

PRESS RELEASE, April 15th, 2013

The SAMBAH field work soon completed – there ARE porpoises in the Baltic Sea!

The Baltic harbor porpoise is critically endangered, but the classification is based on insufficient data. Knowing how many – or few – porpoises there are, is vital for a sound management of the species. The SAMBAH (Static Acoustic Monitoring of the Baltic Harbour porpoise; www.sambah.org) project has kept 300 passive acoustic porpoise click loggers, so called CPODs, in operation now for almost 2 years, and in May 2013 they will be hauled for the last time. These CPODs log the echolocation clicks that the porpoises produce to navigate and find fish to eat.

Ever since the first batch of porpoise click loggers was retrieved in the summer of 2011 in order to change batteries and memory cards, the scientists have been asked by the media and the interested public: **Are there any porpoises in the Baltic? Where are they? How many?**

On the first question the scientists can now answer: Yes, there ARE porpoises out there, but they are scarce! The second and third questions are trickier to answer, as this requires the full packet of statistical calculations. These will be done during the next two years and will generate porpoise distribution maps and estimates of total abundance, as well as show the possible effects of various anthropogenic activities and habitat variables.

What can be said so far is that porpoise clicks have been detected in most areas of the Baltic, and as expected there are more in the southern part, but also rather many on the shallow banks south of Gotland. The northernmost detection was in Finnish waters.

Already now SAMBAH data may become practically useful: a clear seasonal variation in porpoise presence has been found in the water around Kriegers Flak, where large wind farms are currently being planned. The SAMBAH data may help the constructing companies to minimize the detrimental effects on porpoises by timing the noisy construction of the windmills to periods with few porpoises in the area.

SAMBAH scientists organize a meeting in Gothenburg on April 15th with marine stakeholders and sea-management authorities from the countries around the Baltic in order to discuss how SAMBAH results can best be used to protect the critically endangered Baltic harbour porpoise population. The aim of the meeting is to initiate a dialogue with these groups and bodies, with the ultimate goal of finding good ways for porpoises to co-exist with fishing, shipping, leisure boats, oil and gas exploration, wind farm developments and other human marine activities.

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This is all what can be seen when a porpoise comes to the surface to breath. In just a little worse wind conditions, it will be missed! The acoustic click loggers used in SAMBAH, on the other hand, logs around the clock in all weather conditions! Photo: H. Benke.



The harbour porpoise is the only endemic whale species in the Baltic Sea. It is critically endangered!
(Photo Solvin Zankl)

These pictures can be downloaded via:

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