

Welcome to the Autumn newsletter– just (well it is still November)! We've managed to squeeze a fair few dives in since the last newsletter and as per the last two years this has been despite the unfavourable weather. A short summary of the weekends, the evening dives and the courses can be seen on pages 2 and 5. Also, see below for why the last 10 years of Seasearch in Dorset have been so valuable to marine conservation, and page 3 for why marine conservationists everywhere are celebrating this month.

Using Seasearch for marine protection in Dorset

Earlier this year a new set of draft Special Areas of Conservation (dSACs) were announced by Natural England. These areas are designated as part of a network of Natura 2000 sites that aim to provide marine conservation for some of our most important habitats. Within the new proposals is a large mosaic area spanning three sites in Dorset.

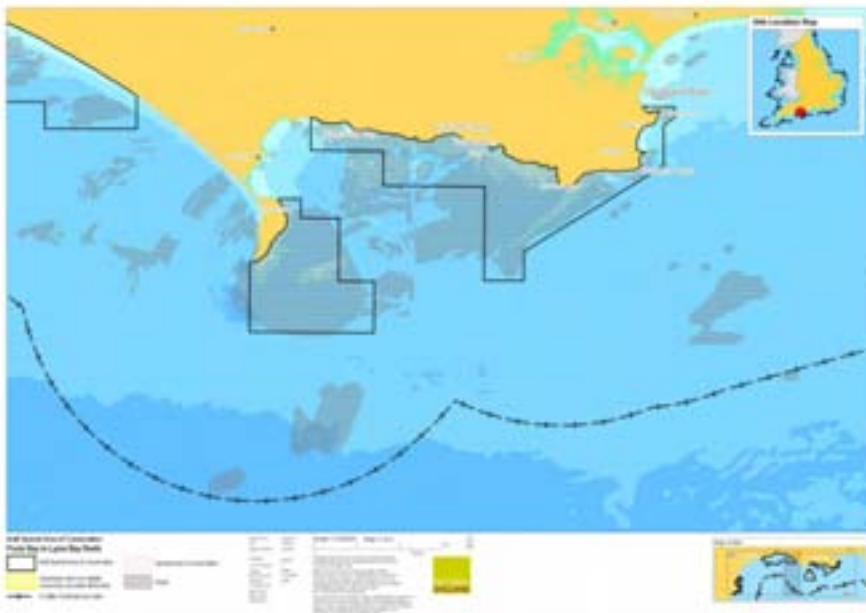


Image courtesy of Natural England

The area has been termed the 'Poole Bay to Lyme Bay dSAC' and has been proposed for rocky reefs and sea caves. The three sites in Dorset cover some important reef habitat to the east of Portland Bill, a section of Lyme Bay and very large sections stretching from Ringstead to Swanage. This last section, which contains DWT's long established voluntary Purbeck Marine Wildlife Reserve, has been noted as being the most diverse area within the draft SAC.

So where does Seasearch come into this? The proposal frequently cites Seasearch reports and work based on Seasearch data when detailing the important diversity and habitats found in the areas. It is well known that Dorset offers some fantastic diving and the wealth of data that has come back to us from Seasearch diving, reflects this. The frequent use of Seasearch data in the proposal highlights just how important this effort by Seasearch and Seasearch divers has been.

What next for Seasearch in Dorset? Well, we want to keep the level of recording up and if possible, boost it further. Continued surveying is very important in order for us to be able to compare the diversity and health of the areas over time, with and without the SAC. Seasearch has demonstrated it's value once again and DWT would like to thank all of the contributors to Dorset Seasearch over the past 15 years. In addition to the potential future uses of Seasearch, we hope that we can continue to further the knowledge and awareness of divers in the UK, whilst adding an extra element to recreational diving.

Seasearch diving 2009

We managed a total of four chartered weekends this year, with an additional three evening dives and three specialist courses with dives. Three of our scheduled weekends were cancelled for one reason or another. Despite this we have had a good return of forms and some very interesting information. Once again, the number of photographs submitted with forms has been fantastic with many more I'm sure still to come.



