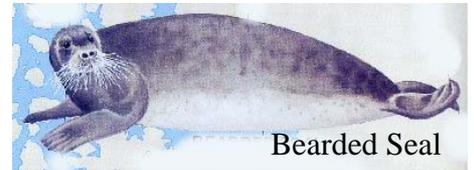


Penzance B.S.A.C. Conservation Officer's Report, July 2008

On 3rd March this year a Bearded Seal, *Erignathus barbatus*, was spotted as it hauled itself up onto some dry rocks at Loch na Keal, on The Isle of Mull in the Inner Hebrides. This seal was well out of its normal habitat for it is usually found in the Arctic, and is the largest of the northern phocids. They can reach 2.5 metres in length and weigh 340 kilograms and are usually solitary animals. They have never been the object of a major seal industry, but the Inuit, who live in the Arctic, hunt them for meat, leather and oil.



Bearded Seal



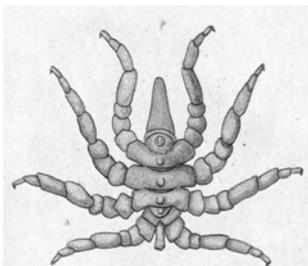
Thresher Shark

On 9th June a 3 metre Thresher Shark was seen leaping out of the water south of Shag Rock off Plymouth Sound. This is the first report of a Thresher this year and the first since the only report of last year on July 12th. There were also reports of Threshers in July of 2006 and 2005.

There was a mass stranding of Common Dolphins in various Cornish creeks on June 9th. Mainly in the Porthcuel River, but also some up the Fal near King Harry Ferry and in Gillan Creek near The Helford River mouth. 28 dolphins died and some were taken for post mortem. Others were successfully returned to open water by rescuers from RSPCA, BDMLR The Wildlife Trust, and members of the public. There was much speculation about the reason for the stranding, some suggested that Naval Sonar was possibly the cause, others suggested that a Killer Whale may have frightened them ashore, others though that they were chasing fish and were caught out by a receding tide. An email arrived later in the month from a Captain David Williams of Deafwhale Society. He remarked that the answer was so obvious, that whale experts the world over should hang their heads in shame for not investigating the most logical reason. Pod beaching has been going on since the beginning of recorded history so any new ideas, like Navy Sonar and live explosions should be eased to the back burner, not the major factor. Cetaceans he said were the greatest divers the world had ever known, yet no one had ever asked the question of whether or not they suffer diving related injuries. The logical explanation he states is barotrauma from exposure to rapid and excessive pressure waves generated during undersea earthquakes. He points out that 90% of all seismic activity on the planet occur underwater in the back yard of whales. He says that lightning fast explosive vertical movement of the sea bed can generate pressure waves in excess of 14,500 pounds per square inch which roar toward the surface at 1,500 metres per second. This would cause barotraumatic injury to the whales or dolphins in the region, killing outright those near by and injuring other to the extent that they

would no longer be able to dive due to ear and sinus injuries. There was an earthquake in the western approaches of the English Channel on May 24th, and knowing that dolphins would likely be feeding in that area, he had predicted that there would be dolphins stranding on Cornish shores during mid June.

A tiny creature was found in a dive boat after the divers had surfaced, so had probably been brought aboard by one of them. It was a pale orangey yellow and only 3 to 4 mm across. It was first thought to be a crab between the larval stage and full size, but now believed to be a very juvenile sea spider *Pycnogonum littorale*.



Pycnogonum littorale
Full size

There were 53 reports of Basking Sharks during June, from St Agnes on the north coast to Looe on the south. The largest number being 24 off Pendeen on the 2nd June.

Of 22 reports of Bottlenose Dolphins, 14 were of the north coast pod, 3 of the south coast pod and 5 of the pair, moving from Drakes Island on the 3rd June down to St Ives on the 24th.. 8 other reports of dolphins were probably Bottlenose. There were 3 sightings of Common Dolphins, largest pod 50 off Porthoustock, and 3 reports of Harbour Porpoises off The Lizard, Tater du and Brisons. A single Risso's Dolphin was seen off Marazion and 2 Minke Whales, both off Porthgwarra on different days. 6 Ocean Sunfish, one in the Carrick Roads the rest from Porthgwarra around to Hayle. Grey Seals were also reported 3 times, singles at Gull Rock, Nare Head and Hayle and 6 at Black Rock at the entrance to Falmouth Harbour.