

Seasearch Argyll

2017 Report

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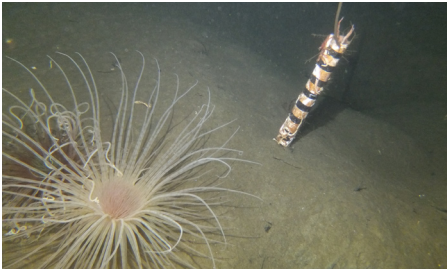
Loch Sween Maerl Bed, P. Bardsley

Surveys

During this year, 23 days diving took place, involving 22 divers and resulting in a total of 43 survey forms. Of these, roughly 75% were Surveyor forms and 25% were Observer forms - a marked increase in the proportion of Surveyor forms to Observer forms. Highlights of the year included finding regenerating serpulid reefs in West Loch Tarbert, recording a population of the anemone *Anthopleura ballii* at the Summer Isles, the incorporation of Seasearch into the Scottish Sub-Aqua Club (SSAC) training schedule and increasing involvement with community-led marine conservation groups.

Courses & Promotion

An Observer course was run in Fort William in 2017 with 9 participants, involving students from the University of the Highlands and Islands. A positive feature of 2017 was the growth of community groups associated with newly designated Marine Protected Areas. Over the year, diving was organised with the Sea Change group in Wester Ross and talks were given to the Friends of the Sound of Jura in Argyll and the CROMACH group based in Loch Craignish, again in Argyll. Two Seasearch talks were given at the SSAC dive conference in Stirling attended by 40 people and a presentation was given to community groups attending a community participative monitoring workshop in Oban organised by SNH.

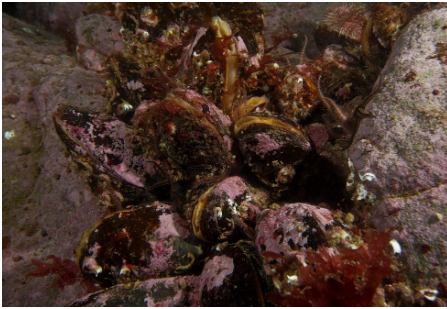


Monitoring Station 6, Loch Shira
J. Rees

January

Predictably the weather in January was pretty wild with gale force winds and heavy rain. None the less, some intrepid divers braved the cold to dive in West Loch Tarbert and Loch Shira. Native oysters were recorded in the West Loch along with horse mussels and relict serpulid reefs. A number of the non-native sea squirt *Styella clava* were also recorded.

In Loch Shira, photographs were taken of the fireworks anemone monitoring sites set up in 2013. Remarkably clear water made the task easier than usual finding the monitoring poles in Loch Shira easy. All 7 anemones first marked in 2013 were still present including a pair so close together that their tentacles touched.



Horse Mussel Clump, Greenock

February

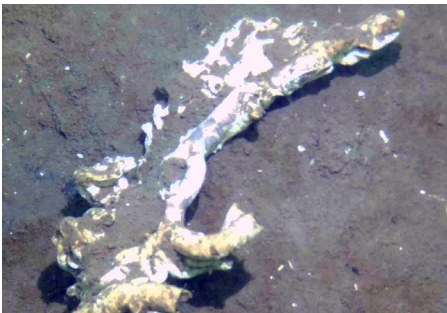
Improving weather in February led to a burst of activity with Seasearch dives in West Loch Tarbert and off Greenock. The West Loch divers again found native oysters and relict serpulid reefs but interestingly they also found signs of new serpulid reefs forming. Serpulid worms were observed growing upwards from collapsed reefs and several small clumps of serpulids looking very like proto reefs were also observed.



Proto Serpulid Reef, West Loch Tarbert,
J. Rees

The diving off Greenock continued to map the extent of a *Modiolus* bed off the Greenock Sub Aqua club base. This was first recorded in 2016 but an earlier attempt to map the reefs extent was cut short when divers found an unexploded torpedo. The 2017 were more successful and increased the known extent of the horse mussel bed for a further 200 meters to the south west.

Seasearch collaboration with other NGO's continued with porpoise sightings passed on to the Clyde Marine Mammal partnership and flapper skate egg case reports to the Shark and Skate Trust.

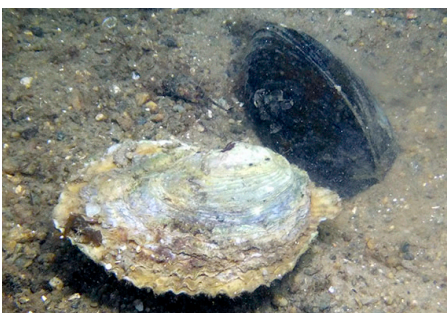


Relict Serpulid Reef, West Loch, J. Rees

March

In March, an Observer course was run in Fort William for 9 students at the University of the Highlands and Islands studying Marine and Coastal Tourism. This was a pilot course with the aim of it becoming an annual event. As the majority of participants were snorkellers rather than qualified divers, this required some adaptation of the standard Seasearch course with a little more emphasis on shore life than usual. Rather than the diving day usually organised after a course, a snorkelling day was arranged at Lochaline. As all the snorkellers were using wet suits, only one session in the sea was arranged followed by guided form filling afterwards.

