

Seasearch training

This year we welcomed 23 new trainees to Seasearch over two Observer courses – keep up the good work with those qualifying forms! Seven keen divers took the plunge with the detailed Surveyor course, and are now contributing even more valuable information with every survey dive.

As a specialist level course, 15 people were introduced to Fish Identification; enjoying a dive, aquarium visit, rockpooling session and beach seine netting field work in glorious weather. Thank you all for getting involved, it has been brilliant fun running every one of these courses.

The following people completed their training dives and gained their qualifications:

Observer

John Yarrow
Steph Davies
Ryan Hunnisett

Surveyor

Hazel Selley
Becky Gill
Lizi Miller
Andy Grant



Learning about fish in the lab.
Photo by Cat Wilding



Cornwall Seasearch Surveys - Summary report 2014



Bispira worms. Photo by Cat Wilding



Mixed seaweeds. Photo by Keith Hiscock

Seasearchers Snorkellers!

In Cornwall we are very lucky to benefit from clear visibility, more reliably than in many other parts of the UK. Snorkellers, as well as divers, are avid explorers of the underwater environment, but unlike divers are not restricted by the need to carry heavy kit, so can access more remote locations from the shore. This year, for the first time, Seasearch has expanded by running an Observer Snorkeller course, to empower more people with the knowledge to survey their marine environment. 20 people participated, and the course finished with a boat based snorkel, kindly offered at special rate by the crew of Atlantic Diver. Several trainees are well on the way to completing their qualifying forms, and it is hoped that they will be able to generate valuable data from the shallower depths of many sites which divers are unable to reach.

Seasearch dive records

Group	Number of species recorded
Seaweeds	104
Sponges	55
Cnidarians	82
Worms	23
Molluscs	59
Crustaceans	37
Arthropods	2
Bryozoans	33
Echinoderms	21
Vertebrates	91



Seasearch survey at the Runnel stone. Photo by Cat Wilding



Goldsinny and nudibranch on oaten pipe hydroids.
Photo by John Yarrow

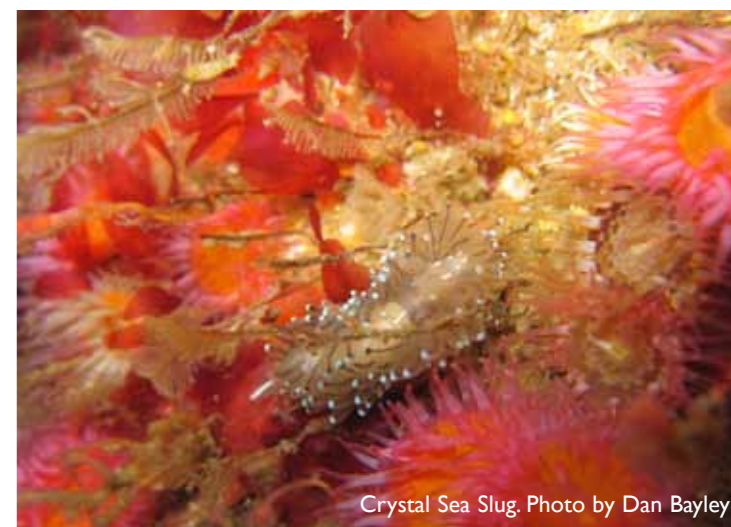


A day at the beach for Fish ID course participants. Photo by Cat Wilding

To get involved in Seasearch please contact Seasearch@cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk or visit our website www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/seasearch



John Dory. Photo by John Yarrow



Crystal Sea Slug. Photo by Dan Bayley

These survey dives were conducted as part of the national Seasearch Programme. Many volunteers took part in these surveys during 2014, and we would like to thank all involved. Seasearch is a volunteer underwater survey project for recreational divers to actively contribute to the conservation of the marine environment. For details of Seasearch visit www.seasearch.org.uk. For details of Seasearch in Cornwall visit www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk. This report has been prepared by Catherine Wilding.

Financial support for the production of this report and for data entry was provided by: PANACHE, Cornwall Wildlife Trust, and MCS.



Cornwall Seasearch 2014

A total of 130 Seasearch dives were carried out in 2014, involving 44 recorders. This produced records for 512 species totalling 5255 records for Cornwall in total.

