

The 37th annual conference of the European Cetacean Society was held at the Livehouse in Dundee from 22nd-24th April, and it was the first ECS conference I'd attended so I wasn't sure entirely what to expect...

The Tuesday evening icebreaker in the V&A museum was a great opportunity to catch up with friends I hadn't seen for a few years, and to discover that people I haven't met previously would look at my name badge and say "Ah, you're the White-beaked Dolphin guy". To be fair, there are worse things to be known for than an obsession with photographing the most beautiful and engaging marine mammal in the Northern Hemisphere 😊 Chatting with conference attendees from NatureScot, WDC, HWDT, CSIP, SMASS, and the Orkney Marine Mammal Research Initiative was a great start to the week.



White-beaked Dolphin (Library image/MARINELife)

Throughout the conference there was a packed lecture programme each day, grouped under the general headings of human interactions & climate change, genetics, behaviour, anatomy & physiology, conservation & management, abundance & distribution, health & welfare, and ecology, as well as hundreds of posters to browse.

Wednesday mornings plenary lecture was by Professor Emer Rogan, and "**Back to the future – why basic science is still important**" was a thought-provoking look at the need for curiosity-driven basic research, and the ongoing issue of fisheries bycatch. Thursday's plenary was "**The Scientific Advantage: Strengthening Science to Understand Human Impacts and Drive Recovery**" by Dr Lori Schwacke. Looking at the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, Dr Schwacke covered environmental legislation, the impact of pollution events, and the (sometimes unintended) consequences of nature recovery projects. Friday's plenary was from Paul Thompson, Professor in Zoology at the University of Aberdeen's Lighthouse Field Station, and "**Basics to benefits; does curiosity risk killing the cat?**" considered, amongst other issues, whether we've got the correct balance between observing, generalising from observations, identifying causal links, and designing and testing interventions. Thought-provoking plenaries first thing in a morning are quite a way to get your day up and running!

The poster sessions were 90mins or so on Wednesday and Thursday evening where the authors stand next to their posters so are available for anyone who wants to ask about the poster content. Even numbered posters including mine '**Social networking; Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus* and White-beaked Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus albirostris* population size and structure in NE England, 2010-2023**' had their session on Thursday, sponsored by Harris Gin (Wednesday's poster session was sponsored by Loch Lomond Brewery, who had brewed 'whale ale' and 'pinnipint' especially for the ECS conference). There was a steady stream of visitors to

my poster, with questions about photo-ID, piebaldism in Bottlenose Dolphins, and how we'd created our sociograms.



Bottlenose Dolphin (Library image/MARINELife)

The conference concluded with the ECSAGM late afternoon on Friday, then all that remained was the banquet and ceilidh 😊

Many thanks to MARINELife for supporting my attendance at the conference and giving me the opportunity to study cetaceans off NE England since 2009, and to Tom Brereton, Katie Hackett and Jo Richardson for the report we co-authored that was the basis for my poster presentation. Huge thanks also to the local organising committee for such a great conference.