The potentially regenerating serpulid reefs in West Loch Tarbert were the subject of an Seasearch article in Scottish Diver magazine. Following on from a talk given in 2016 photographs taken during Seasearch fireworks anemone monitoring dives were requested by the Andrew Raven Trust. These were used to illustrate a limited edition book produced to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Trust.



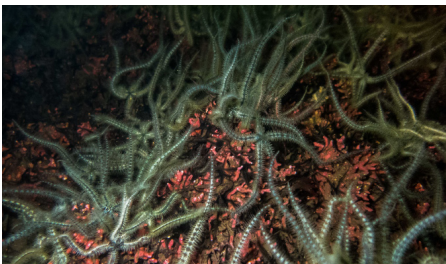
Native Oyster And Horse Mussel, West
Loch, J. Rees



Psolus phantapus In Loch Creran, J. Rees



Summer Isles Diving, J. Rees



Maerl Bed, Loch Sween, P. Bardsley



Flapper Skate Egg Case, Lewis
P. Bardsley



Leptosynapta sp. Spawning In Loch Fyne
P. Bardsley

April

In April, diving surveys took place in Loch Creran and the Summer Isles. The Creran divers recorded horse mussels and, interestingly, a spawning population of the sea cucumber *Psolus pantopus* with animals observed protruding for several cm out of the sediment.

The Summer Isles diving took place in conjunction with Inverness Sub Aqua Club and the community group Sea Change. The initial plan had been for two days diving but poor weather led to a single day's diving. The main feature of note was recording a population of the anemone *Anthopleura ballii* some 200 miles north of the previously most northerly records from Eire.

May

In May, assistance was provided to Heriot Watt University carrying out native oyster surveys in the Linne Mhuirrich, Loch Sween. Disturbingly the native oyster population was lower than previously recorded. This was possibly due to a combination of misidentification of saddle oysters as native oysters and previous episodes of illegal collection. One interesting find was a relict serpulid reef buried approximately 15cm below the sediment surface. As the relict reefs first recorded in the 1990's were still visible on the sediment surface the buried reef may be from a much earlier period and evidence of decade long cycles in serpulid reef abundance.

June

June was a busy month with diving In Loch Fyne, Loch Creran, the Summer Isles and Loch Tealasaway on the west of Lewis.

The Loch Fyne diving took place at the Bar Mor near Tarbert where divers recorded healthy populations of galdsinnay, rockcook and cuckoo wrasse.

Loch Creran diving took place over two days with 9 divers and two RHIBS. The Creran diving covered eight sites checking the health of the serpulid reefs and looking for any sign of the invasive sea squirt *Didemnum vexillum*. A mixture of healthy and collapsed reefs were noted and more positively no sign of *Didemnum*.

Inverness Sub Aqua Club carried out a couple of days diving around the Summer Isles, a continuation of the survey work carried out in April.

An interesting find during the Lewis diving was several flapper skate (*Dipturus cf. intermedia*) egg cases which were reported to the Shark and Ray Trust.

A talk was also given to the community group "Friends of the Sound of Jura" about Seasearch and marine conservation.

August

Two diving days were organised during August, in Loch Shira and

the Sound of Jura. The Loch Shira diving involved photographing the usual monitoring site. Alongside the fireworks anemones, Fries gobies and long clawed squat lobsters, several juvenile plaice were seen. There was also a noticeable increase in the abundance of *nephrops* burrows along the monitoring transect. Encouraging signs following the banning of prawn trawling at the head of Loch Fyne. The second dive took place at the Keills jetty, Sound of Jura with divers reporting a number of stalked jellyfish (*Lucernariopsis campanulata*) in a healthy kelp forest.

September

During September, six forms were returned from a diving group visiting Wester Ross. They recorded healthy populations of feather stars and wrasse present at three of the six sites dived. Further diving took place at Loch Shira to capture photographs of the anemones missed in the August dive.

October

Two talks were given at the Scottish sub-aqua club AGM as break out sessions and were attended by approximately 30 divers. As a result, an Observer course was arranged for Kilmarnock club early in 2018.

November

Following reports of possible anchoring damage in Scotnish Narrows in Loch Sween, a dive was organised and four divers swam the length of the narrows, fortunately finding no damage. A dive also took place in Loch Fyne near Inveraray during which divers observed and photographed specimens of the burrowing holothurian, *Leptosynapta* sp.

A number of meetings were attended in November including taking part in a community participative monitoring workshop in Oban, a meeting with the Loch Craignish community group and attendance at the Seasearch coordinators workshop in London.

December

After a long wait the new Scottish Sub Aqua club log books arrived. The latest edition contains Seasearch qualification pages which means that all divers undertaking training with SSAC will have Seasearch as one of their training options.

A huge thank you to all the volunteer divers who gave freely of their time and energy in 2017.

They include: Jim Anderson, Peter Bardsley, George Brown, Jason Coles, Rory O'Callaghan, Tony O' Callaghan, D.Gillies, T.Gloag, Claire Hallybone, Natalie Hirst, Scott Hughes, Graham Jackson, James Lynott, Glenn King, Hilary Mackay, Kerry MacKay, Neil MacInnes, Frank Melvin, O. Paisley, Tim Parmley, J.Rees, Colin Wishart.

Seasearch in Scotland gratefully acknowledge the financial support provided by Scottish Natural Heritage in 2017.



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.

