



MarLIN

Marine Information Network

Information on the species and habitats around the coasts and sea of the British Isles

Killer whale (*Orcinus orca*)

MarLIN – Marine Life Information Network
Marine Evidence-based Sensitivity Assessment (MarESA) Review

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A report from:

The Marine Life Information Network, Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom.

Please note. This MarESA report is a dated version of the online review. Please refer to the website for the most up-to-date version [<https://www.marlin.ac.uk/species/detail/1540>]. All terms and the MarESA methodology are outlined on the website (<https://www.marlin.ac.uk>)

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See online review for
distribution map

School of orca.
Photographer: Fernando Ugark
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Distribution data supplied by the Ocean
Biogeographic Information System (OBIS). To
interrogate UK data visit the NBN Atlas.

Researched by	John Bleach	Refereed by	Admin
Authority	(Linnaeus, 1758)		
Other common names	-	Synonyms	-

Summary

🔍 Description

Conspicuous black and white colour. Black on top with a white belly and throat and patch behind the eyes. The distinctive, large dorsal fin can reach 1.8m in length in males and 0.9 m in females. Large paddle like flippers. The snout is blunt with short, poorly defined beaks. Males can be in excess of 9 m in length, 6 m for females.

📍 Recorded distribution in Britain and Ireland

Shetlands, north and west Scotland. Irish coastline and south and west coasts of England and Wales.

📍 Global distribution

-

🏠 Habitat

Usually found in deep water, although it may enter shallow water to catch prey.

↓ Depth range

-

🔍 Identifying features

- Up to 9 m in length with a blunt snout.
- Distinctive black and white colouring, with white belly, throat and patch behind eyes.
- Large dorsal fin, up to 1.8 m high.
- Large paddle-like flippers.

Additional information

The orca is the largest species of dolphin. It is also referred to as the killer whale. It is a fast swimmer, reaching speeds in excess of 30 knots. It feeds on squid, octopus, fish, seals and other smaller dolphins and may eat seabirds and marine turtles occasionally.

Orcinus orca is listed in the Red list of threatened animals (IUCN, 2003) as of Lower Risk (LR) but dependant on conservation effort. *Orcinus orca* is included within the grouped Species Action Plan "toothed whales (other than small dolphins)" under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (Anon, 1999x).

The killer whale is listed under Appendix II of the Bern convention. All species of cetaceans are given protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 and the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (Anon, 1999x). All cetacean species are listed on Annex IV (Animal and Plant Species of Community Interest in Need of Strict Protection) of the EC Habitats Directive (Anon, 1999x). All whales are listed on Annex A of EU Council Regulation 338/97 and therefore treated by the EU as if they are on CITES Appendix I thus prohibiting their commercial trade (Anon, 1999x).

Whaling is illegal in UK waters (Fisheries Act 1981) but neighbouring countries maintain the right to hunt (Anon, 1999x). An 'Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans in the Baltic and North Seas' (ASCOBANS), formulated in 1992, has now been signed by seven European countries, including the UK. Under the Agreement, provision is made for protection of specific areas, monitoring, research, information exchange, pollution control and heightening public awareness. Although aimed primarily at dolphins and porpoises, ASCOBANS includes all toothed whales except the sperm whale (Anon, 1999x). The killer whale is also listed on Appendix II of the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory species of Wild Animals (Anon, 1999x).

✓ Listed by



Further information sources

Search on:



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