

During September and October sightings of "porpoise" were being reported from a number of estuaries on the Island. On the night of September 18th, 45 to 48 Atlantic White-sided Dolphins became stranded in the shallow waters of the Dunk River estuary when the tide fell. Fisheries Officers and volunteers who responded to the call for help did what they could to assist these mammals. CBC staff were on the scene to record the stranding and, within the next 24 hours, the stranding and sightings of dolphins became high profile news.

Sightings in the Hillsborough River at the bridge in Charlottetown Harbour became so frequent that the resultant traffic jams led to the posting of the bridge for no stopping. On some days as many as 20 cars could be seen parked at one time along the approaches to the bridge. The pod of dolphins ranged quite widely in the river. On September 9th, 4 were watched for several hours at Red Point (near Johnston's River) while on October 1st, several were seen just below Mount Stewart. As a natural history event, these sightings marked a highlight for many naturalists and their families as the viewing opportunities came frequently over a five plus week period.

The Atlantic White-sided Dolphin is a common mammal of the Atlantic Coast from Cape Cod to southern Greenland. It occurs in groups of up to 500 or more and individual dolphins can measure up to 9 feet in length. This toothed whale is a member of the oceanic dolphin family (Delphinidae) and feeds on squid, herring, smelt, silver hake, and shrimp. They are recognized from the other local dolphins and porpoises by their blackish back, white belly, a pale area along either side below the prominent dorsal fin, yellowish streaks along the sides, and a short, blunt nose. It has 30 to 37 teeth along each side of both jaws.

These sociable dolphins are sometimes seen riding the bow waves of boats and are known as jumpers in Newfoundland. In his book The Whales of Canada, Erich Hoyt reported the mass strandings of 20 dolphins on May 15th, 1973 at Cape Cod and about 150 dolphins at Cobscook Bay in Maine on September 6th, 1974. Studies of these animals revealed that the males become sexually mature at 4 to 6 years of age while the females become mature at 5 to 8 years. Calves nurse for about 18 months and it appears that sub-adults are segregated from the breeding groups.

For more information on the various members of the whale family that occur in our waters, consult Erich Hoyt's books The Whales of Canada and The Whale Watcher's Handbook.

91st CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS



Want to participate in a fun birding event this Christmas? Why not join members and friends of the Society in celebrating the 20th consecutive year of Christmas Bird Counts on Prince Edward Island and the 91st consecutive year in North America. For the beginner, participating in the counts is a great way to learn bird identification as there are far less species than in the summer and some of the most confusing ones have headed to warmer areas to winter. Be one of the 40,000 plus people