

*Charlotte Bolton, Marine Survey & Data Officer, Living Seas team, Dorset Wildlife Trust*

### The year so far...

What a winter we had! Although the water temperature didn't plumb the depths of single figures as it did in 2013, Dorset suffered some of the worst storms seen on the south coast for an extremely long time, and we're still feeling the effects... Many sediment-dwelling species such as the sea mouse (*Aphrodita aculeata*) have been found washed up on beaches, whilst the sessile reef-attached species like pink sea fans (*Eunicella verrucosa*) that managed not to be ripped from the rocks appear to have had tissue scoured away from their bases (noted on our early season West Bay survey day at the start of May). Encouragingly, the tissue appeared to be growing back when the Lyme Bay reefs were dived again at the beginning of June:



*Eunicella verrucosa* in Lyme Bay showing scoured tissue at the base (L) and the beginnings of tissue re-growth (arrowed, R)

The beaches were also littered with strange exotic species (various goose barnacles, Columbus crabs *etc.*) hitching a lift on the long-lived plastic items. The warm water seemed to bring on the May plankton bloom very early this year – the second week in April to be semi-precise – which may have been the reason for the vast numbers of barrel jellyfish (*Rhizostoma pulmo/R. octopus*) seen throughout the south-west. These massive animals, up to 1m across the bell, have been recorded in their hundreds both in the water and washed up on beaches. They do not sting and present no danger generally, though they can give you quite a shock if you encounter them in low viz!



Barrel jellyfish (*Rhizostoma pulmo*/*R. octopus*) off Chesil Beach and washed up in Portland Harbour in May

The plankton combined with the fine loose sediment churned up to produce very challenging conditions at times. Nick Owen's survey weekend out of Lyme Regis at the beginning of June was a particular casualty of this – trying to survey and take photographs in 30cm viz is very difficult! Despite these challenges, good records have been produced from previously-unsurveyed areas, all of which help to build up the evidence base and contribute (via Natural England and Defra) to the conservation advice given to the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (Southern IFCA in our area) regarding management of marine protected areas.

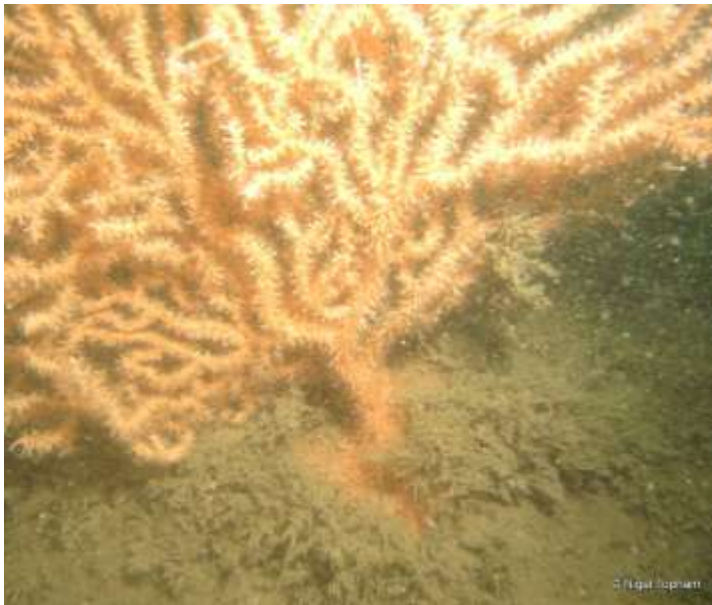
Poole Bay was also dived on a very pleasant (above-water!) weekend in mid-June; we looked at a DORIS-identified plateau just east of the Outer Whitehouse Grounds and then Wrasse Reef in the Poole Rocks MCZ which really lived up to its name, having plenty of goldsinny, rock cook (unusual in Poole Bay), cuckoo, ballan and Baillon's wrasse. Sunday saw us headed east to Southbourne Rough in search of the most easterly sea fans in the UK, on reefs not surveyed by Seasearch divers since 2004. There isn't an accurate position for these fans so we weren't altogether surprised not to find them. Skipper Mike Markey had a good mark for the second dive of the day which resulted in a successful mission:



