



Opening the Orcawatch display at Portsmouth International Port

2017 ORCA OceanWatch and exhibition launched at Portsmouth International Port

A crucial and comprehensive survey of whales, dolphins and porpoises living in British and European seas was launched today at Portsmouth International Port (Wednesday 19 July), alongside a new marine conservation exhibition.

The setting was apt, with Portsmouth International Port increasingly known as a gateway to whale watching adventures. Ferries headed to Spain cross through one of the most diverse habitats on the planet for whales, dolphins and porpoises, the Bay of Biscay. Last summer passengers spotted breaching fin whales, which are the second largest animal in the world, as well as killer whales and thousands of dolphins.

ORCA, the Portsmouth based marine conservation charity, is hoping to build on the successes of the previous two ORCA OceanWatch events. Surveys are carried out by deck crews on commercial vessels leaving Portsmouth International Port and other UK ports, and allow ORCA to capture a critical snapshot of the different whales, dolphins and porpoises living in European waters.

The launch event inside the passenger terminal explained how data from almost 50 vessels will be used by ORCA to help shape UK and European marine conservation policy, giving a snap shot of the distribution of these beautiful marine mammals. Over recent weeks ORCA has been training ship's crews how to identify and record different species. The survey also helps raise awareness of marine conservation issues for staff

working in the industry, and allows them to actively contribute towards the protection of our seas.

At the same time a new summer exhibition was opened on the mezzanine floor of the terminal building at Portsmouth International Port. Designed for passengers and locals alike, the display panels and exhibits celebrate ORCA's conservation work and explain how 'citizen science' is helping to protect cetaceans - the collective name given to whales, dolphins and porpoises.

This year's ORCA OceanWatch will take place between 29 July and 6 August. Cruise ships and ferries leaving Portsmouth International Port will be taking part, with crews actively watching out for whales and dolphins every day. This year's survey is expected to have a larger reach than ever before, with almost the entire UK ferry network involved. A number of cruise companies including Saga, Silversea and Carnival UK will also be recording data.

Brittany Ferries, which is based at Portsmouth International Port, has been working with ORCA for over a decade. The charity places Wildlife Officers on many of the crossings to Spain, which sail through the whale rich Bay of Biscay. Once again this year passengers traveling with Brittany Ferries will also be helping to spot marine mammals on the 24 hour cruises from Portsmouth to Bilbao or Santander.

Mike Sellers, Port Director at Portsmouth International Port, said: "The routes from Portsmouth to Northern Spain are renowned for whale watching, and can make the start and end of a holiday extra special. ORCA has worked hard to highlight the variety of species living in the waters around us, and we're delighted that the data recorded from ships coming and going from Portsmouth International Port this summer will help with further important work."

Sally Hamilton, ORCA Director said, "ORCA OceanWatch is one of the highlights of the calendar for all our partners, and we are incredibly grateful to those companies that have committed to supporting our work and helping this year's programme to be the biggest yet. The data collected by crews this year will play a vital role in helping us to protect the stunning range of whales, dolphins and porpoises seen across UK and European waters."

Brittany Ferries runs regular Sea Safari whale watching mini cruises from Portsmouth International Port, accompanied by expert guides including TV wildlife presenter Chris Packham. The short breaks are just one example of Portsmouth being a gateway to new experiences, highlighted by this year's #portsmouthtakesyouthere campaign.

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