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A First for Barbados: Groundbreaking Cetacean Research Reveals Rich Marine Biodiversity

Bridgetown, Barbados, 11 November 2025 - Barbados made significant advancements in marine science and conservation this year as the Barbados Marine Spatial Plan (BMSP), in collaboration with the Coastal Zone Management Unit (CZMU) and the Caribbean Cetacean Society (CCS), conducted two scientific expeditions around the island. These expeditions focused on undertaking Barbados' first-ever standardized cetacean monitoring surveys, marking an important step toward improving the understanding and management of marine mammal populations in Barbadian waters.

Conducted in February–March and November 2025, the surveys formed part of CCS's regional *Ti Whale An Nou* ("Our Own Little Whales") programme, a UNESCO Ocean Decade–endorsed initiative spanning more than 20 Caribbean islands. Using visual observations and underwater acoustic monitoring, the expeditions documented whale and dolphin diversity, abundance, and distribution up to 50 nautical miles offshore, while also building national research capacity.

"In just two expeditions, the richness of Barbados' marine environment became unmistakably clear," said Richard Suckoo, Deputy Project Manager of

the Barbados Marine Spatial Plan. "From sperm whales and pilot whales to elusive Kogia species, the findings reinforce the ecological importance of our waters and the need to ensure they are managed responsibly."

One of the most significant discoveries was repeated sightings of the same bottlenose dolphins across both expeditions, suggesting the presence of a resident population, including juveniles. Early analysis indicates that these dolphins remain in Barbadian coastal waters for extended periods, underscoring the need for targeted protection measures as their residency also makes them more vulnerable to human pressures.

Researchers also recorded visible signs of human impact. Analysis of photographic data revealed that at least 11 per cent of dolphins showed injuries likely caused by vessels or fishing gear, while a sperm whale was observed with severe injuries consistent with vessel strike or entanglement.

Beyond cetaceans, the expeditions documented nine seabird species, highlighting Barbados' role within a wider Eastern Caribbean feeding and migration corridor. Seabirds play a vital ecological role by supporting reef health and coastal ecosystems through nutrient transfer.

"This work establishes an essential scientific baseline," Suckoo added. "It allows us to better integrate marine mammal protection into national planning and ensures decisions about ocean use are grounded in sound science."

A strong emphasis was also placed on local capacity-building. Seventeen Barbadian volunteers from agencies including CZMU, the Fisheries Division, the University of the West Indies, and local NGOs received hands-on training in survey techniques, data collection, and species identification. The CCS, CZMU, and the BMSP expressed sincere thanks to all volunteers, skippers, and crew who supported the expeditions, as well as the Blue Marine Foundation for its critical support.

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About the Barbados Marine Spatial Plan

The Barbados Marine Spatial Plan (“BMSP”) speaks to the evidence-based, participatory zoning of Barbados’ marine space as well as the requisite administrative and legal arrangements to achieve long-term sustainable ocean management. It is administered by the Marine Spatial Planning Unit (MSP Unit), which is a division of the Coastal Zone Management Unit (CZMU) of the Ministry of Environment and National Beautification, Green and Blue Economy as the MSP authority in Barbados. The BMSP is being developed in partnership with The Nature Conservancy and the University of the West Indies Cave Hill, and with the financial and technical support of the InterAmerican Development Bank, to encourage sustainable national socio-economic development, promote cooperation and reduce conflicts between users.

About the Caribbean Cetacean Society

The Caribbean Cetacean Society (“CCS”) is a regional non-profit organization dedicated to the research and protection of whales and dolphins across the Caribbean. Its “Ti Whale An Nou” program promotes standardized monitoring, education, and cooperation among islands, endorsed by the UNESCO Ocean Decade and the International Whaling Commission.

About the Coastal Zone Management Unit

The Coastal Zone Management Unit (“CZMU”) is a government agency dedicated to protecting Barbados coastal areas. Its main goals are safeguarding the shoreline through data collection and monitoring, promoting conservation, and raising public awareness about the importance of healthy coastal environments.