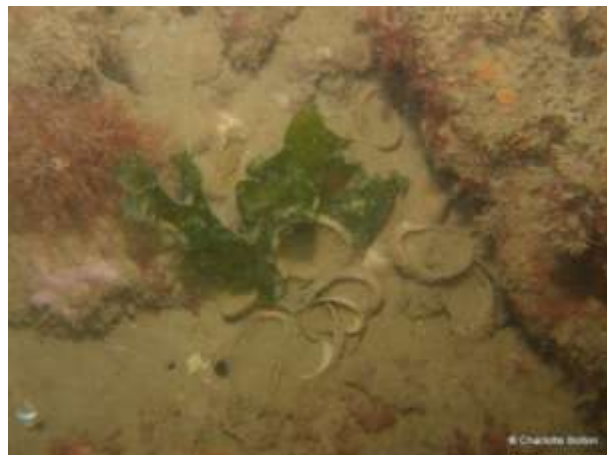
The sea fan was subsequently nicknamed 'Lazarus' after he was discovered almost completely crushed under a large boulder in 2006 (above). Removal of the boulder left the sea fan in a sorry-looking state but still attached (below right).

The earliest-recorded sea fan in Poole Bay was discovered in 2000 (above.)

Lazarus was re-visited in June 2014 and carefully measured at 22cmH x 33cmW. 'He' appears to be thriving and most definitely 'in the pink' – note the sturdy trunk and holdfast (below left) and the overlapping branches (below right) giving an overall impression of denseness (bottom).

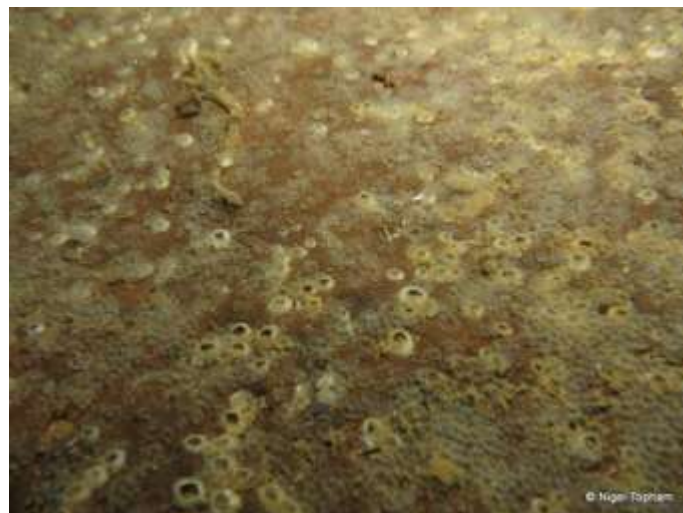


Once again survey efforts were hampered by sub-optimal viz – we would normally expect >2m at this time of year but there is a layer of fine unconsolidated sediment on the reefs here just as in Lyme Bay.



The effects of wafting the fine silt that coated Poole Bay (above left; note all the new growth of the foliose bryozoan *Chartella papyracea*), and the *Crepidula fornicata* (slipper limpet) shells thrown half-way up onto the reef from the seabed by the winter storms (above right).

Bream (*Spondyliosoma cantharus*) nests were in evidence as usual and also many Baillon's wrasse (*Symphodus bailloni*) nests on the tops of the patch reefs. The latter, a southern species, has become well-established in Dorset in recent years and it's no longer remarkable to find them or their nests.



