

Phylum/sub-phylum	Common name	Number of species	Total records	Common species (number of records in brackets)
Porifera	Sponges	25	69	<i>Cliona celata</i> (10) – Boring sponge <i>Axinella infundibuliformis</i> (8) – Prawn cracker sponge
Cnidaria	Anemones, corals, hydroids, jellyfish	41	278	<i>Caryophyllia smithii</i> (36)– Devonshire cup coral <i>Alcyonium digitatum</i> (27)– Dead men's fingers <i>Nemertesia antennina</i> (20) – Antenna hydroid
Annelida	Segmented worms	9	30	<i>Janicea conchilega</i> (7) – Sand mason worm <i>Pomatoceros triquetus</i> (4) – Keel worm
Crustacea	Lobsters, crabs, barnacles	27	300	<i>Necora puber</i> (46) – Velvet swimming crab <i>Cancer pagurus</i> (46) – Edible crab <i>Pagurus bernhardus</i> (27) – Hermit crab
Mollusca	Shells, sea slugs, cuttlefish, octopus	71	223	<i>Calliostoma zephyrinum</i> (27) – Painted top shell <i>Pecten maximus</i> (24) – King Scallop <i>Gibbula cineraria</i> (18) – Grey topshell
Bryozoa	Sea mats	12	69	<i>Alcyonidium diaphanum</i> (12) – Jelly finger bryozoan <i>Membranipora membranacea</i> (11) – Kelp Sea Mat
Echinodermata	Starfish, urchins, sea cucumbers	24	272	<i>Echinus esculentus</i> (48) – Edible urchin <i>Asterias rubens</i> (57) – Common starfish
Tunicata	Sea squirts	17	115	<i>Clavelina lepadiformis</i> (31) – Light Bulb Seasquirt
Pisces	Fishes	39	294	<i>Pollachius pollachius</i> (27) – Pollack <i>Ctenolabrus rupestris</i> (26) – Goldsinny Wrasse <i>Labrus bergylta</i> (20) – Ballan Wrasse
Other Animal Groups	Mammals, comb-jellies, sea spiders, worms	4	4	<i>Phoca vitulina</i> (1) – Harbour seal
Algae	Seaweeds	45	178	<i>Laminaria hyperborea</i> (27) – Kelp <i>Delessaria sanguinea</i> (15) – Sea Beech <i>Laminaria saccharina</i> (12) – Sugar kelp
Total		314	1832	

Sponges the yellow staghorn sponge *Axinella dissimilis* was recorded from Rathlin, this is a southern species and rare in Northern Ireland. **Anemones, corals, hydroids, jellyfish** The slender sea pen *Virgularia mirabilis* was recorded from both Strangford and Rathlin. This is a Northern Ireland Priority species as it is easy damaged by seabed disturbance. **Worms** the most common species was the sand mason worm *Janicea conchilega*, as the name suggests this worm constructs a tube to live in from sand and gravel on the seabed around it. **Crustaceans** The masked crab *Corystes cassivelaunus* was recorded from both Rathlin and the North Coast. This strange looking crab with distinctive long antennae was found in sandy areas. It is a NI species of conservation concern. **Molluscs** The attractive sea slug *Okenia elegans* was recorded from the 'Alastor' wreck in Strangford. This is rarely recorded: there are a few records from the north and east coasts of Northern Ireland, but it is the first record from Strangford Lough. The fan mussel *Atrina fragilis* was recorded from Rathlin. This is the only known living individual in Northern Ireland. **Bryozoans** species that grow on kelp and other seaweeds, the sea mat *Membranipora membranacea* and the frosty sea mat *Electra pilosa*, were common.

