

Seasearch

Newsletter 13 - October 2009



Welcome to the thirteenth National Seasearch Newsletter. It is being circulated, by email, to our database of over 3,000 Seasearch participants and interested organisations. In it we want to bring you up to date with some of the things that have been happening with Seasearch during 2009. There has been so much going on there isn't room for it all.

Seasearch is a volunteer underwater survey project for recreational divers, enabling them to contribute to protecting marine wildlife through recording underwater habitats and the plants and animals they support. Seasearch provides training for volunteer divers and organises dives and survey expeditions.

Another record year for Seasearch recording

2009 is already a record year for Seasearch in terms of the number of forms we have received. A mixture of good diving weather for much of the summer, many training dives and Seasearchers going out and doing their own thing, has led to the record figure. You can read more about where the records come from and some of the highlights on pages 2, 3 and 4.

The graph compares the records received so far with previous years - and there are still two months to go!



Focus on Marine Protected Areas

With the passing of the Marine Act expected imminently, and a similar bill going through the Scottish Parliament, there is going to be a change of focus from whether we should have marine protected areas to where they should be.

Seasearch data is being used by the Marine Conservation Society to suggest 74 marine protected areas in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands.

From 10th November you can express your views on these suggestions and nominate other sites you think need and justify protection at www.yourseasyourvoice.com.

The programme is being launched in London on 10th November and is supported by the Co-op.

The Seasearch data is also being used in four regional MCZ projects; Finding Sanctuary (South West England), Irish Sea Conservation Zones, Net Gain (North Sea), and Balanced Seas (South-East England). CCW is working with the Welsh Assembly Government on a similar project in Welsh waters, which is also using Seasearch data. To increase their value we have also begun to biotope code our earlier Welsh data.

Pink shoots of recovery

A recent Seasearch Devon survey weekend diving reefs in Lyme Bay produced some exciting results. Since the bottom trawling ban, the sea fans and reefs are looking healthier and there is evidence of really good recent settlement of juvenile sea fans. In some areas the estimate was 20plus small recruits (less than 10cm high) per square metre. The dive on a maerl bed showed that it had been well trawled in the past and the living maerl was very sparse and patchy but there was an abundance and variety of sea squirts and small crustacea and many clusters of the red fan worm *Serpula vermicularis*.

We will continue to monitor the, hoped for, recovery of the reefs in the area in future surveys.



Seasearch 2008 data and report

All of the data received by Seasearch during 2008 has now been entered into the Marine Recorder database and has been passed on to our partners and will appear on the National Biodiversity Network website - www.searchnbn.net. The Seasearch Annual Report for 2008 contains the highlights of our work in 2008 and can be downloaded from our website - www.seasearch.org.uk

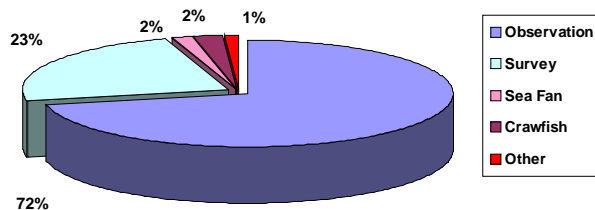


Seasearch is co-ordinated by the Marine Conservation Society on behalf of the Seasearch Steering Group which comprises the Marine Conservation Society, Wildlife Trusts, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage, Environment and Heritage Service Northern Ireland, Environment Agency, Marine Biological Association, Nautical Archaeological Society, British Sub Aqua Club, Sub Aqua Association, Professional Association of Diving Instructors, Scottish Sub Aqua Club, Irish Underwater Council and independent marine life experts. Financial support is given by the organisations with logos above.

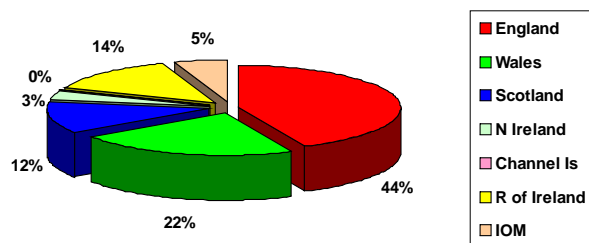
Seasearch data 2009

At the time of writing we had received and logged over 1,650 forms from surveys in 2009, already well exceeding the 2008 figure. The types of forms and where they are from are shown in the pie charts below and to the right is a map of the locations of each form. Brief details of each form are already available from the Seasearch website by downloading the Google Earth file of the 2009 data. This gives the location and type of each form, the date, recorder and special features of the site.