Polycera sp. on hydroids at Grove Point, Portland

RY

May 30th/31st– Weymouth and Portland Bill: Despite heavily easterly winds we managed to get a days diving in on the west side of the Bill (after a rather stomach churning ride to get there!). A second day in Weymouth Bay found pink sea fans, large numbers of nudibranchs and solitary hydroids (*Corymorpha nutans*) and a colourful dive in a spot usually quite inaccessible due to the strong tides. Our thanks to Grahame Knott for taking our 12 divers out that weekend on 'Outcast'.

June 13/14th– Weymouth: The weather couldn't have been more different for our nine divers for our second weekend. We had a glorious weekend aboard 'Divetime', focusing on some rocky reefs around Lulworth Banks and Worbarrow Bay. Divers recorded some more pink sea fans of varying sizes, *Scyliorhinus stellaris* egg cases and some beautiful spongy, hydroid covered reefs. Our thanks to Paul Pike for a lovely weekend.

August 15/16th– **Poole Bay**: Some slightly windy weather had us heading for some sheltered spots in the afternoon but none the less, we dived on some very spectacular reef to the east of Swanage. Large congers, hundreds of Bib and beautiful sponge and hydroid communities made 'Mike's reef' quite a hit. Using the seabed map from DORIS, we also located an interesting looking formation that proved to be more rocky reef, just outside the new dSAC. The weekend was finished with a very special drift over Pevenil Ledges, complete with a John Dory.

September 12/13th– **Poole Bay**: Once again, wind made site selection a bit restricted but the resultant spots turned up some interesting surprises. On a popular angling site in Poole Bay, one diver managed to snap a rare Couch's Goby (see page 4). Also noted were more

sightings of numerous very small Tompot blennies and Leopard spotted gobies. This has been a frequent comment this year from Dorset Seasearchers. A focused dive on Blacker's Bump, a rocky reef south of Dancing Ledge, resulted in a very detailed joint effort for the site and a quick trip to Chapman's Pool in the afternoon provided a lovely, scenic finish to the weekend. For the August and September trips, our thanks again go to Mike Markey.



This rather large and impressive Conger eel was spotted by most of the divers who dived Mike's Reef in August.

GB

Some evening dives were also carried out during the summer months. From one dive in Poole Bay some interesting observation on the levels of Slipper limpets (*Crepidula fornicata*) were made. In previous years the site was covered in the limpets but was subjected to spoil from the deepening of Poole Harbour. On returning to the site this year, the divers found that the limpets were all dead and the area still heavily silted. This suggests perhaps that the dredged sediment has had a long lasting effect. Whether this has been positive or negative remains to be seen but fewer slipper limpets may mean that other species have an opportunity to re-colonise the site.

Welcoming in the new Marine and Coastal Protection Act

Earlier this month saw the Marine and Coastal Access Bill become an Act of Parliament. This act has arguably been one of the hardest and longest fought for pieces of legislation in the UK, with campaigning from many organisations, including the Wildlife Trusts and the Marine Conservation Society, spanning several years. The Wildlife Trusts kicked off their campaign in 2002 with the publication of "Our Dying Seas", calling for a fundamental change in the way our seas are managed.

Dorset Wildlife Trust has been part of these campaigns with The Wildlife Trusts throughout this period, calling for new laws to provide better protection of marine habitats and wildlife, as well as improved management of activities at sea. In 2007, Dorset Wildlife Trust helped to gather more than 170,000 petition signatures in support of a Marine Bill. So this month has been a real cause for Dorset's marine conservationists to celebrate

As well as greater coastal access, the Bill provides for:

- ◆ A new Marine Management Organisation to regulate marine activities and help enforce law
- ◆ Modernised sea fisheries legislation and management to protect the environment and ensure a sustainable, profitable fishing industry
- ◆ Marine Conservation Zones to protect important habitats and species
- ◆ An overhaul of the marine consents and licensing procedure

As Seasearchers are all very aware, the seas around the UK and in Dorset are home both to spectacular creatures, such as the pink sea fan and bottlenose dolphin, as well as valuable resources such as commercial fish stocks. But after decades of neglect and over-exploitation our seas and their habitats have been damaged almost to the point of no return, especially by large boats with destructive fishing gear, including bottom trawls or scallop dredges. Under the provisions of the new Bill, it is hoped that these habitats and species will be afforded much better protection through a change in the way the marine environment is managed. In Dorset, we will continue to use the resources that we have, including Seasearch, to support the creation of the Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs). These MCZs will work in conjunction with the recently announced draft SACs (see page1) and the pilot marine spatial plan for the area.

