

## ***Turtle offers hope - and a warning - for the Irish Sea***

A leatherback turtle washed ashore on the Cumbrian coast is evidence that the Irish Sea is hiding wonderful wildlife.

Unfortunately the dead turtle raises concerns over the critically endangered species and about pollution and overuse of our seas and oceans.

While the discovery of the turtle proves the importance of the Irish Sea for wildlife it also reinforces calls by the Cumbria Wildlife Trust for the introduction of Marine Conservation Zones to protect this vital environment.

Trainee Marine Conservation Officer Nicola Taylor said: “Having these majestic animals in our waters is a privilege, but seeing them alive and well in their environment is surely preferable than washed up on our beaches, and sadly enough it is often human influence that lands them there.

“Leatherbacks have a soft shell unlike its relatives, so a hit from a boat propeller is often fatal. They can be caught in nets both above water, and drown in our nets below. But maybe the biggest sin of all is the introduction of ‘false jellyfish’ in the form of plastic bags, which can easily be mistaken for food and are frequently found in the stomachs of dead turtles.

“Leatherbacks are listed as critically endangered as their populations have crashed to worrying low numbers, but you can do your part to help the fight to keep them in our seas. Report any sightings so we can get a better understanding of where they are, don’t let your plastic end up in the sea, have re-useable bags and avoid plastic wherever possible, and spread the word!”

The turtle at St Bees was spotted by the British Divers Marine Life Rescue, a voluntary organisation who help stranded animals make it back to the water

Leatherbacks are not complete strangers to the temperate waters of the Irish Sea. Nicola said: “The greener waters may seem like a disappointment on our coasts when we are fed image after image of the crystal clear Caribbean or turquoise islands. But, without the green, we wouldn’t have such a diverse and spectacular array of wildlife landing on our doorstep, as all the greenery that turns our waters the colour they are, is food!

“Plankton, tiny crustacean like creatures, and algae suspended in the water brings filter feeders like the awesome 12m long Basking Shark, and we also attract jellyfish in great numbers which are the staple food for the leatherback, and the main reason they are found here.”

You can help Cumbria Wildlife Trust to protect our Irish Sea by signing Petition Fish in support of Marine Conservation Zones at [www.wildlifetrusts.org/petitionfish](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/petitionfish)