Over the winter we will be entering all of the data from 2009 into the Marine Recorder database and producing summary reports for many of the surveys. The new data should be added to the existing Seasearch data which is available on the National Biodiversity Network website (www.searchnbn.net) by the end of April 2010 and be available for all to use.



Seasearch Forms 2009 by type of form



Seasearch Forms 2009 by country



Seasearch dive goes with a bang!

Seasearch divers Bill and Peter Hewitt were hoping to photograph mantis shrimps which they had previously discovered off Ballard Down near Swanage, when they came across what turned out to be a 600lb Second World War parachute bomb.

The MOD bomb disposal team nicknamed the lobster that was using the rear of the casing as a safe home Lennie, before blowing him and the bomb to smithereens. We hope the mantis shrimps fared better and Bill and Peter will continue their quest to photograph them next year.



At nearby Swanage Pier the anemone prawns which have been recorded for the past two years appeared again this autumn. They were seen by divers on the South East MCS/Seasearch Marine Ecology course in October. This is the same time of year as they were seen in both 2007 and 2008. Why they should not be around earlier in the year remains a mystery.

Crawfish recording goes on-line

One of our focuses this year has been on recording crawfish (or crayfish, or spiny lobster - take your pick of common names). Crawfish are now a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species because of the small numbers remaining and we have been asking divers to record them wherever they see them.

We have introduced an on-line recording facility for both crawfish and pink sea fans, neither of which require sketches. It is a simple process requiring you to tell us where and when you saw one of these magnificent crustaceans and whether they were adults or juveniles.

So far we have received 35 records for 2009 from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland as well as records on Observation and Survey forms.

We are also asking divers in Wales to look back through their logbooks and give us information on when and where they have seen crawfish in the past. This part of the project is supported by the Wales Biodiversity Action Partnership and will include distributing an information pack to all Welsh dive clubs. A Welsh crawfish is pictured below.



John O'Groats

Thanks to beautiful September weather Seasearchers were able to dive two new sites and revisit an two old ones at this most northerly point of the British mainland. Interesting sightings included a Mauve Stinger - *Pelagia noctiluca* and a pair of free swimming organisms related to tunicates - *Thetys vagina*, both rare visitors to our coasts. One pair of divers were even lucky enough to see a sunfish underwater! The strangest sight, however, came upon reaching dry land on day 2 - a life size T-Rex on the back of a truck - apparently it 'drove' all the way from Lands' End!

The video of *Thetys vagina* was on Autumnwatch.

Flamborough No Take Zone

A small no take zone has been established at Sewerby south of Flamborough Head, Yorkshire, and Seasearch divers carried out the first underwater survey of the area. There were plenty of crabs and lobsters amongst the chalk boulders (photo below). However, being both very shallow and about half barren sand, we did not get the impression that it had ever been a very important fishing area. It does not include the much more diverse habitats around the headland itself, but there was a BAP habitat (mussel beds on sediment, and a BAP species, plaice, recorded).



Diving a lost village

A brief window of perfect conditions early in the year saw an Observer course with dives off the lost city of Dunwich on the East Suffolk coast. Students were able to observe the species which had taken up home on the ruins of St Peters church, which was still visible as low walls. All the usual suspects were present - Xmas tree nudis, elegant anemones, oaten pipes and a single common cuttlefish, though it was interesting to see that no algae or sponges could exist in the silty gloom.



Norfolk mussel bed

Seasearch divers have discovered an enormous edible mussel bed just off the shore at Sea Palling, Norfolk. Two overlapping drift dives proved it to be at least 3km long and 0.5 km across, though we haven't found any edges yet! This area was previously undived and thought to be barren sand and gravel by local clubs. It falls just outside one of NEs proposed SACs, which may now be extended to include it. Large numbers of common whelks, antenna hydroids, juvenile sunstars, common starfish, molgula squirts and common brittlestars were seen, a community very different from that on nearby wrecks.

