

DISCOVER

FIN IDENTIFICATION GUIDE



The shape, size and position of the dorsal fin of a cetacean is one of the key features that can be used to tell species apart. This fin is the most visible part of the body, as it is located on the cetacean's back, pointing upwards. Sometimes the fin is all you will see as the animal breaks the surface of the sea.

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN

Tursiops truncatus



Dark grey in colour, this fin is quite large and is in the middle of the back. It is sickle-shaped (like a crescent curving backwards). If you are lucky you may see Bottlenose dolphin leaping out of the water!

HARBOUR PORPOISE

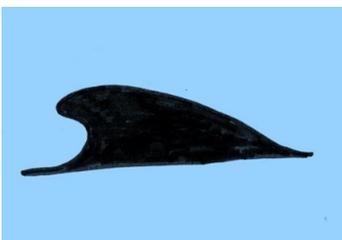
Phocoena phocoena



The fin of the Harbour porpoise is less prominent than the Bottlenose dolphin's. More triangular in shape, the fin's movement can appear 'circular' like a wheel turning.

LONG FINNED PILOT WHALE

Globicephala melas



This dorsal fin has less height but is long and thick at its base and rounded backwards at the tip. Black or dark grey in colour, the fin is centrally located on the whale's chunky body.

ORCA (KILLER WHALE)

Orchinus orca



The Orca has a really distinctive, tall, central dorsal fin. The fin of a male Orca can be 1.8 metres high. This species is unlikely to be confused with any other due to its large size.

MINKE WHALE

Balaenoptera acutorostrata



The Minke whale's dorsal fin is positioned two-thirds of the way down its back (closer to its tail). It is a small fin with broad base, which is sickle (or crescent) shaped like the Bottlenose dolphin. Can be confused with the Long finned pilot whale, so try to check how far down the body the fin is located.



All of the species mentioned above can be seen around Scotland's seas but there are many more species of cetacean and you can learn more about them here:

<https://uk.whales.org/whales-dolphins/species-guide/>