Simon Cripps, Chief Executive of Dorset Wildlife Trust, said: "The Marine Bill is nothing short of an historic moment. It will provide a once in a lifetime opportunity to protect our marine species and habitats and those whose livelihoods depend on the sea. Dorset Wildlife Trust will continue to work with authorities and groups such as fishermen to provide a more secure future for Dorset's sea".

This is an exciting time for marine conservationists and for anyone who has an interest in the marine environment. We hope that as Seasearchers, divers recognise the value of their contribution to our knowledge of the seas and continue to support the advancement of marine conservation.



Pink sea fans in Dorset, are one of the species that could benefit from the creation of Marine Conservation Zones under the Marine Act. PT

Text: K Dawson and Nicky Hoar



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Species of interest

The summary of all of the data from 2009 will be available in the annual report, due in March 2010. Until then, below is a short review of some of the interesting species and sights recorded this year, along with a couple more to be on the look out for.

◆ Throughout the season, and last, divers have been reporting sights of Baillon's wrasse., mostly from the Poole Bay area. Baillon's wrasse (*Symphodus bailloni*) look very similar to corkwing wrasse (*Crenilabrus melops*) but with distinctive pink lips and fins (see the Seasearch website 'news' page for an image). A photograph can greatly assist in confirming identification.

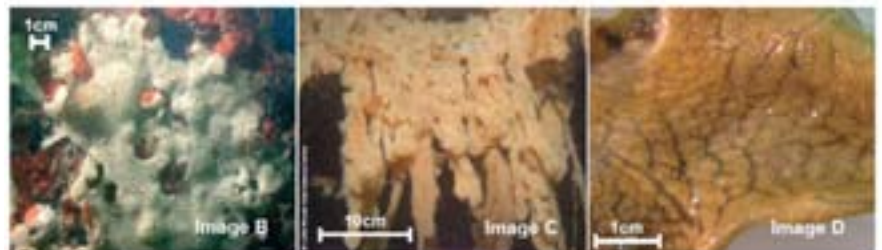
◆ Twice this year, a rare species of goby was captured on camera by two of our Seasearchers. Couch's goby (*Gobius couchii*) has been recorded in Dorset before and these are our first Seasearch records. Spotted in Weymouth Bay and next to a patch reef on Poole Bay, the small fish looks like a Black goby but, as Suzanne who recorded one said, 'a slightly odd Black goby'. As with the Baillon's wrasse, it may be that these fish have been in the area for some time but overlooked due to their similarity to other species.



◆ This year Seasearch have enabled an online recording form for Crawfish, a specific focus for Seasearch this year. Crawfish have now been listed as a Biodiversity Action Plan species due to the dramatic decrease in populations in recent years. Although not often seen in Dorset, if divers have spotted a crawfish anywhere in the UK (also known as crayfish or spiny lobster) then please consider logging your sighting using the online recording form (www.seasearch.org.uk).

◆ A mantis shrimp (*Rissoides desmarestia*) was spotted off Ballard Reef in Swanage this summer by diver Peter Hewitt. This large burrowing shrimp is typically thought to be a warm water species and it's presence in Dorset may be related to increasing sea temperatures. Found in sands and gravel, the mantis shrimp can be identified by it's large mantis-like claws each with 5 long barbs. For more information and a photo visit the MarLIN website - <http://www.marlin.ac.uk>

Invasive species can often present quite a problem to conservationists if they appear to be out competing native species. One of the latest species to present a potential problem is a colonial ascidian called the Carpet sea squirt, or *Didemnum vexillum*. Thought to have originally come from Japan, this sea squirt forms dense colonies that can smother native species. It can be difficult to identify due to it's similarity to some other native species and once established can spread rapidly. At the moment the Carpet Sea squirt has been reported in marinas and harbours from North Devon and Wales but it's ability to grow on mobile as well as sedentary organisms, means that it poses a threat to natural habitats in the open sea. Monitoring the occurrence and spread of the species will assist the appropriate agencies in management making decisions. Below are some photos and characteristics, provided by the Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNS) that may help with identification.