Plymouth drop off surveys

A series of evening dives have taken place to survey sea fan forest and steep reef edge down to 40m and to record Sunset cup coral sightings. This area is currently outside the Plymouth Sound SAC but comes within the new draft SAC and all the sunset sightings fell within this new area. Crawfish, sea fan anemones & Weymouth carpet coral were also recorded on these very scenic reefs. A full report is available on the Seasearch website.



Durham Coast

Once one of the most polluted stretches of coastline in the UK, a Seasearch survey has revealed that it is now host to a colourful variety of marine life.

Divers encountered a varied undersea landscape of kelp forests, sandy sea bed and sponge-encrusted rocky reefs reclaimed by nature from the county's industrial past that saw millions of tons of coal rubble dumped off the coast.

Seasearch divers have recorded numerous species including lobsters, many types of crab, squat lobsters, northern prawns, little cuttle, sea slugs, urchins, common starfish, brittle stars and colourful anemones. Fishes sighted included plaice, bib and long-spined sea-scorpions.

Mulberry Re-visited

Seasearch has resurveyed the Outer Mulberry in Sussex, thirty years after the first records in 1979 and 13 years after it became a Site of Marine Nature Conservation Importance. The big changes are the growth of jewel anemones and cup-corals on the overhanging swim end, including large numbers of the nationally scarce and rare southern cup corals (*Caryophyllia inornata*) and Weymouth carpet corals (*Hoplangia durotrix*) right.



Kent chalk

Seasearch in Kent has focused on subtidal chalk habitats between Folkestone and Kingsdown, as part of a project supported by Natural England's Countdown 2010 and the Crown Estate. Surveys have included chalk gullies, boulders, ledges, ridges and bowls, reaching a record of over 90 forms completed in the county this year. Local celebrity presenter, Kaddy Lee-Preston and her team filmed the divers on one of the trips for a BBC SE "Inside Out" feature this autumn.

Pink sea fans blooming

Though pink sea fan colonies grow by budding off new polyps, there is an annual sexual reproduction in the summer when larvae are released into the plankton and some form new colonies.

MCS Seasearch divers were able to photograph the sea fans ready to release their larvae at the Manacles, Cornwall at the end of July - photo right.



Isles of Scilly

The first Seasearch course for Scilly divers was held in April followed by the annual week long Seasearch survey. In addition, thanks to the Isles of Scilly Marine Biodiversity Project, there was a flurry of Seasearch activity in Scilly in June and September.



Exciting finds in Scilly this year have included new sites for BAP species including stalked jellyfish, pink seafans and sea fan anemones. Amongst southerly species, the rarely recorded paddle or slipper lobster was also recorded (above).

New Seasearch Observers and Surveyors

Between January and late October 2009 64 people have achieved Seasearch qualifications. The 60 new Seasearch Observers are:

Rob Adams, Michael Bateman, Toni Bates, Tavia Bentley, Frank Berg, Kathryn Birch, David Browning, Fidelma Carroll, Anna Cawthray, Gerard Conneely, Spencer Cook, Wendy Cooke, Neil Davies, Gerard Donnelly, Rebecca Eakins, Nicola Faulks, Amanda Ford, Cara Gammage, Tony Glen, Deirdre Greer, Lynn Hallam, Anne Hindmarch, Phillip Hodgson, Simon Jones, Jenni Kakkonen, Bill Larnach, Kathryn Last, Stuart Last, Barry Lister, Albert Kerr, Neil MacInnes, Christine Maddison, Adrian Marshall, Ken Maye, Ann McAvoy, Jon Meek, Ian Meers, Adrienne Mockler, Jane Mowatt, Pete Mowatt, Kaisa Muhonen, Chris Newton, Wendy Northway, Tadhg O'Brien, Tomos Parker, David Prince, Craig Roberson, Alison Ross, Gill Seels, Phil Scott, Michelle Simpson, Ann Smith, Robin Smith, Molly Venning, Mark Weeks, David Wharf, Bob Wiles, Emily Williams, Leena Wilson and Jan Ziolo.

