

Seasearch Argyll

2018 Report

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Arran Observer Course, R.Spray



The Carna Dive team

The Year's Achievements

2018 was the 30th anniversary of Seasearch and it turned out to be an exceptional one for the west of Scotland. A record number of two hundred forms were received, representing four hundred volunteer days diving over sixty two days. Over the year, fifty three divers volunteered their time to collect Seasearch data. In addition, there were a number of non diving volunteers involved who provided accommodation, boats and other assistance. Of the two hundred forms submitted, 39% were Surveyor forms and 61% were Observer forms. The high percentage of Observer forms reflected the unusually high number of courses run. Extra effort was also put into encouraging participants to complete their qualifying dives. This extra effort resulted in ten newly qualified Observers by the end of the year.



The Arran course participants

During the year surveys were carried out from Loch Long to the Summer Isles and all points between. The trend first noted in 2017 of community groups becoming increasingly involved continued through 2018 with SeaChange in Wester Ross and Carna Conservation Trust at Loch Sunnart both actively supporting surveys.

Four Observer courses were run during 2018, Fort William, Arran, Loch Long and Oban with thirty three participants. All four courses were run in partnership with other organisations. In Fort William, the University of the Highlands and Islands provided premises and included the Seasearch Observer Course as part of their Marine Tourism BSc course. On Arran, the community organisation COAST hosted the course with all their staff attending. At Loch Long, the course was hosted by Global Underwater Explorers (GUE), a relatively new player in Scottish Diving. Finally, the Oban course was hosted by SAMS at Dunstaffnage Marine Laboratory.



A snorkeller tries out Seasearch recording on Arran

Later in the year, two talks were given at the SSAC dive conference in Stirling which resulted in two clubs expressing an interest in future courses. Articles were also produced for the SSAC magazine and Seasearch slates featured in an STV report about oyster reef restoration in the Dornoch Firth.



Tall Sea Pens were recorded at 3 locations during the year

The Seasearch Year

January/February

As usual, the early months of the year were occupied with tidying up loose ends from 2017 such as dealing with late forms and answering any queries about forms submitted for data entry. Planning for future courses and starting to organise diving later in the year became more important as January turned to February. A new record of Tall Seapens in Loch Melfort was submitted after commercial divers reported seeing them whilst searching for a lost bow door.



Flame Shell reefs were surveyed in Loch Sunnart and Loch Broom

March

The first Observer course of the year took place in Fort William, with eight snorkelling participants from Argyll College taking the course as part of their BSc course. Five divers from elsewhere in Scotland including Oban, Mull, Helensburgh and Edinburgh also took part in the course. The next day diving and snorkelling was organised in Loch Linnhe during which a Horse Mussel bed was recorded.



Shoals of juvenile Saithe were a common sight in many places

April

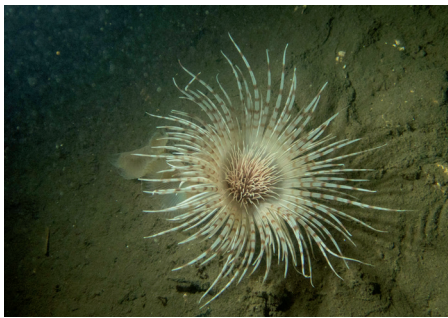
A second Observer course was run in the new COAST offices in Lamlash Bay, Arran. There were nine participants including all of the COAST staff. The course was livened up by reports of Orcas in the Clyde which was something of a distraction. Once again, some of the participants were snorkellers, this time interested in using Seasearch techniques over Eel Grass beds. As well as the diving in Lamlash Bay, forms were also received from Loch Creran and the Sound of Mull.



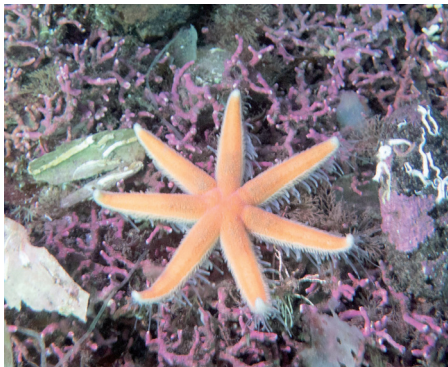
Relict Serpulid Reef, Loch Teacuis



The suspected "Divex" in Loch Fyne which was actually *Diplosoma* sp.



The solitary Fireworks Anemone in Loch Teacuis



Juvenile Luidia photographed on a Maerl bed at the Summer Isles



The only reasonably sized example of a living Serpulid reef found in Loch Teacuis during the 2018 surveys

May

A third Observer course was run in Oban at SAMS this time with five participants and followed by diving at Dunollie. A two page article describing the Arran course was produced for Scottish Diver and text supplied for the SNH blog.

