



**What did you do before the Lighthouse ?**

After spending many years at different jobs that ranged from hotel receptionist to diving instructor, I realised that I wanted to pursue a career as a marine researcher. So, in my late twenties, I made the hardest and best decision ever: I left my job, my city, and my friends and started a degree of Marine Science at the University of Cadiz (Spain). During my degree I won three scholarships that took me to Mexico, Brazil, and the Canary Islands. These academic exchanges increased my confidence in working abroad and once I finished my degree, I applied for a Spanish scholarship called “Beca de posgrado La Caixa” to move once again and study an MPhil at the University of Aberdeen.



**What do you do at the Lighthouse ?**

In 2015, I joined the Lighthouse Field Station as an MPhil student. Before I finished my research project, Prof. Paul Thompson offered me a grant to complete a PhD. As part of my PhD, I investigated the effects of environmental cycles, prey fields, predator-prey interactions, and offshore developments on the occurrence of bottlenose dolphins in the Moray Firth. During these years I have been fortunate to help other colleagues in their research projects, including a seal tagging campaign and several dolphin photo-ID trips. Now, as a postgraduate researcher, I'm involved in different research projects including salmon tracking and the effect of the 'anthropause' on dolphin occurrence.



© Charlie Phillips

**What advice would you give someone who wants to follow in your footsteps ?**

It is never too late to get started on a new career path. I started my degree when I was 29, and being a mature student, rather than being a drawback, made me seize every opportunity my university offered. Not all of us know exactly what path we want to follow when we are 18, and that's perfectly fine!



**Dr Oihane Fernandez-Betelu**  
PhD & Research Fellow • 2015 - present