Bream nest on bedrock cleared of silt, shells etc. (above left) and the eggs in close-up (above right)



Baillon's wrasse (left) and the shell-/bryozoan-decorated nest (above)

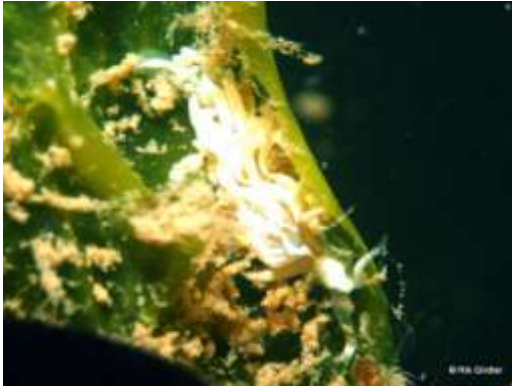
Our Portland survey dives are generally scheduled for later in the season (August 31<sup>st</sup>, September 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup>); the one day planned for mid-season fell foul of the unsettled weather in the preceding week (strong easterlies, followed by strong south-westerlies), only to have the Sunday turn out to be relatively benign in the end. Such are the joys of dive planning.

Dorset Seasearch has also, somewhat belatedly, joined the social media revolution and now has a dedicated group page on Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1438374789765610/> If you're already registered on Facebook, search for "Seasearch Dorset" (name reversed to fit in with all the other regional Seasearch groups...) and request to join the group. In the first instance the group settings are 'closed' so the group is publicly visible but you have to be an (approved) member to post – this is an attempt to ensure we don't get too much in the way of spam and commercial advertising that have plagued other groups. We hope that it can develop and be a useful resource for keeping in touch, sharing photos and knowledge etc. Your feedback on this development would be very welcome!

### Interesting sightings/records

Maybe the low viz has forced us to look more carefully but we've certainly had some interesting records of small and/or unobtrusive species already this year...

The nudibranch "bible" (officially, 'A Field Guide to the Nudibranchs of the British Isles' by Picton & Morrow) has long been out of print and extremely hard to find. Fortunately earlier this year, a new publication appeared, albeit in electronic format (iBook and subsequently as an ePub) – 'A Photographic Guide to Nudibranchs of South West England' by Bolt, Griffiths & Picton. Whether this has increased the number of nudi records in the same way as the recent Seasearch guides to seaweeds and bryozoans/hydroids did for those phyla cannot easily be quantified, but we've certainly had some new and interesting records already this year, including a first (as far as I can find) for Dorset in *Favorinus branchialis*:



*Favarinus branchialis* (above; note the dark rhinophores with white tips) and *Trapania maculata*, a nationally rare species (right; note the distinctive yellow 'T' or triangle on its back) (5 Dorset records). Both spotted in Portland Harbour.



*Geitodoris planata* (left), is wartier than a sea lemon (*Archidoris pseudoargus*), with large pale acid glands and brown spots under the mantle. There are only 3 existing Dorset records, possibly because it's often erroneously recorded as *A. pseudoargus*. Portland Harbour again.

Here's another one that requires closer inspection – *Ancula gibbosa* (right) in possibly unfamiliar white/orange colourway. Habitas has two photos of this species, one with white pigmentation at the ends of the cerata/rhinophores etc. and one like this. This specimen was recorded under Swanage Pier (8 previous Dorset records).



*Aeolidiella alderi* (left), a shallow water species that is also found inter-tidally, was also recorded under Swanage Pier earlier this year (3 existing Dorset records)

And finally, something a little more unusual - internal copepod parasite(s) of the family Splanchnotrophidae infecting a *Facelina auriculata* in Chesil Cove. The white egg masses of the parasite can be seen between the cerata, having been extruded from within the body cavity of the nudibranch...



To continue the theme of 'small but interesting', a number of sightings and photos of less common anemones have also been received (there is a new edition of the Seasearch Anemones book too...):



The worm anemones pictured above are very small and likely to retract into the sediment at the slightest disturbance. *Scolanthus callimorphus* (above left) was recorded in Portland Harbour whilst *Edwardsiella carnea* (above right) was found in Lyme Bay.