The 4 Surveyors qualified since January are:

Georgia Connolly, Paula Lightfoot, Carolyn Waddell and Kathryn Dawson.

Congratulations to them all.

Remember to fill in your Seasearch forms after your dives and send them off to make them count. Only five completed forms are needed for the Observer qualification, and six for the Surveyor qualification - but don't stop there since ANY DIVE CAN BE A SEASEARCH DIVE!

Club divers have been taking this advice like never before this year and we have had the most northerly Seasearch records ever from Out Stack off Unst, the most northerly point of Britain and Ireland, as well as iconic sites such as St Kilda and Wolf Rock. We have also had our first records from Liverpool Bay, the only ones this year from North-West England.

This Newsletter is produced twice a year and is sent by either email or post to almost 3,000 individuals and organisations. We prefer to use email as the printing and postage costs are high, but you can receive paper copies by post if you make a contribution of £5. Please let us know by phone or email if you change your email address.

The Seasearch website is the place to look for the latest Seasearch news, courses, dives and results. You can find it at:

www.seasearch.org.uk
email: **info@seasearch.org.uk**
phone: **07776 142096**

Meet the Seasearch Tutors & Coordinators

Seasearch activities are organised by our team of 16 Coordinators, many of whom are also tutors. Contact details for all of the coordinators can be found on the Nationwide page of the Seasearch website.

During 2009 there have been a number of changes.

We have a coordinator for the Republic of Ireland for the first time. Adrienne Mockler is the Scientific Officer for the Irish Underwater Council (CFT) and has organised a range of courses and dives which has led to an unprecedented level of activity in Ireland.

Adrienne is notoriously camera-shy so the picture of her underwater is a rare sighting!



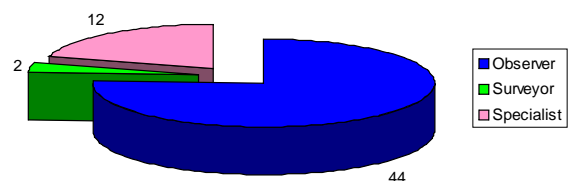
We also expect changes in Northern Ireland, where Claire Goodwin is giving up the role after 5 years to concentrate on sponges! (there's no accounting for tastes). Her replacement will be Adrian Marshall who is marine biology student from Queen's University and already a keen Seasearch diver.

In Hampshire a change in Wildlife Trust staffing has resulted in Amy Dale taking over from Angie Gall who is now in the Isles of Scilly.

We are also welcoming a new coordinator for Sussex. Chris Williams works for Natural England in Lewes and will be taking over from Kate Cole who is now County Ecologist for East Sussex. Both Claire and Kate will remain available to help the new coordinators. Georgia Conolly will also be helping to run Seasearch activities in Sussex.

For our courses we currently have a team of 28 active Seasearch tutors who are able to deliver courses throughout the UK and Ireland. New tutors this year have been Vicky Swales (S. Wales), Paul Holmes (W Midlands), Kathryn Dawson (Dorset), Angie Gall (Isles of Scilly), Paula Lightfoot and Carrie Pillow (both Yorkshire). There are 3 others going through the training process.

During 2009 so far there have been a record 58 Seasearch courses run. 44 of these have been Observer Courses and have involved 465 divers, all new to Seasearch. Unfortunately only 2 Surveyor courses were run, with others cancelled because of low numbers of potential participants. We hope that many more divers will want to move up a gear in 2010. Specialist courses have included fishes, seaweeds, hydroids and bryozoans, nudibranchs, underwater photography and marine ecology..



Seasearch Courses 2009

Text by Chris Wood with contributions from many Seasearch coordinators. Images by Chris Wood, Dawn Watson, Rob Spray and Sally Sharrock. Map by Stephen Frampton.

This Newsletter has been produced on behalf of Seasearch by the Marine Conservation Society, Unit 3 Wolf Business Park, Alton Road, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire, HR9 5NB.