Echinoderms several rare Northern Ireland priority species were recorded. These included the sea cucumber *Thyonidium drummondii*, the purple sunstar *Solaster endeca*, the northern starfish *Leptasterias muelleri*, and the sand star *Astropecten irregularis*. The purple sunstar and the northern starfish are northern species, and looking for changes in their distribution can help us monitor climate change. **Seasquirts** the lightbulb seasquirt *Clavelina lepadiformis* was the most common species recorded. There were two records of the NI species of conservation concern *Synoicum incrustatum* from near the Giant's Causeway. **Fish** pollack *Pollachius pollachius* were the commonest species recorded. Lumpsums *Cyclopterus lumpus* were recorded from Portrush harbour. **Seaweeds** the NICC species *Stenogramme interrupta* and the NICP species *Carpomitra costata* were recorded.



Seapen *Virgularia mirabilis*



Yellow Staghorn sponge
Axinella dissimilis

Northern Ireland 2007 Summary Report



Fan Mussel *Atrina fragilis*



Dogfish *Scylliorhinus canicula*



Masked crab *Corystes cassivelaunus*



Cuttlefish *Sepiolo atlantica*



Seasearchers join the MCS campaign



Rare sea slug *Okenia elegans*



Sand star – *Astropecten irregularis*



Recording on Rathlin



Many surveyors took part, too many to mention here but we would like to thank them all for their support.

Seasearch is a volunteer underwater survey project for recreational divers to actively contribute to the conservation of the marine environment (see www.seasearch.org.uk for more information). Financial support for the project was given by the Environment and Heritage service Northern Ireland. This report was written by Claire Goodwin (thanks to Julia Nunn and Chris Wood for editorial comments). Photos are by Claire Goodwin and where specified by Andrea Graeb.



Environment & Heritage Service
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An Agency within the Department of the
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www.seasearch.org.uk

Training

Observer Course

A Seasearch combined Observer and marine life identification course took place in Portrush Coastal Zone on the 24th and 25th February. The course was slightly modified to include one dive to collect marine life; this was then examined in the centre to enable participants to gain confidence in their identification skills. Participants were even able to observe a common urchin *Echinus esculentus* spawning, prompted by the warmer water in the collection tank. 12 divers took part and several of the participants have participated in dives over the season.

Surveyor course

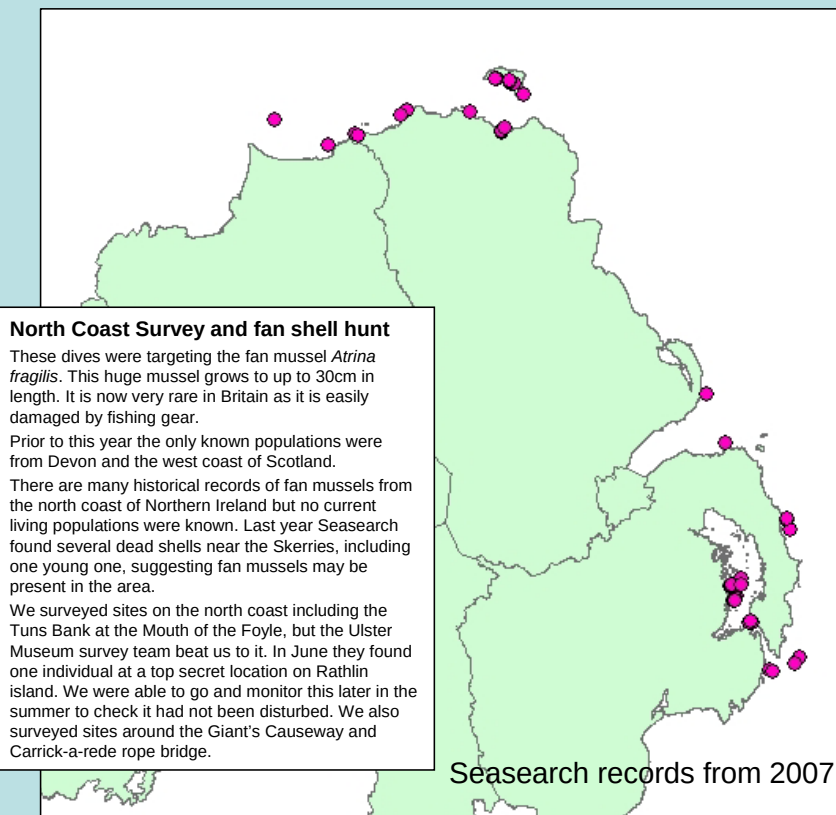
A Surveyor course was held in September which four people participated. One of these was Colin Ferguson who clocked up an amazing 20 observer forms this year.

