

Seasearch West of Scotland

2022 Report

Owen Paisley, Seasearch West Coordinator

taobh Siar na h-Alba



sireach na mara

www.seasearch.org.uk



A large native oyster firmly cemented to a rock. Found by seasearch volunteer Morvern Paisley during a snorkel survey in a northern sea loch.



A small Seasearch team were blessed with unseasonably good weather during a visit to Little Loch Broom (Iain Dixon)

2022 The Covid Bounce Back

Whilst 2022 marked the end of restrictions Covid continued to cast a long shadow with several planned surveys cancelled or modified at short notice due to Covid related complications. Despite this people did manage to go diving and complete survey forms. An enthusiastic team of 46 volunteers managed to complete 102 survey forms over the year. In addition two Observer courses were run with a total of 22 participants.

Notable records received during the year included an ROV record of a Fireworks Anemone at 60 metres, well to the South of previous records. Later on Fireworks anemones also featured in a survey report from Loch Duich which revealed one of the densest populations ever recorded with over 400 counted during a single dive. Native oysters also featured in the surveys with several populations found to be still hanging on decades after they were last recorded.

The Seasearch Year

January to March



Potential Pacific Oysters in West Loch Tarbert

As usual activities at the start of the year were focused on sorting out forms from the previous year and chasing up tardy form fillers. During this clearing process two volunteers submitted their 5th qualifying forms and were duly signed up as Seasearch Observers.

Advantage was taken of the usual January weather to plan surveys in West Loch Tarbert, Little Loch Broom and Loch Hourn. A break in the weather allowed three hardy volunteers to carry out a survey at the mouth of West Loch Tarbert. There they found some odd looking oysters, possibly Pacific Oysters, *Crassostrea gigas*, firmly cemented to a large boulder. Attached to a rock as they were, this raised the possibility of breeding *Crassostrea*, the first such record obtained from the west coast. Plans were laid with NatureScot to carry out some sampling to confirm or refute this tentative identification but weather, tides and illness all conspired to prevent this. Hopefully an attempt in 2023 will be more successful.



The Little Loch Broom dive team in action (Iain Dixon)

At the request of a local community group plans were laid to carry out a 5 day survey at Little Loch Broom in March. Unfortunately an outbreak of covid meant that the West coast coordinator Owen Paisley had to pull out at short notice. Fortunately Iain Dixon and Karen Boswarva were able to step in and ran a successful 5 day expedition with 6 divers. The survey culminated in a presentation to the local community which was well received.



A tired surveyor coming ashore from Loch Hourn

An interesting record obtained during this period was of a Fireworks Anemone, (*Pachycerianthus multiplicatus*) found to the East of Tarbert in Loch Fyne. The anemone was at a depth of 60m and recorded using an ROV deployed from volunteer Frank Melvin's yacht. An interesting recording system which is likely to become more common as the technology develops and drops in price. The record extends the known occurrence of these anemones in Loch Fyne considerably with the next closest record being off Furnace some 20 miles to the North.

In early March a small snorkeling expedition was mounted to Loch Hourn at the request of a local community group. Successful surveys were carried out despite some inclement weather and several new records obtained.



A Loch Fyne Fireworks Anemone

Finally March was also noteworthy for the arrival of a set of ID guides to be used during expeditions. Previously coordinators had to rely on their own personal copies which understandably received some abuse during expeditions.



More evidence was found of past Serpulid Reefs in West Loch Tarbert during 2023



Once again Free Divers played a prominent part in West Coast Seasearch surveys



Some of the very large Oysters found in Loch Fyne



Participants in one of the mentoring days hard at work form filling.

April to June

April started with preparations for an online Observer course. This took place towards the end of the month with 7 participants. The course was a good example of the advantages of online courses. One participant was able to join from South Africa while another was in France. Both were based in Scotland but holiday/work commitments would have prevented them from joining an “in person” course.

A series of online meetings were held with the Roslin Institute, Fish Health Scotland and Friends of the West Loch to discuss seasearch volunteers helping with *Bonamia* research and an oyster restoration project. This bore fruit later when volunteers collected native oysters from four sites with the presence of *Bonamia* confirmed at two. Less good news was more evidence uncovered of the presence in the recent past of large scale serpulid reefs in West Loch Tarbert

During June a new record for late forms was set with the arrival of an envelope full of forms from 2019. These were duly checked and passed on for processing.

Despite the easing of restrictions covid continued to cause havoc with a planned First Aid course for tutors and volunteers having to be cancelled at short notice by the instructor. A survey trip to the Isle of Lewis was also derailed when one of the main Island organisers was diagnosed with Long Covid.

July to September

A small expedition was mounted to a site in Upper Loch Fyne during July and just over 100 native oysters recorded. Strangely many of these were of enormous size, >15 cm but no small oysters or spat were recorded. Plans were laid to return to the location and search for a possible settlement site with young oysters though this had to be put off until 2023.

Highlands and Islands Green MSP Ariane Burgess visited and was briefed on the *Bonamia* project work being carried out in West Loch Tarbert with Seasearch help.

A number of mentoring days were organised at West Loch Tarbert, Loch Craignish and Loch Long. These were open to anyone wishing to improve their form filling and over the three days 12 people attended.



October to December

With Autumn well underway an online Observer course was run in November which was successfully completed with 15 participants.

Survey forms continued to arrive reaching a total of 68 in November. Perhaps because of the long Covid lay off many of these forms required more work than usual before signing off for data entry. Of these forms some of the most interesting were completed by Martin Hynd and Vanessa Charles who recorded over 400 Fireworks Anemones at one of their sites and a further 45 at another.

By December the forms total had climbed to 97 and as usual a few more forms trickled in late making the total for the year 102 Not the highest number ever received but none the less a respectable number given the difficulties of recovering from the pandemic.

Social Media

Under the capable management of Karen Boswarva the West of Scotland Facebook page continued to inform and entertain. Over the year the page was viewed over 6000 times and attracted 18 new members. The most popular posts were either requests for identification or notifications of forthcoming dive trips.

Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to the 46 volunteers who gave freely of their time during 2022 to carry out surveys on the West coast of Scotland and perhaps more importantly complete forms.

They were: Lin Baldock, Jo Beaton, Steven Benjamins, Graeme Bruce, Duncan Blyth, Karen Boswarva, George Brown, Rich Carlin, Vanessa Charles, Helen Corrieu, Trevor Davies, Iain Dixon, Chris Hardie, Chloe Hall, Eric Holden, Catriona Hoon, Jason Guthrie, Sarah Fanet, Rachel Horsburgh, Martin Hynd, John Jack, Alain Karmitz, Lucy Kay, Paul Kay, Katherine Knight, Douglas MacDonald, Kerry MacKay, Ross McLaren, Steve McLaughlin, Frank Melvin, Morvern Paisley, Owen Paisley, Andrew Pearce, Beth Pearson, Angeles Fernandez Pena, Rie Pors, Chris Rickard, Duncan Scott, Tisha Scott, Claire Simpson, Lauren Smith, Rachel Stanesby, David Tompkins, Genvieve Tompkins, Sally Walsh, Richard Yorke

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Seasearch is a volunteer underwater survey project run by MCS which encourages recreational divers and snorkellers to contribute towards the conservation of the marine environment.