*Mesacmaea mitchellii* (right), photographed here in Lyme Bay, is very distinctive in its habit of holding the inner ring of tentacles vertically above the mouth.



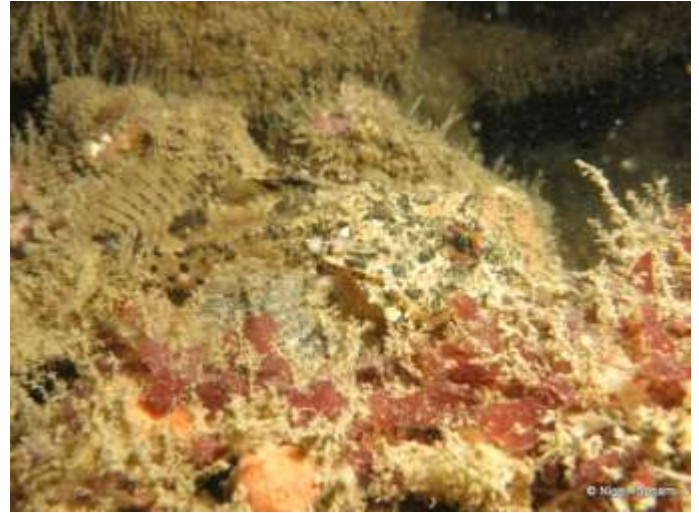
And last but not least, we couldn't leave out the charismatic fish species that have been spotted (hiding in the low viz?!):



Lyme Bay: Topknot (*Zeugopterus punctatus*) above, East Atlantic red gurnard (*Aspitrigula cuculus*) above right and Transparent goby (*Aphia minuta*) right.







Poole Bay: Plaice (*Pleuronectes platessa*) left, rock cook (*Centrolabrus exoletus*) above left and long-spined sea scorpion (*Taurulus bubalis*) above right.

## Recording

A total of 84 forms (43 Observation, 40 Survey, 2 seafan) had been submitted by 29 individual divers by the end of June. Well done everyone, keep them coming!

This year's forms all have to be validated/verified, entered into Marine Recorder and sent to Natural England **before Christmas** this year to ensure that the data can inform the consultation process for the second tranche of proposed MCZs. If you want to know more about this process, please sign up to become an 'MCZ Friend' at <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/MCZfriends> Here in Dorset we did very well in the first tranche of designations so we only have Studland Bay on the list for tranche 2. The priority species at this site are both short-snouted and spiny seahorse, native oyster and undulate ray. We are particularly short of records of undulate rays at Studland Bay, so please let us know if you see one (and try to get a photo if at all possible!)

Dives have taken place in 38 separate locations so far, plotted on the graphic below which also shows the boundaries of the MPAs (west to east: Lyme Bay and Torbay cSAC, Chesil Beach & Stennis Ledges MCZ, Studland to Portland cSAC (2 parts), Poole Rocks MCZ):



Happy divers at West Bay despite departure and arrival both coinciding with LW (L), a pleasant day for a survey in Poole Bay (C), and divers contemplating form-filling (or not!) on the way back into Poole (R)

## Training

Dorset Seasearch have been involved in two Observer courses so far this year, both in May, with another planned for the end of August. Of the people involved in the early courses, some have already completed their qualifying dives – warmest congratulations to them; we salute your dedication! If your club is interested in hosting an Observer course, please get in touch (email [seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk)).

One of our two planned specialist workshops took place in mid-July, and introduced many local Seasearchers (as well as an imported diver from East Anglia!) to the delights of sea squirts, courtesy of David Kipling and Sarah Bowen (also imported for the weekend, this time from South Wales). A quick snorkel under the Portland Marina pontoons highlighted the importance of that particular environment to the invasion pathways of non-native species... We all left feeling newly-energized to go and re-examine our photos, though possibly a little daunted by the tribe of Molgulids, which emerged as the bogey group (taking over from Didemnids!)

