



## Dorset Seasearch: 2015 'end-of-season' newsletter



Charlotte Bolton

Dorset Seasearch Co-ordinator

### The year in summary

It's that time of year again – the weather is allowing fewer and fewer opportunities to get in the water, the Birmingham dive show has been and gone, and the annual call of 'any more forms?' goes out... The 2015 Seasearch season in Dorset has been a story of good underwater visibility and strong winds, with the latter frequently preventing us making the most of the former! Frustratingly, we lost a whole weekend (Lin Baldock's 'season-closer' from Lyme Regis) and two diving evenings (on "Peveril Myth" out of Poole) from the schedule to the wind, leaving 11 full days and one evening dive completed. The winter of 2014-2015 was very quiet in comparison to the year before, which may help to explain why the viz has been good (into double figures at times) right from the start of the season. There was plenty of plankton about in the water column, for both the spring and autumn blooms, but the fine silt churned up by the 2013-2014 winter storms seems to be settling down and consolidating again. We may be in for a cold winter, correlating with this year's El Niño conditions in the Pacific – it will be interesting to observe the effects in the coming months. Thick gloves and undersuits at the ready!

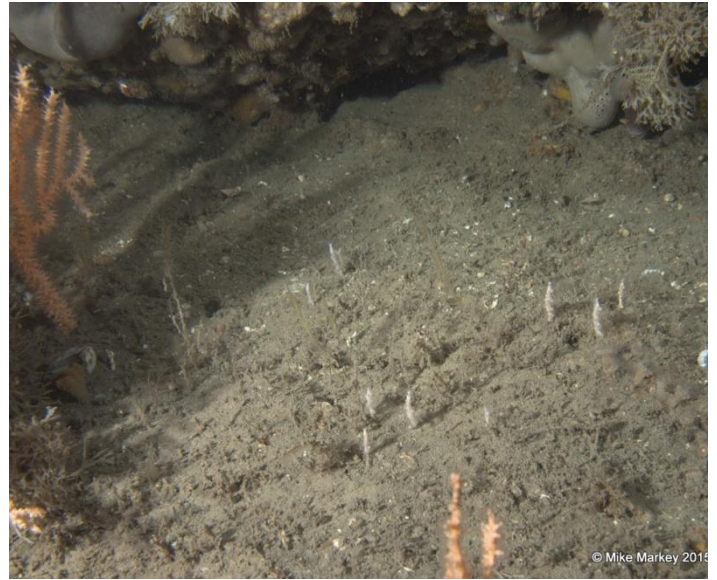
But back to 2015... Having started the 'official' Seasearch season with a weekend out of Poole in mid-May, Nick Owen and Rik Girdler organised hard boats from Lyme Regis and West Bay at the end of June, and again out of West Bay at the end of August, to survey some interesting new sites in the Lyme Bay and Torbay SAC chosen from the DORIS bathymetric map (available online for your own dive planning and expeditions at [www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/dorset\\_seasearch.html](http://www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/dorset_seasearch.html)). A weekend from Weymouth to the Kimmeridge ledges and brittlestar beds at the start of September (organised by Sheilah Openshaw on the hard boat "Tango") was graced with beautiful weather, and also large crowds to celebrate WaterFest around the harbour... The settled conditions in the middle of October, courtesy of a stubborn Atlantic high, generated easterly winds that once again curtailed the weekend on "Blue Turtle" from Lyme Regis.

The 'official' Observer course was unfortunately cancelled due to lack of participants but Swanage hosted a Clidive-organised course (tutored by James Lucey and Nick Reed) at the end of May which has introduced more London-based divers to Seasearch. An Observer course is scheduled for May 2016 so sign up now, or arrange a course just for your club (subject to sufficient numbers).