Underwater Photography

A course on Underwater Photography for Seasearch NI participants took place at St John's Point, Donegal. Tutors were Nigel Motyer (an internationally acclaimed underwater photographer with credits including National Geographic) and Bernard Picton (Curator of marine invertebrates at the Ulster Museum who has over 20 years experience in using photography for survey work). Lectures included techniques for macro and wide-angle photography, developing photographic skills and the use of photography in marine surveys. Lectures were complemented by two dives at St John's point to practice photographic technique; these were followed by an informal critique of participant's work.

Qualifications

Congratulations to Thorsten Brabetz, Sharon Doake, Colin Ferguson and Alasdair Kennedy who all achieved Seasearch Observer qualifications this year.



North Coast Survey and fan shell hunt

These dives were targeting the fan mussel *Atrina fragilis*. This huge mussel grows to up to 30cm in length. It is now very rare in Britain as it is easily damaged by fishing gear.

Prior to this year the only known populations were from Devon and the west coast of Scotland.

There are many historical records of fan mussels from the north coast of Northern Ireland but no current living populations were known. Last year Seasearch found several dead shells near the Skerries, including one young one, suggesting fan mussels may be present in the area.

We surveyed sites on the north coast including the Tuns Bank at the Mouth of the Foyle, but the Ulster Museum survey team beat us to it. In June they found one individual at a top secret location on Rathlin island. We were able to go and monitor this later in the summer to check it had not been disturbed. We also surveyed sites around the Giant's Causeway and Carrick-a-rede rope bridge.

Strangford Lough Survey

We continued our monitoring of the horse mussel *Modiolus modiolus* beds. It is proposed that two small areas be closed to all disturbance to allow the beds to recover. We were surveying within these areas to examine the extent and condition of the beds. As well as horse mussels, NI Conservation Priority species, including the red sea cucumber *Thyonidium drummondii* and the slender sea pen *Virgularia mirabilis*, were recorded.



2007 Diving

35 sites in NI were surveyed in total, and 109 records were made (76 observer and 33 surveyor). The main survey areas and findings are outlined below.

Seasearch NI members also surveyed a further 20 sites in the Republic of Ireland, both as individual dives and as part of a week long survey of the Kenmare River, organised by Julia Nunn.

Seasearch volunteers organised their own dives, either individually or with friends and dive club members as part of the Seasearch "Dive In!" weekend on the 9/10th June. Seasearch volunteers from all over the UK took part in an effort to survey as many sites as possible. Divers from Queens University sub-aqua club surveyed the Blue Pool (Portrush), the Dolphins SAC surveyed Gun's Island (near Ardglass), and Bray divers surveyed St John's Point in Donegal (also completing Sea Fan and Pipefish surveys).



Outer Ards Peninsula

We had intended to survey some horse mussel beds in this area but were prevented by bad weather. Instead we surveyed some interesting rocky areas.

Rathlin Island Survey

Unfortunately poor weather prevented us diving at some of our proposed north coast sites. We took the opportunity to survey some areas of Church Bay on Rathlin. We found several NI Conservation Priority species here including the sand star *Astropecten irregularis* and the slender sea pen *Virgularia mirabilis*.



NI Wrecks

The wrecks of the 'Drake' and the 'Templemore' were surveyed as part of other surveys. In addition to these, several records from other wrecks were collected by independent dives (mainly from Colin Ferguson). Using this and surveys from previous years, we're putting together a Seasearch report on NI wreck life. Hopefully this will get us some wreckie converts! Some interesting species were recorded including the nudibranch *Okenia elegans* from the 'Alastor' wreck, the first time it has been recorded from Strangford Lough.