June

A six day survey was undertaken around the Isle of Carna, Loch Sunnart with eight divers. Over the week, five divers completed their Observer qualifying dives and the week also resulted in the completion of thirty four Observer forms and four Surveyor forms. During the week, a large Flame Shell reef was located at the north end of Carna and the derelict state of the Serpulid reefs in Loch Teacuis was confirmed. A solitary Fireworks Anemone was recorded close to the collapsed Serpulid reefs.

July

A survey took place in West Loch Tarbert recording native oysters and relict serpulid reefs. As in previous years, photographs of possibly regenerating Serpulid reefs were taken.

August

The final Observer course of the year was run at Loch Long with six participants and hosted by GUE. A presentation was given to the wider GUE conference on the evening after the course.

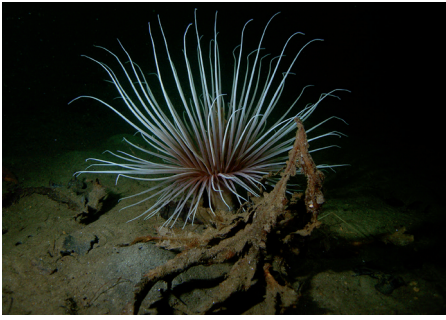
A "rapid response" dive survey in Loch Fyne was organised following reports of "Divex" in Loch Fyne at Gortain Point. Fortunately this turned out to be *Diplosoma* sp.

September

A diving expedition to the Summer Isles in Wester Ross was organised with participants coming from a variety of clubs including Bingham BSAC, Inverness BSAC, Campbeltown SSAC and PADI. Over the five days twenty six dives were carried out resulting in sixteen Surveyor and ten Observer forms. Highlights of the week included diving on a Maerl bed to the East of Tanera Beg and diving on a Horse Mussel/ Flame Shell bed in Loch Broom.

October

A return visit to Carna in Loch Sunnart was organised once again with members of Bingham Sub Aqua Club. During the week the area in Loch Teacuis missed by the earlier survey was checked for live Serpulid reefs, once again with disappointing results. On a more positive note the presence of all three types of Sea Pens along with Fireworks Anemones was confirmed to the East of Carna and the more work carried out on mapping the Flame Shell reef at the northern end of the island.



One of over 150 Fireworks Anemones recorded at Inveraray Pier

November

Two forty minute talks were given at the Scottish sub-aqua club AGM during break out sessions. They were attended by approximately thirty divers, with two clubs interested in hosting future courses.

December

An attempt was made to carry out a survey at the Loch Shira monitoring site but poor underwater conditions prevented a successful outcome. However, a survey at nearby Inveraray Pier confirmed the presence of a large number (150+) of Fireworks Anemones.



One of the many Seasearch divers who volunteered during 2018

Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to the fifty three volunteer divers who gave freely of their time and energy in 2018.

They include: Rowan Aitchison, Sue Ash, Lin Baldock, Caroline Bishop, Steve Bishop, Neil Black, Gavin Cameron, Paul Chandler, Natalie Clark, Jason Coles, Jill Mellink-Davison, Alana Dempsey, Louise-Anna Ferguson, Hugo William-Foley, Ruth Hair, Claire Hallybone, John Harris, Rebecca Hills, Catriona Hoon, Angus Jenkins, Des Kay, Jenna Kosimaki, Lucy Kay, Ian Lowther, Jonathan Maesan, Robin Mair, Serges Maciuk, Ross McDonald, Max McGinn, Hilary Mackay, Lynne MacKay, Ryan McShane, Frank Melvin, David Moore, Noora Nevalainan, Owen Paisley, Andy Pilley, Lewis Press, John Rees, Manueala de Los Rios, Marcus Rose, Kara Scott, Barry Shaw, Andrew Shipley, Susan Shipley, Simon Sloan, Rob Spray, Jenny Stark, Mike Verner, Kathrin Vossen, Dawn Watson, Lyndsay Waterson and Richard Yorke.



Special thanks to Steve and Caroline Bishop of Bingham Sub Aqua Club for all their hard work at Carna and the Summer Isles, especially the provision of a RHIB and compressor, without which diving at the Summer Isles would have been impossible.

Special thanks also to Rob Spray and Dawn Watson for their out of season diving, large number of forms and support during the Arran Course.

Finally thanks to SeaChange Wester Ross especially Sara Nason for her logistical support at the Summer Isles including the provision of accommodation for the dive team and assistance with transport costs.

Seasearch in Scotland gratefully acknowledge the financial support provided by Scottish Natural Heritage in 2018.



Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba
All of nature for all of Scotland
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad



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

