avon Restaurant)
 - 1831 5+ White-beaked Dolphins crossing RtoL ahead c.250m
 - 1839 Probable Minke Whale c.1mile off starboard bow
- We also frightened a Puffin which flew from near the port bow and Fulmars, Gannets, Greater Black-backed Gulls and a Storm Petrel were also seen.

03/09/17 Isafjordur

- Passenger sightings from ship's tour to Vigur Island: 6 Atlantic Grey Seals, 12 Harbour Seals, c.100 Purple Sandpipers, 2 Arctic Terns, 2 Ravens, 20 Eider Ducks (m), 12 Eider Ducks (f), Pied Wagtail, Shag. Six Harlequin Ducks (f) featured in another report from the river mouth near the airport. Other sightings include 2 Red Shanks, 3 Glaucus Gulls and a Long-tailed Duck as well as two Ravens in the port area and lots of Jellyfish in the harbour, mainly Aurelia, aka Moon Jellyfish.
- 1445 Whale blow, then tail (by passenger) which Kris and I also saw, probably Humpback
 - 1455 Dolphins down the side of the ship (by passenger) which again we saw from Deck 11, port side and similar splashing continued on and off until 1515. No markings were noted but either White-beaked or perhaps White-sided is the most likely as Bottlenose are very rare in Iceland and only recorded occasionally in the south.
 - 1550 Minke Whale surfaced x3 to starboard aft, spotted by a lady from her balcony!
 - c.1600 A fin spotted to port, unidentified whale or dolphin. Two or three big splashes later seen about 2miles astern suggesting whales breaching.
 - 1840 Dolphin spotted leaping clear of the water to starboard (by passenger)
 - 1910 Whale surfaced ahead (spotted by passengers from Observatory Lounge)
 - 2015 Dolphins along port side (by passengers) and Orca to starboard (by passengers). I suspect that both were actually White-beaked Dolphins but Orca is a possibility.

04/09/17 Akureyri

- 0550 5-10 Harbour Porpoises en-route to port (by an early rising passenger, well done!)
- 1130+ Humpback Whales seen very close to the boat during the ship's whale watching tour to Husavik.
- 1200 On a Whale Watching Extreme rib trip with *Ambassador*, we saw 3 different Humpback Whales, "Tattoo", "Ghost" (aka "Lucy") and one new, as yet unnamed, whale. Repeated close views of each, including tail-up dives.
On the ship's whale watching tour with *Ambassador*, a number of different Humpbacks were seen, a number of times. Overall, a successful day's whale watching in a superb whale watching destination!

05/09/17 Akureyri

Another very successful ship's whale watching tour with *Ambassador*!

- Konsul* This was the smaller boat and we remained with the same Humpback Whale throughout the trip and stayed very close for almost the whole time, watching it surface, blow and dive repeatedly. This was "Tattoo" again, who has an incredibly distinctive tail.
- Arctic Circle* This was the larger boat which also saw "Tattoo" closely but then moved up the fjord and found another 5 or 6 whales including "Ghost". A great total!
- 1200 Little Auk in the harbour, ahead of ship (by passenger)
- 1350 2 Humpback Whales, c.2miles ahead
- 1408 Humpback Whale dived, between the 2 whale watching boats to port
- 1432 4 Humpback Whales blowing, surfacing and diving c.3miles off the port bow initially and another about 1mile to starboard
- 1511 Humpback Whale surfaced x3 then dived (very black tail)
- 1515 Humpback Whale with juvenile close beside, c.500m to starboard
- 1527 Humpback Whale to starboard
- 1530 Humpback Whale to port, very close to Hrolfssker, the rocks with the light tower
- 1745 We crossed the Arctic Circle, west of Grimsey
That's 13 whales during the sail away and some very successful whale watching trips. I think Akureyri lived up to my promise of being a fabulous whale watching destination! Lots of Fulmars and other seabirds around too.

06/09/17 At Sea

- 0850 A Wheatear was seen on deck outside Palms Café at 0850 and was still around later in the day.
- c.1100 5-6 Orca, to starboard and in the distance, seen by passengers and confirmed by photograph later
- c.1105 Several groups of Dolphins, maybe 20+, starboard side (by Kris, during my talk)
- c.1115 5+ Pilot Whales, c.500m to starboard (Kris again!)
- 1120 Dolphins spotted by passengers from the Spa, pale sides suggest White-beaked
- 1220 Whale-back spotted as it surfaced, port side
- 1316 Whale blowing, c.1mile to starboard, many seabirds in association

- 1445 3 big blows seen close together, repeated 5 times, probably Fin Whales as they were travelling faster than the ship, in the same direction! (by passengers)
- 1500 & 1525 4 blows off the stern, dark body sometimes visible (by passenger)
- 1520 2 large whales blowing to starboard, one appeared to partially breach. Identified as Fin Whales from Kris' photographs.
- c.1600 Fin Whale ahead and then to starboard
- 1616 2 whales blowing to port, probably Sperm Whales
- Gannets, Fulmars and occasionally Sooty Shearwater and Great Skuas were spotted throughout the day.
- Which brings me to what was, allegedly, the last marine mammal sighting of the cruise. A passenger recorded the following: "Polar Bear and cub on floating ice, port side!" I never did find out exactly what they'd been drinking!

07/09/17 At Sea

Sadly, there were no significant sightings in fairly challenging watching conditions today, with the bow closed off. A few Gannets and Fulmars were spotted and occasional Sooty and Manx Shearwaters as well as Great Skuas.

Below, and on the following page are a selection of photographs taken during the cruise to illustrate some of the encounters above. I intend ultimately to create a gallery of photographs, and a DVD, on my website for sale to support my work and that of the charity so do keep checking. Please consider making a donation to www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk on their website or via mine at www.TheWhaleandDolphinMan.co.uk

I hope we meet again on a future cruise, Best Wishes, *Robin*

Photographs – Balmoral to Iceland

Puffin, winter plumage – 29/8/17



Northern Gannet – 29/8/17



Great Skua aka "Bonxie" – 29/8/17

Juvenile Gannet, 2nd / 3rd year – 30/8/17



Photographs – Balmoral to Iceland



Sei Whale – 30/8/17



Northern Bottlenose Whales – 30/8/17



Northern Fulmar – 30/8/17



Greater Black-backed Gull – 1/9/17



Puffin – 2/8/17



White-beaked Dolphin – 2/8/17



Humpback Whale – 4/9/17



Humpback Whale "Tattoo" – 4/9/17