

# Cardigan Bay

a Special Area of Conservation



**Stretching from Ceibwr Bay in Pembrokeshire to Aberarth in Ceredigion and extending almost 20km from the coast, Cardigan Bay Special Area of Conservation (SAC) protects the wildlife found in around 1000 square kilometres of sea.**

The area is home to an amazingly rich variety of marine animals and plants, including Europe's largest population of bottlenose dolphins. Cardigan Bay SAC is about more than just dolphins however; its reefs, sandbanks and caves are recognised as being important in their own right, and some of its other animals are also of international importance. Read on to find out more about this most special of areas...

### **Bottlenose Dolphins**

The quiet waters of southern Cardigan Bay provide an ideal place for dolphins to live and raise young. They range throughout the SAC, but headlands such as Mwnt, Aberporth and New Quay are especially important feeding areas and great places to watch from the cliffs. Dolphins can be seen all year but summer is generally the best time, with around 200 individuals present.

### **Atlantic Grey Seals**

Like the dolphins, we know that seals are feeding and socialising throughout the SAC. Their pups are born in sea caves and on remote beaches, particularly to the south of the area.





## River and Sea Lampreys

These ancient jawless fish feed on the flesh of live fish with their sucker-like mouths. Like salmon they migrate to sea as juveniles, only returning to fresh water to breed. They are occasionally seen in the rivers Aeron and Teifi but little is known of their life at sea.

## Reefs

Reefs in Cardigan Bay consist largely of boulders, cobbles and pebbles but there are some bedrock reefs near beaches and just offshore. Honeycomb worms form some extensive biogenic reefs on the lower shore where their tubes bind the stones and boulders together. Reefs provide a home for a wide variety of plants and animals.

## Subtidal Sandbanks

Mainly found to the north and east of the site, the SAC's sandbanks are low lying and consist of gravelly sand. Some specialised burrowing animals live on and in the banks, including the rare mantis shrimp, known in Wales from only one other site.



## Sea Caves

As well as providing pupping sites for seals, sea caves provide a home for a variety of animals and plants, many found only in this unusual environment.



# The Special Area of Conservation: *unravelling the red tape...*

## Where did the idea originate?

The EU Habitats Directive instructs member states to designate Special Areas of Conservation to protect the continent's most important wildlife sites. Together with areas designated under the Birds Directive, these protected sites form a Europe-wide conservation network.

## What is protected?

The Directive includes a list of animals, plants and habitats considered to be most in need of conservation at a European level. The four animals and three habitats mentioned on the previous page are on this list.



## What is the aim of the designation?

Favourable conservation status - put simply, to ensure that the site is maintained in at least as good a condition as when it was first designated. This doesn't mean that we can't continue to use and enjoy the natural resources of the area, but that any activities have to be carried out sustainably.



## Who is responsible?

Many public bodies have responsibilities in the marine environment - all have to use their powers to help the site meet its aims. These powers include managing fisheries, development, pollution, navigation, recreation etc. The Countryside Council for Wales gives advice on the site and is responsible for monitoring its condition.

## How does this work in practice?

The authorities have worked together to produce a management scheme. This explains how potentially damaging activities will be managed so that the wildlife can continue to flourish. Any new development that may affect the features also has to be assessed and can only be given the go-ahead if it can be shown not to damage the site's integrity. Education is an essential part of the scheme because public support is crucial to the site's success.



There is still much that we don't know about the marine environment and the impacts of human activity - the management scheme identifies where more research is needed. Managers need to know whether the measures they are taking are effective, and the government has to report to Europe every six years on whether the SAC is meeting its objectives, so monitoring is also essential.



## *Some of the issues...*

**Although relatively quiet, the area is still well used for a wide range of activities. Commercial fishing, angling, boating, military testing, tourism, wildlife watching, scientific research and treated sewage disposal (among many other things) all occur within the SAC.**

Dolphins are vulnerable to disturbance by boats, and seals need undisturbed shores for rest and breeding. Very loud undersea noise such as seismic testing can injure dolphins and other cetaceans. These top predators also require a healthy and productive ecosystem if they are to sustain their populations. Lampreys need access to clean rivers with suitable habitat for spawning. Because the animals range far beyond the boundary of the site, conservation management has to too.

Fishing (especially with heavy mobile gear) and trampling on the shore can damage reef features. Chemical and nutrient contamination can also alter communities of animals and plants, as can changes to water movement and sedimentation, such as from shore defence work or harbour dredging. Litter can entangle animals or be mistaken for food and eaten; plastics are of particular concern because they are so persistent in the environment.



# Where to find out more...

The website [www.cardiganbaysac.org.uk](http://www.cardiganbaysac.org.uk) has a wealth of information on the wildlife of the area, what is being done to protect it and how you can help. There are discussion boards to allow you to raise any concerns and keep up with all the latest news from the site. You can also check the latest weather forecast to see if it's a good day for dolphin watching, download a copy of the management scheme and find links to many other useful sites.