Images and text descriptions courtesy of NNS

- ◆ It can grow as thin flexible sheets (Image B), or hang down in long rope-like growths (Image C).
- ◆ It has a uniform pale orange, cream or off-white colour.
- ◆ The surface has a firm leathery texture (not slimy) and has a veined or marbled appearance (Image D).
- ◆ Numerous small pores open on the surface, but close up out of water to produce pale spots (Image D).

If you think you have seen the Carpet sea squirt then please call the NNS on 0845 600 3078 or for more information please visit www.nonnativespecies.org.uk

Records so far

Nearly 120 records have been sent in to date which is fantastic. Many of these were compiled by several divers surveying a small area intensively and about a third of the total were Surveyor forms. Usefully, many have been backed up with photographs, which means our catalogue is now very impressive! We will be using these images over the coming months, along with images from DWT's mapping project, to produce a habitat map for Dorset's seabed.

If you have any more Survey or Observer forms still to come in (and I know there are some!), then please send them to me as soon as you can, particularly if they are from one of the DWT weekend charters. If the subsidies don't work in encouraging people to fill in a form and send it to us, then they can't continue.

As with last years photos, all of this years will be entered into our annual photo competition . The prize for the best photo will be a place on a Dorset Seasearch charter or our next Surveyor course. So please do send in your photos, with the accompanying Seasearch form by the end of December.

Bryozoans and Hydroids

Our bryozoan and hydroid course in August had a fantastic turnout. In fact, we were oversubscribed a little and had to squeeze around the microscopes that we had accumulated for the weekend. The course, taught by Dr Joanne Porter of Herriot-Watt University, covered the ecology and biology of hydroids and bryozoans, and the ID of some of the more common species. The images that we saw under the microscopes were truly eye opening for many and we all learnt a vast amount. The dive on Peveril Ledges the next day was the perfect opportunity to collect a few samples to practice on. Jo's enthusiasm for all things small was certainly catching and we spent a very happy afternoon identifying small things using very large books! Thank you to Jo for a brilliant course and to all who attended for making it so enjoyable. Further thanks to those who brought microscopes (and cake!).

DWT's marine survey work

The intertidal survey has finished for this year and has covered the majority of the coast between St Aldhem's and Bowleaze near Weymouth. We spent a very pleasant week snorkeling in and around Worbarrow, looking at the intertidal chalk (a Biodiversity Action Plan habitat) and surge swept bedrock. Next year's target is finish the areas to the east, around Swanage and then Portland Bill. Several volunteers have assisted on the project and we are very appreciative of their contribution. DWT is looking at ways of engaging more volunteers in the future for the long term monitoring of the coastline, based on the work already done for DORIS (Dorset Integrated Seabed study) in partnership with C-SCOPE.



Surge swept kelp and red seaweeds below the Fossil Forest in the Purbecks. PT

Dorset Wildlife Trust– working to protect Dorset's wildlife for the future, Brookland's Farm, Forston, Dorchester, Dorset, DT2 7AA; Tel: 01305 264620; Fax: 01305251120. Registered Charity No 200222. For more information about DWT, our work and the Seasearch project, please visit www.dorsetwildlife.co.uk or email kdawson@dorsetwildlife.co.uk.

Newsletter prepared by K Dawson. Photo credits: RY– Richard Yorke; GB– Gordon Bird; PT– Peter Tinsley; SZ- Suzanne Munnelly

Seasearch is a national project involving volunteer sports divers in marine biological surveys. The project is co-ordinated in Dorset by DWT and nationally by the Marine Conservation Society on behalf of the Seasearch Steering Group. For more information on Seasearch please visit www.seasearch.org.uk or email info@seasearch.org.uk

DWT would like to acknowledge the support and funding received for Dorset Seasearch from Natural England, the Environment Agency and Viridor Credits.



