

10. Boat-based whale- and dolphin-watching

Cetaceans (whales and dolphins) are very well represented in Australia, with several species easily seen from shore or on organised boat trips and many more seen on specialised pelagic trips or opportunistically at sea. A great way to see a range of cetaceans in Australian waters is to take a whale- or dolphin-watching cruise or to join one of the pelagic birding trips that run from many ports, especially in the south-east. Dedicated whale-watching tours on the east and west coasts usually focus on the annual **Humpback Whale** migration; along the south coast, particularly in SA, they cater to the **Southern Right Whale** migration. In addition, numerous boat operators run dolphin-watching cruises at many sites around the country, chiefly near big population centres and holiday destinations. Pelagic birdwatching trips run year-round (weather permitting) from Southport, Port Stephens, Sydney, Wollongong, Portland (or Port Fairy) and Eaglehawk Neck; and less frequently from the Sunshine Coast, Eden, Port Macdonnell, Perth and Albany; there's also an annual cruise to Ashmore Reef in the Timor Sea. A long list of cetaceans has accumulated over the years on these trips and they are organised by people who have plenty of field experience with identifying whales and dolphins. Seabirding trips are popular and often booked out months ahead; unfortunately cetacean sightings aren't usually quantified the same way bird sightings are, so picking the best times and locations has been an inexact science to date. Many of these trips also record pinnipeds, especially in southern waters.

The following sites are presented clockwise from north Queensland to WA. Note that Dugong- and pinniped-watching trips are also offered at some sites - see individual chapters for more information.

CAIRNS, QUEENSLAND

Big, powerful boats full of day trippers leave daily for Green I. and Michaelmas Cay (weather permitting). **Short-flipped Pilot Whales** are sometimes seen not far off