Land's End rMCZ

After five cancelled attempts in 2012-13, we finally made it to the Runnel Stone this year – not just once, but twice! It was definitely worth waiting for thanks to the prolific marine life; elegant and jewel anemones in every colour imaginable, a profusion of oaten pipe hydroids and nudibranchs; all seen in over 12m visibility! We dived a total of 7 sites within the pMCZ, gathering valuable data to support its designation.



Elegant anemones. Photo by Dan Bayley

St Ives Bay

The St Ives area is known to be important for large charismatic species including seals, bottlenose dolphins and porpoise; but little is known about the rocky reef communities in the bay. Survey divers recorded a diverse community of seasquirts, red seaweeds, sponges and bryozoans, and were treated with a sighting of a yarrels blenny.



Cocks comb seaweed. Photo by Cat Wilding



Newquay and The Gannel rMCZ

This year Newquay will be considered for protection in the second tranche of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs). The area is famous for its surfing beaches, though regular swells mean diving is often difficult, so there is limited dive data available to support this designation. Through the Newquay Marine Group, teams of Seasearchers completed eight dives within the recommended MCZ (rMCZ), many to previously unexplored sites. One species which the site is proposed to protect is the pink sea fan. Despite known reefs with dense sea fan "forests" in nearby areas there had been no confirmed reports of this species living within the boundary of the rMCZ. After searching hard all summer, divers achieved their goal when colonies of this important species were eventually found! These records will add strength to the growing evidence base that will support the campaign for the protection of this site. Thanks are due to Dive Newquay for generously donating boat dives to support these surveys.



Prawns seen in Newquay pMCZ. Photo by Cat Wilding

Dive Against Debris

Seasearch divers joined a team from PADI AWARE's Dive Against Debris programme, Kernow Divers, and The National Trust to perform an underwater litter pick at Lansallos cove. The picturesque cove has a beautiful reef on one side but along the western side a large amount of man-made debris has built up, most of it are washed ashore by currents and tide. Over 1600 pieces of debris were removed from the water and catalogued by volunteers. A Seasearch survey was also performed, as this was a rare chance to survey the cove which is usually inaccessible to shore divers.



Fifteen-spined stickleback. Photo by Cat Wilding

Manacles MCZ

Surveyor trainees completed course dives within the Manacles MCZ and found the pink sea fan hat trick; sea fan nudibranchs (*Tritonia nilsodneri*), sea fan anemones (*Amphianthus dohrnii*), sea fan false cowries (*Simnia hiscocki*), and of course the sea fans themselves (*Eunicella verrucosa*). Both the nudibranchs and the anemones are tiny, and incredibly well camouflaged against the polyps of the fans. The anemone is a nationally rare and Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species, found on less than 1% of sea fans, while nudibranchs have been recorded on 20% of fans at the Manacles. Both the nudibranchs and false cowries feed on sea fan polyps, and the false cowries have recently been separated from a similar species which lives on soft corals like dead man's fingers.



Sea fan nudibranch, anemone, and false cowrie. Photos by Cat Wilding

Kernow Dive Fest

Seasearch divers joined a host of BSAC clubs as part of the annual Kernow Dive Fest, a meeting of all the clubs from throughout the region for a weekend of diving, camping and BBQ's near Penzance. Each BSAC club donates their boat at cost as part of this event, which aims to connect local divers in celebration of our hobby. Seasearch jumped at the chance to take part, and with so many boats going out to various different dive sites it was a fantastic opportunity to simultaneously gather lots of data from Seasearchers spread across several different clubs.



A fleet of dive boats ready to cast off. Photo by John Adams

Sadly, a large amount of plastic was recovered, including lots of tiny pieces which are easily mistaken by marine life for food. 889 plastic fragments were recorded, along with 498 pieces of cloth. Unusual finds included a plastic children's ring and half a lobster pot! A fifteen-spined stickleback was spotted on the dive, a large flounder was found hiding under washed-in litter, and millions of isopods were seen feeding on drifts of decomposing kelp.

Following the success of the day a volunteer group called Divers Against Debris UK was formed, and will be carrying out other events in future to help combat the global issue of marine litter.