

MORAY FIRTH



Location: Moray Firth, North East Scotland

Introduction: Not only is the Moray Firth one of the best locations to watch Common Bottlenose Dolphins from commercial tour boats, there are also some outstanding dolphin watching locations along the shore, with dolphins regularly occurring within a few metres of the beach in some places.

First prize here must go to Chanonry Point - an idyllic spot situated where the Firth narrows dramatically. Two hours before high tide, rapid currents push through this 'bottleneck', concentrating prey close to shore. The dolphins are seen daily here, often performing acrobatics to the delight of onlooking crowds. On the opposite side of the Firth here is Fort George, which is also excellent for close views. Several of the other best places to watch also involve narrow channels of water where rapid tidal currents create optimum feeding conditions. They include the North and South Sutors, which guard the entrance to the Cromarty Firth, and North and South Kessock, which overlook the entrance to the Beaully Firth at Inverness. Dolphins are also regularly sighted from headlands and bays along the south coast of the Firth, including Findhorn, Burghead, Lossiemouth, Spey Bay and Portknockie.

Species and season: Common Bottlenose Dolphins are the main attraction in the Moray Firth. Sightings of these dolphins in the Inner Moray Firth are strongly influenced by the tide. Try to refer to a tide table before planning your



Location:
Moray Firth, North
East Scotland

Photography:
Dolphins breaching
at Chanonry Point
© Charlie Phillips

Land-based Listing

watching, as animals are much more likely to be present during the three hours either side of high tide.

Harbour Porpoises and Northern Minke Whales are also regularly seen, particularly in the Outer Firth to the east. Rarities have included Killer Whale, Humpback Whale and Northern Bottlenose Whale, and White-beaked Dolphins are probably more common offshore than sightings suggest. The Moray Firth is also famous amongst cetacean scholars as the location where Sowerby's Beaked Whale became known to science. A specimen was discovered stranded in 1800 and described four years later by water-colour artist James Sowerby.

How to get there: Inverness is the obvious starting point for a day's dolphin watching in the Moray Firth. Why not start at the edge of town at South Kessock, or cross the Kessock Bridge and watch from the other side? Heading north on the A9, take the

A832 east onto the Black Isle. Turn right at Rosemarkie for Chanonry Point, passing a golf course and arriving at a car park by the quaint lighthouse. Continuing northwards on the A832 leads to Cromarty and the Sutors – another hotspot.

Alternatively, skirt the southern side of the Firth by taking the A96 road to the east of Inverness and stopping off at Findhorn, Burghead, Lossiemouth, Spey Bay and Portknockie. The dolphins tend to be more distant from along this stretch of coast, although some elevated viewpoints at Burghead and Lossiemouth make it easier to view larger areas of sea or spot fins between the waves.

Photographic opportunities:

Excellent opportunities for using cameras with long lenses and mounted on tripods, particularly at North Kessock and Chanonry Point, where dolphins are frequently demonstrative and spend time close to shore.



Photography:
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