

# Harbour Porpoise



Harbour Porpoise:  
(Photograph by NEYEDC)

## Links to Habitat Action Plans and Guidance Notes.

Priority habitats associated with Harbour Porpoise:

**None**

Action Plans have been prepared for those in bold.

## Introduction

The Harbour Porpoise also known as the Puffing Pig because of the sharp sneeze-like sound of its blow, is the most common of the small cetaceans (whales and dolphins) seen in coastal waters off the Yorkshire Coast. It is small (1.4 – 1.8 m in length) but stocky and robust with a small rounded head. It lacks the prominent forehead or beak, typical of many of the dolphins. The dorsal fin is low and triangular and the swimming motion during breathing is a slow forward roll. When chasing prey it may roll to reveal a flash of its lighter under-belly or even leap in a very fast arc. The Harbour Porpoise may form large groups but is most often seen singly or in small groups. Unlike other small cetaceans, the Harbour Porpoise is usually uninterested in boats and does not usually “bow ride”.

## Our objective for Harbour Porpoise is:

To establish a local system to improve the recording and reporting of sightings of the Harbour Porpoise.

## Status and Distribution

The Harbour Porpoise is found in the cold temperate and sub-arctic waters of the northern hemisphere, with semi-isolated populations in the Black Sea, Northern Atlantic and North Pacific.

There is some evidence for a species decline in the North Sea, but its true conservation status is unknown. Some of this uncertainty derives from the fact that the Harbour Porpoise is difficult to spot except in very flat sea conditions.

Little of the animal is visible when it breathes and the small dorsal fin is easily obscured, even in small wavelets. A recent survey of the species in the North Sea, Channel and Celtic Sea indicated a population of approximately 350,000.

The Harbour Porpoise is protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and listed on Appendix II of CITES. It is also covered by the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of

the Baltic and North Seas (ASCOBANS), a regional agreement under the Bonn Convention.

The Harbour Porpoise is a UK BAP priority species, which is already recognised in the Durham and Norfolk LBAPS and its inclusion in the Scarborough District LBAP may help to provide a better picture of distribution of this species in the southern North Sea.

## Threats

The biology of the Harbour Porpoise is not fully understood and the reasons for the reported decline remain unclear. It is thought that threats include direct persecution, noise disturbance, incidental captures and drowning in fishing gear, declining fisheries, ingestion of marine debris, disease, the effect of toxic substances at sea and the indirect influences of climate change.

## Current Action

- Recording undertaken by Dolphincity Surveys.
- National database maintained by Natural History Museum and post mortems undertaken on some stranded cetaceans.
- Casual recording and reporting of the species, typically by birdwatchers viewing from headlands.
- Defra code of practice available.