**W4 Sperm whale scientific article – shorter version**

The following article is an extract from the One World Wildlife website a charity based in the UK. It records a study of Sperm Whales.

[**http://www.oneworldwildlife.org/what\_we\_do/projects/current/mediterranean**](http://www.oneworldwildlife.org/what_we_do/projects/current/mediterranean)



monitoring whales, dolphins and turtles in the mediterranean

**The search for a population of sperm whales began in 2003 after visitors and locals reported various sightings around the Balearic islands of Mallorca and Menorca. Sadly, dead calves and adults indicate all might not be well. As of 2009, five full field seasons were completed.**

Over the last five years, we have managed to identify in the order of about 50 individual sperm whales by “photo-tagging”, a process that identifies each whale by its unique tail fluke, similar to the use of fingerprinting in people, but this can be done from a distance before each feeding dive.

The monitoring team searches for sperm whales with the aid of hydrophones, focusing on areas around the islands where the sea is one kilometre deep or so. This is the depth at which sperm whales typically feed. In the complete darkness, they locate and catch their prey, mainly squid. The whales use clicks to navigate and probably to find and stun prey. The males make what could be the loudest noise in the animal kingdom – a very loud click thought to demonstrate size and location of prey to other males. It is these noises that the dual hydrophones pick up, thus enabling the team of researchers to locate the whales.

A dual hydrophone is used to allow the team to track individuals, acting like antennae. The team tracks them until they come to the surface, at which point they fall silent. This is when the team has to work quickly: the whales are spotted by their plume, and the reserch vessel attempts to move close enough to take a photo before they dive once more. Other information is taken when possible, such as skin and faecal samples to help understand the ecology of these whales and possible relationship to populations of sperm whales elsewhere in the world.