NEW HEBRIDEAN WHALE TRAIL LAUNCHES ON SCOTLAND'S SPECTACULAR WEST COAST

Friday 28 June, 2019

30-plus site initiative aims to promote sustainable, low-impact marine wildlife watching from land, and benefit local communities

A spectacular new trail – launched today (28 June 2019) by the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust – is to showcase Scotland's west coast as a world-class destination for spotting whales, dolphins and porpoises from land, and champion conservation of the Hebrides' globally important marine wildlife and environment.

The Hebridean Whale Trail, the first of its kind in the UK, is a unique initiative connecting more than 30 top places offering opportunities for land-based sightings of whales, dolphins and porpoises, or showcasing important whale heritage sites that reveal the history of people's relationships with whales in these communities.

Basking sharks, seals and other wildlife may also be seen from the trail, which features 33 sites across the Hebridean archipelago and along Scotland's stunning west coast, from the Clyde to Cape Wrath, and as far west as St Kilda.

These include lighthouses at the Butt of Lewis on the Isle of Lewis, Eilean Glas on the Isle of Scalpay, and the UK mainland's most westerly point at Ardnamurchan Lighthouse.

Beaches include Clachtoll in the Highlands, and Huisinis on the Isle of Harris. Bustling harbours include Tobermory on the Isle of Mull, and Ullapool.

The trail ranges from easily accessible attractions such as the Hebridean Whale Trail Centre in Tobermory,to remote and wild destinations such as the Oa on Islay.

"Scotland's west coast is one of Europe's best places to catch sight of whales, dolphins and porpoises from land – and you may see bottlenose and common dolphins, harbour porpoise, minke whales and killer whales," said Karl Stevens, Hebridean Whale Trail Manager.

"We want people from all walks of life to visit the Hebridean Whale Trail to enjoy exploring the region's unique nature, culture and history, and to be inspired to support marine conservation."

The aims are also to boost the local economy and support communities through sustainable eco-tourism, provide educational opportunities, and improve connections between coastal areas.

David Adams McGilp, VisitScotland Regional Director, said: "Scotland's Hebrides offer captivating views, endless beaches, ancient history, the finest fresh food and of course, wonderful wildlife. The Hebridean Whale Trail is a clever initiative, which presents visitors with an unrivalled opportunity to explore the best of Scotland's marine wildlife and seascapes.

"The launch of this new trail is particularly apt as we prepare for the Year of Coasts and Waters 2020 – a year-long programme of events and activities which will shine a spotlight on Scotland's coasts and waters. It's particularly pleasing that the trail is a conservation-based tourism product, as a key focus of the themed year will be celebrating and protecting Scotland's beautiful natural environment."

The Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust has spent a year developing the trail, identifying sites with communities, site owners, conservation organisations, schools, and businesses.

The trail's website www.whaletrail.org includes routes, transport options and site details. On-site interpretation at key locations will explain which species of cetaceans – the collective name for whales, dolphins and porpoises – might be seen.

Across the trail there will be many opportunities for visitors and residents to get involved in marine conservation activities – including joining volunteers to watch, identify and record marine wildlife from land or the ferries which connect the sites, as well as discovering more about Scotland's seas from experts at a range of visitor centres.

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“The trail encourages accessible, low-impact whale-watching from land, which for many is a completely new way of thinking about viewing marine wildlife. Scotland’s west coast is dotted with stunning places where you can quietly watch whales, dolphins, and other wildlife going about their business from a clifftop or harbour,” said Alison Lomax, Directorof the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust.

“Ultimately we want people to experience the thrill of watching a fin breaking the surface in the distance, and the challenge of identifying which type of whale they’ve seen, sharing that experience with others, and learning about the threats these animals face in our seas.”

While sightings of cetaceans can never be guaranteed, the Hebridean seas are exceptionally rich in wildlife. More than a quarter of the world’s whale and dolphin species have been recorded in the region – including many national and international conservation priority species.

The Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust is based on the Isle of Mull and has been taking action for the conservation of cetaceans off western Scotland for over two decades.

The Hebridean Whale Trail has been made possible by a grant of almost £200,000 by the UK Government-funded Coastal Communities Fund, which is delivered by The National Lottery Community Fund.

Ends

Notes to editors

Hebridean Whale Trail key sites:

Lewis and Harris

* Butt of Lewis, Isle of Lewis

* Tiumpan Head, Isle of Lewis

* Gallan Head, Isle of Lewis

* Huisinis, Isle of Harris

* Eilean Glas, Isle of Scalpay

* St Kilda

Uist and Barra

* Barra Airport, Isle of Barra

* Rubha Ardvule, South Uist

* Balranald, North Uist

* Lochmaddy, North Uist

NW Highlands

* Cape Wrath

* Clachtoll

* Ullapool

* Gairloch

Skye and Small Isles

* Kilt Rock, Isle of Skye

* Sabhal Mor Ostaig, Isle of Skye

* The Pier, Isle of Eigg

* Kinloch, Isle of Rum

* Gallanach Bay, Isle of Muck

* Isle of Canna

Inner Hebrides

* Hynish, Isle of Tiree

* Arignagour, Isle of Coll

* Tobermory, Isle of Mull

* Glengorm, Isle of Mull

* Duart Castle, Isle of Mull

* Ardnamurchan Lighthouse

* Isle of Iona

Southern Hebrides and Clyde

* The Oa, Isle of Islay

* Port Askaig, Isle of Islay

* Scalasaig, Isle of Colonsay

* Ardminish Bay, Isle of Gigha

* Lamlash Bay, Isle of Arran

About the Costal Community Fund: The Costal Community Fund is funded by the Government with income from the Crown Estate's marine assets. It is delivered by The National Lottery Community Fund on behalf of UK Government and the Devolved Administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. See www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/coastal-communities-fund

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Hebridean Whale Trail map

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