The sponge workshop will take place on August 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, tutored by Jen Jones (from Pembrokeshire; there's a Welsh theme developing...) and local marine biologist Lin Baldock; there are still places available (email [seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk) to book). The main objective of the course will be to learn how to 'ground-truth' our common local sponges, so they become more readily identifiable on dives or via photos.

Charlotte Bolton has become a Surveyor tutor (after a very long trip to Eyemouth in SE Scotland, only to have the planned course dive blown out), augmenting the existing Dorset Surveyor tutor list of Peter Tinsley and Kathryn Dawson, so we are very keen to hear from people who would like to take the next step up the Seasearch training ladder. If you're running out of space on the Observation form to include all your dive survey information, the Surveyor course is for you.

**Finally, a big thank you to all the divers, skippers, tutors and volunteers who have contributed to Dorset Seasearch so far in 2014:**

Abbi Scott, Adam Stevens, Amy Marsden, Andy Marsh, Andy Ward, Ben Robinson, Brian Davis, Bryan Knight, Carol Horne, Charles McGibney, Chris Wood, Christine Lissoni, Claire Shotton, Clare Allen, Colin Garrett, Fiona Ravenscroft, Jackie Howe, James Lucey, Jeff Lewis, Jess Mead, Jill Lewis, Jon Chamberlain, Julie Hatcher, Justin Evans, Keith Darvelle, Kerry Evans, Lin Baldock, Mark Harrison, Matt Doggett, Nick Owen, Nigel Topham, Polly Whyte, Richard Yorke, Rik Girdler, Rob Spray, Ross Bullimore, Suzie Ward.

Neil Birdsall and Keith Ferris of West Bay Diving; Mike Markey of Poole Diving ("Peveril Myth"); Paul Pike of "Dive Time"; David Sellers of Scimitar Diving.

David Kipling and Sarah Bowen (ascidian course tutors); James Lucey, Josie Pegg & Abbi Scott (Observer tutors)

Apologies to anyone whose name has been inadvertently omitted from this list.

**Remaining 2014 Events**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Contact for further information &amp; booking</b>
August 2 <sup>nd</sup> / 3 <sup>rd</sup> (weekend)	Poole Bay survey dives	DWT (seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk)
August 9 <sup>th</sup> / 10 <sup>th</sup> (weekend)	Sponge workshop, Portland	DWT (seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk)
Tuesday August 12 <sup>th</sup>	Seasearch-friendly evening dive on 'Peveril Myth'	Mike Markey / Poole Diving (mike@poolediving.co.uk)
Sunday August 31 <sup>st</sup>	Portland survey dives	DWT (seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk)
September 20 <sup>th</sup> / 21 <sup>st</sup> (weekend)	Portland survey dives	DWT (seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk)
Sunday September 28 <sup>th</sup>	Lyme Bay survey dives	Rik Girdler (rikgirdler@yahoo.com)
October 11 <sup>th</sup> / 12 <sup>th</sup> (weekend)	Lyme Bay survey dives	Lin Baldock (polychaos6@virgin.net)

Thanks to the divers who contributed photographs; copyright remains with the photographer, as indicated on the images.

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Registered Charity No. 200222. For more information about DWT, our work and the Seasearch project, please visit [www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk) or email [seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk)

Seasearch is a partnership between the Marine Conservation Society (MCS), The Wildlife Trusts, statutory nature conservation bodies and others, co-ordinated nationally by MCS and co-ordinated and delivered locally in England by Wildlife Trust and MCS local co-ordinators. For more information on Seasearch and to see all of the partners involved nationally, please visit [www.seasearch.org.uk](http://www.seasearch.org.uk) or email [info@seasearch.org.uk](mailto:info@seasearch.org.uk)

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