

Pink Sea Fan Recording Project Notes for recorders



Why record sea fans?

The pink sea fan, *Eunicella verrucosa*, is one of the two sea fans that grow in British waters. It is found in SW Britain, unlike the northern sea fan, *Swiftia pallida* which occurs in western Scotland. It is a slow growing and long lived species which is especially prone to damage by fishing gear or careless divers.

The sea fan is a protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act and has been included amongst the marine species for which a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) has been prepared. The aim of this recording project is to add to our knowledge of sea fan distribution, habitat and condition and to complement other research taking place to contribute to the action to protect them.



Where do sea fans occur?

Sea fans are filter feeders and you will find them in rocky areas with some current. They are oriented across the current and are sufficiently flexible to withstand some buffeting. They are normally deeper than any wave surge and thus are not usually seen shallower than 20 metres. The picture above shows a number of fans growing in a typical open rocky habitat amongst dead men's fingers and ross coral - a bryozoan.

The Pink sea fan is a south-westerly species in the British Isles but is also found around south-west Europe, the Mediterranean and north-west Africa. It occurs in the English Channel from Purbeck westwards around the whole of the SW Peninsular and up to Ilfracombe on the north Devon Coast. It is also found in the Channel Islands, the Scilly Isles and Lundy. In south Wales it can be found around the St David's and Skomer Peninsulars. In Ireland it occurs all along the south and west coasts north to Donegal.

The sea fan anemone

The sea fan anemone, *Amphianthus dohrnii* is another Biodiversity Action Plan species. This little anemone, which rarely exceeds 1cm across, generally attaches to the branches of sea fans, though it may also occur on other tall features such as hydroids and worm tubes.



Because the anemone normally reproduces by basal laceration, where small fragments of tissue tear off from the anemone and regenerate into tiny anemones, its distribution can be patchy and changeable. Where one occurs there will often be others nearby as in the picture above.

The sea fan anemone appears to be very rare with recent records only from near Lands End, on the Lizard and near Plymouth. Because of its small size, the sea fan anemone is easily overlooked.

How to take part

This project has been designed to be used by anybody diving in SW Britain, SW Ireland and the Channel Islands. We are particularly interested in records from poorly recorded areas.

Copies of this sheet and recording forms are available to anybody who wishes to take part and can also be downloaded from the Seasearch Website.

www.seasearch.org.uk



Cornwall

If you want to know more visit the Seasearch website or contact National co-ordinator Chris Wood at chris@seasearch.org.uk phone 07776 142096, or Ruth Williams Cornwall Seasearch Co-ordinator at ruth@cornwt.demon.co.uk phone 01872 273939.

How to complete the form

Side One

The first side of the form has your contact details so we can keep you informed about progress with the project and of the results.

A new form should be completed for each dive.

Site Name: Be as specific as you can.

Date and Time: This will enable us to relate your depth information to chart datum.

Position: Latitude and Longitude or OS Grid Reference is essential.

Depth Range: Record the shallowest and deepest depth you see sea fans on your dive.

Habitat: Tick each of the habitats in which sea fans are growing. If one is predominant circle it. If you use the Other category explain in the additional notes box.

Density: Tick the box that describes the maximum density of sea fans at the site. *Forest* is a thick covering of sea fans where they almost touch each other (see picture on front page). *Common* is where there are a number of sea fans in different parts of the site and you see at least 20 over your dive. *Occasional* is from 5-20 seen. *Rare* is less than 5 seen during the dive.

Additional Notes: Put anything unusual or other information of interest in here.



Side Two

Complete side two for as many fans as you can during your dive. If you can count more than there is space for on one card, complete another one and attach them together. If you are working as a pair, make sure you record different fans.

Height and width: Record the width and height of as many fans as you have time for. To get an idea of the size distribution it is better that you record all the fans in a small area rather than just the bigger ones over a wider area.

Feeding: Record for each fan if the polyps are expanded and feeding (Y) or retracted (N). In the picture above the small fan at the front has its polyps out whilst the larger one behind has them retracted.

If you are diving on a deep wreck or other site below 30m where your bottom time will be limited there is a separate recording form available. See the Seasearch website for details and to download it.

Take special care when carrying out this survey. The pink sea fan is a protected species and you should make sure you do not damage any individual or their habitat. Watch your fins!

Colour: Most sea fans are a light pink, though this often looks dull and buff unless you shine a torch on it. A few fans are bright white. Record all fans as pink (P) unless they are distinctly white (W). The picture below shows the two extremes.



(Photo: Keith Hiscock)

Condition: Fans may be either partially broken or partially or wholly overgrown with other plants and animals. Score each fan on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is totally fouled or broken and 5 is wholly unfouled and intact. Make sure you don't confuse a living fan with its polyps retracted, with a dead one. If you see a fan totally broken and detached measure it and put D in this column.

Fouling Species: If a fan has other things growing on it or fouled around it record what they are if you can. Typical examples will be algae, barnacles, mermaids purses and bryozoan turf.

Fishing Debris: List any fishing line, weights, netting or other fishing debris around the fan.

Fan Anemone: Record the number of sea fan anemones on each fan (see picture overleaf). Look carefully as they are very rare.

Tritonia: *Tritonia nilsodneri* is a little sea slug that perfectly mimics the branch and polyps of the sea fan. Record separately the number of egg masses and adults (see right) on each fan. Look carefully for both eggs and adults as they can be difficult to spot. The egg masses are little spirals around a branch.



Returning the forms

It should only take a few minutes to transfer the information from your slate to the recording form. Please return the form to one of the addresses on the card as quickly as possible.