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Seasearch Diving 2010

May 8/9th

Weymouth Bay and west Purbecks, Divetime (www.divetime.info)

June 19/20th

Poole Bay and east Purbecks, Peveril Myth (www.poolediving.co.uk)

July 10/11th

Weymouth Bay and Lyme Bay, Wey Chieftain 4 (www.theshipwreckproject.com)

July 24/ 25th and August 21st/22nd

Poole Bay and east Purbecks, Peveril Myth (www.poolediving.co.uk)

September 4/5th

Weymouth Bay and Portland, Wey Chieftain 4 (www.theshipwreckproject.com)

(Saturday's option to dive to 40m, weather and participants depending)

October 2nd/3rd

Weymouth Bay and Portland, Divetime (www.divetime.info)

Also being organised next year are two trips further afield, being coordinated by two of our Seasearchers. Firstly, North Dorset Sub-Aqua Club is organising a trip to Scotland for 19th-25th September 2010, which is open to Seasearchers. The club has booked onto the liveaboard Elizabeth G (www.elizabthgcharters.com), Oban, for 5 nights- from the evening of Sunday 19th September to the morning of Friday 24th. Cost is £500 per person (including food, but excluding drinks and fills). Weather permitting, the Sound of Mull, Coll/Tyre and the Inner Hebrides will be explored. Max depth will be 35m. For more information please contact Wendy Rooke via Kathryn at DWT.

The other Seasearch trip is also a liveaboard trip but to North Rhona, the most remote and least visited nature reserve in the UK, situated about 40km north of Stornaway. The trip is from 24th -31st July 2010, leaving from Scrabster so there will be no additional ferry costs. The price is £550 which includes food, accommodation, air, 2 dives per day, and tanks and weights (unless you prefer to bring your own). For more information on this rather exciting and far flung trip please contact Paul Homes via Kathryn at DWT.

Courses

April 10/11th

Seasearch Observer: DWT's Urban Wildlife Centre, Poole; diving on Peveril Myth
Learn the basics to Seasearch surveying with this one day course combined with one day's diving in Poole Bay. This course is designed for divers with no prior experience of marine surveys or marine life ID. Minimum dive qualifications apply for those taking part in the diving. Places will go initially to those booking on for both days. Course cost is £60 for both days or £35 for the just the classroom session. Space depending, divers who did the course last year and are yet to qualify, may find this a great opportunity to get some more qualifying dives in.

April 24/ 25th

Seaweed ID for Seasearch Surveys : Venue tbc but will be located in Dorset, dive optional.
This course is aimed at those who have a basic knowledge of algae ID and would to further their skills and knowledge. Using samples and photos, participants will be able to work through a range of seaweeds found in Dorset, using ID guides, microscopes and hand lenses. Tutor- Lin Baldock

All enquiries for courses and diving to kdawson@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Booking dives: Two dives a day are scheduled for the weekend dive events, weather permitting. A single day is £30 and a weekend costs £50. Air costs of £5/£10 are also covered again this year **only** if you submit Seasearch forms. To take part in DWT's Seasearch dives, you must have a minimum qualification of BSAC Sports Diver or PADI Advanced Open Water, and have at done at least 10 dives in the UK. For the dive weekends, divers must have some prior experience of marine life ID or completed an Observer course. All divers must provide all own equipment and be able to provide proof of qualifications and third party insurance. Further information and booking forms are available from Kathryn at kdawson@dorsetwildlife.co.uk. Cheques should be made payable to 'Dorset Wildlife Trust' and sent with a form at the time of booking.

DWT subsidises all courses and weekend dive events so to avoid making a loss on the programme, we ask for a non-refundable deposit to confirm your place. **If no deposit or booking form is provided within six weeks of the event, your place will not be reserved.** If for any reason you do need to cancel then please let us know as soon as possible so that we can fill your place and return your deposit. In the event of a cancellation by the skipper or DWT, all divers will be fully refunded.