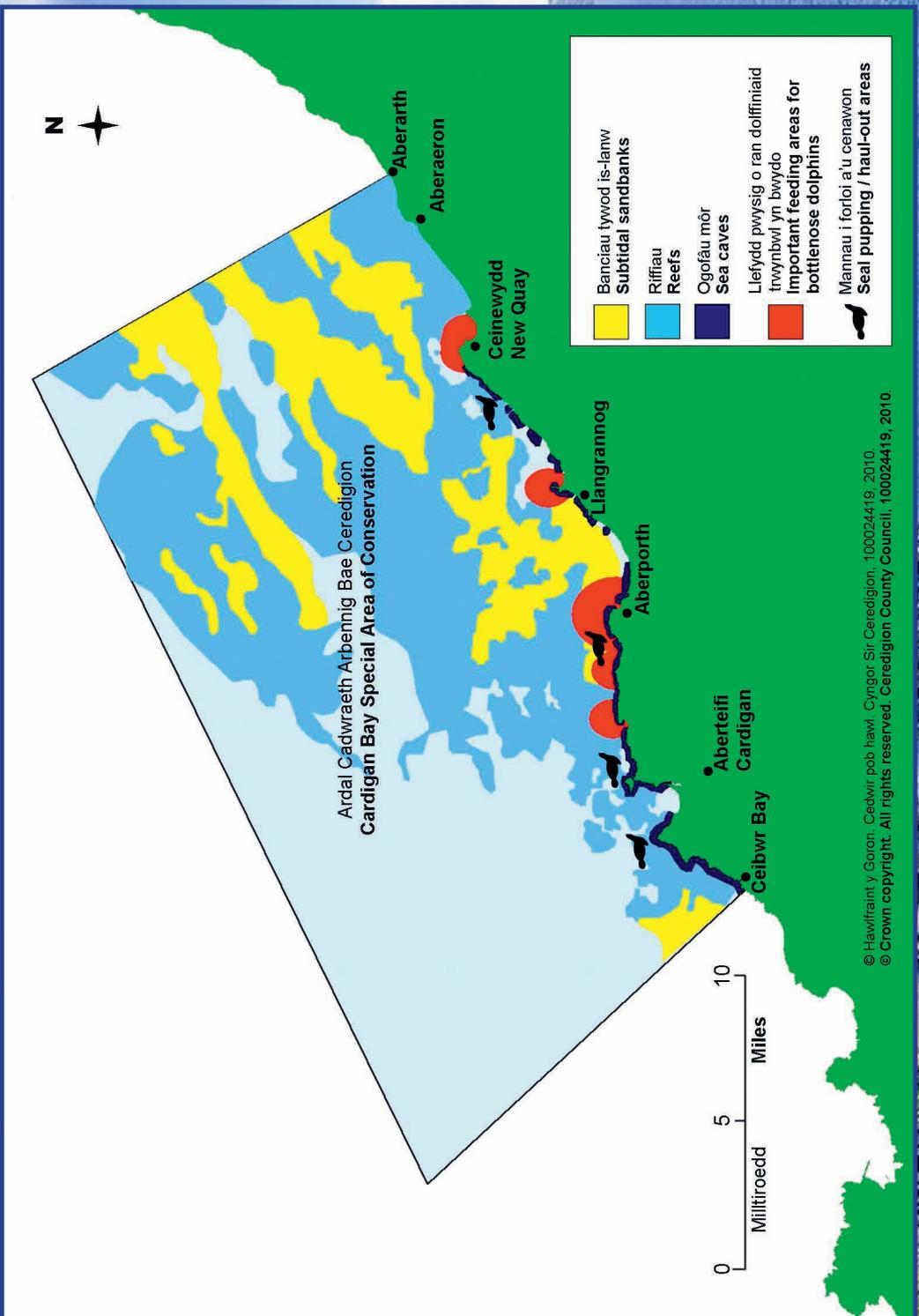


**The Cardigan Bay SAC Liaison Group:** This public meeting is held at least once a year and allows users of the site to discuss any concerns directly with those responsible for managing it. The meetings are publicised at least a month in advance on the SAC website. If there is a subject that you think needs discussing, get in touch with the SAC Officer, contact details on the next page.

There is a lot of information on responsible boating in the **Boat Place**, Ceredigion County Council's centre on New Quay harbour wall. The Ceredigion Marine Code can be found there as well as in tourist information centres and harbour offices.

The **SAC Officer** is always happy to hear from people directly about any issue affecting the area. Use the contact details overleaf or look out for the SAC patrol boat on the water during the summer months.





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Mae'r map hwn yn seiliedig ar fesuriadau acwstig cynnar, ac mae'n dangos dosbarthiad tebygol y traethellau a'r riffiau yn yr ACA.

Mae unrhyw fylchau fel arfer yn dangos diffyg gwybodaeth yn hytrach na diffyg cynefin. Mae'r gwaith ymchwil yn parhau; wrth i ni wella ein dealltwriaeth, rhoddir fersiynau diwygiedig ar wefan yr ACA.

This map is based on early acoustic surveys and indicates the probable distribution of sandbanks and reefs within the SAC. Gaps generally highlight lack of information rather than absence of habitat. Research is ongoing; as we improve our knowledge, updated versions will be uploaded onto the SAC website.

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Produced on behalf of the Relevant Authorities.

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