



Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines

Scottish Islands and Lochs Black Watch Sightings Record

Robin Petch - www.TheWhaleandDolphinMan.co.uk



Thank you for joining us on Deck 7&8, and sometimes the Observatory, 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 Black Watch cruise, from Liverpool to Kirkwall (Orkney) and back, along with a few of the photographs I have taken. Being only a 5 day cruise, with often difficult weather and sea conditions, sightings were few but I hope you enjoy the report anyway!

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.

I hope you enjoy this report on sightings during the voyage, as well as the photographs we took. If you would like to make a donation to Sea Watch Foundation to help us study and protect our UK whales, dolphins and porpoises you can do so on either of two websites:

www.TheWhaleandDolphinMan.co.uk or www.seawatchfoundation.co.uk

24th May 2019 Leaving Liverpool

Plenty of Herring Gulls (of course) and a couple of glimpses of Cormorants but nothing else to report. Passengers later told me that a Dolphin and a Whale had been seen which is very possible as Bottlenose Dolphins and Minke Whales are sometimes seen in the area as are the more numerous Harbour Porpoises.

25th May 2019 Greenock, Scotland

0713 Grey Seal, 100yds off port bow

0719 Harbour Porpoise seen briefly, 300yds off port bow as we sailed towards Greenock
Otherwise, just a couple of Cormorants and a few Herring Gulls.

In the port, a Mute Swan swam past and another was nesting on the shore just outside the port. During sail-away, Herring Gulls, Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls and one or two Cormorants were seen but no more marine mammals.

26th May 2019 Tobermory, Scotland

The Sound of Mull is a great area for Minke Whales and Common Dolphins in particular, as well as Harbour Porpoise but unfortunately very low cloud and rain as well as windy conditions restricted watching today. A number of birds were seen, during the morning, particularly by Alistair who is a keen birdwatcher, and these included Guillemots, Razorbills, Manx Shearwaters and an Arctic Skua as well as the usual Gulls.

The wind picked up and the sea quickly became rough once we left the shelter of the anchorage but a number of people really stuck with the watch from the shelter of the starboard side on Deck 7. Thank you for what proved to be a forlorn effort except for bird sightings including lots of Manx Shearwaters as well as Gannets, Kittiwakes, Guillemots and one or two Fulmar.

1710 Dolphin, with a long beak so probably Common, seen leaping above the waves by a few passengers on a higher deck than we were

1730 Probable Minke Whale seen surfacing to port by Clare from the Observatory

27th May 2019 Kirkwall, Orkney

Assorted seabirds on the sail-in included Guillemots, Kittiwakes, Fulmars (*right*), Gannets and a Great Skua. Yesterday, apparently there were around 20 Pilot Whales in the bay but no sign of any this morning.

1115 Passengers on the RIB tour saw a Harbour Porpoise from the boat which stopped to allow a few minutes of observation of this elusive small cetacean.



1120-25 Passengers reported seeing either Harbour Porpoise or Dolphins near the ship, probably the former.

Around the berth and the town harbour, Oystercatchers and Eider Ducks could be seen and during the sail-away, Herring Gulls, Fulmars, Gannets, Kittiwakes, Cormorants and another Great Skua (aka "Bonxie") were seen. One passenger reported an unusual sighting, three Sabine's Gulls

28th May 2019 At Sea, North Atlantic, south-west coast of Scotland

0630 Minke Whale, aft of the ship (*seen by Brigitte*)

1110 2 Minke Whales, 200yds to starboard (*seen and photographed by Mandy Gravitl*)
Lots of amazing seabird activity throughout the morning, foraging and feeding, including Gannets, Kittiwakes, Fulmars and Manx Shearwaters, as well as Guillemots, often fathers and chicks.



The afternoon was even more rich with seabird activity as we approached the channel between Northern Ireland and the Mull of Kintyre. Hundreds of Manx Shearwaters (*left*)



were seen in vast flocks and groups of 20 to 50 Kittiwakes (*above*) feeding, sometimes in mixed flocks with Terns. Fulmars, Gannets, Guillemots and Razorbills were also evident but despite the obvious presence of fish, no marine mammals were seen in quite choppy



conditions.

2055 Amazingly, as we sat drinking tea at the window on Deck 6, port side next to the tea station, a Minke Whale surfaced right alongside the ship!

Of the 29 species of Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises which Sea Watch Foundation have recorded in UK waters, unfortunately very few were seen. Minke Whales are seen around Mull from April through to October and May is probably the best time to see the Orca (Killer Whales) which visit Orkney, Shetland and northern Scotland. We sailed through these areas, where Common and Bottlenose Dolphins, Pilot Whales, Harbour Porpoises and other species can also be seen but weather and sea conditions made spotting difficult, even on the final day when at least the wind was behind us! I hope that next time you visit the area you are as successful as we have been in the past!



If you like the photographs, they and others can be purchased as prints on request in 7x5" or larger formats.

In addition, Photopacks (6x4" & 7x5") and DVD slide shows are also available to support my work and that of the charity.

Alternatively, 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*