In terms of marine life in 2015, once again we were treated to lots of jellyfish (but unfortunately no turtles), and it was surely a boom year for many species of nudibranchs (especially *Crimora papillata*). Chesil Cove continued to delight divers with the cuttlefish show, although the returning beach has made access hard work once more. There have been large numbers of dogfish/cat shark (*Scyliorhinus canicula*) around in the Cove recently, as well as the cuttles, and the very sad sight of a mature female porbeagle shark (*Lamna nasus*) accidentally caught in fishing nets. That's not a species that often gets recorded on Seasearch forms although it is infrequently sighted from boats, as with the sunfish (*Mola mola*; only one seen this year). Other less-recorded species spotted this year include spiny seahorses (*Hippocampus guttulatus*) in both Studland Bay and Portland Harbour, *Aplysia fasciata* (a larger, darker Southern species than our more common sea hare species *A. punctata*) and the pogge (*Agonus cataphractus*; above left, in Chesil Cove). We also recorded a first for Dorset, and the first-ever Seasearch record – the Mediterranean nudibranch species *Tritonia manicata* was spotted on the inshore reefs south of Durdle Door in September.





**ABOVE:** *Eunicella verrucosa*, the next generation – a forest of juvenile seafans at East Tennants Reef in Lyme Bay.

**ABOVE LEFT:** *Tritonia manicata*, a first-ever record for Seasearch and Dorset. **BELOW LEFT:** a *Suberites* sponge on an *Ampelisca* (amphipod) bed – a special Dorset habitat that seems to be increasing in area. **BELOW RIGHT:** the unusual sight of a large mature plaice (*Pleuronectes platessa*) off Pulpit Rock, Portland. Nesting wrasse are a common sight in spring – corkwing (*Sympodus melops*) on the Fleur de Lys wreck (**BOTTOM LEFT**) and Baillon's (*Sympodus bailloni*) on the Ringstead Bay wreck (**BOTTOM RIGHT**), both in May this year.





## VARIED DORSET HABITATS...

The forest of *Sargassum muticum* at Swanage Pier (**LEFT**), bream nests in Swanage Bay (**BELOW LEFT**) and the wonderfully-diverse Ballard Maerl Beds (**BELOW**).



Some Ballard Maerl Bed residents: cuttlefish *Sepia officinalis* (**ABOVE LEFT**), sea mouse *Aphrodita aculeata* (**ABOVE RIGHT**) and clingfish (**CENTRE RIGHT**).



Despite the capricious weather and the change from full-time to part-time co-ordination this season, we've had a very good number of forms so far (with more to come?), dived many new sites and seen lots of new faces on Seasearch boats, so a massive thumbs-up to everyone involved. The data entry of all the forms into Marine Recorder has almost finished and will inform the annual summary and individual MCZ reports once completed.

New and/or higher-resolution bathymetric data has recently been released for Lyme Bay and southern Dorset waters so the online resource will soon be updated to allow even better dive site searching and discovery.

## Recording

A total of 159 Dorset forms (87 Observation, 67 Survey, 5 seafan) from 46 individual divers had been submitted either directly or via the National Co-ordinator by the end of November. Well done everyone, keep them coming!

Survey dives have taken place in 57 separate locations within Dorset this year, 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):



The 'most-dived' site, using the metric of 'number of forms received', was unsurprisingly Swanage Pier (28 separate forms so far) – a total enhanced by the Observer course held there at the end of May!

Many of the markers around Weymouth indicate survey dives carried out by the Community Seagrass Initiative (CSI), a Heritage Lottery Fund-supported project for volunteer divers. The CSI project officer, Jess Mead, has been compiling observation forms based on the CSI survey dives to ensure that the data is captured and used as part of the larger Seasearch dataset.

The majority of the diving took place in one flavour of MPA or other, though given the proportion of designated areas in Dorset (36% of the area up to 6 nautical miles offshore) that's not particularly remarkable. One of the strategic targets for 2016 will be to investigate currently-undesigned areas, either for consideration in the third and final tranche of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs), to explore the possibility of boundary changes of existing MPAs (the process by which this may happen is not yet known, however) or to provide evidence for as-yet-undesigned features. But the main aim will be to go diving as much as possible, since **"any dive can be a Seasearch dive"** so please tell us where you went and what you saw!

## Contact us!

Email: [seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk)

 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/seasearch.dorset/>

## Finally, a big thank you to all the divers, skippers and volunteers who have been involved with Dorset Seasearch or submitted forms so far in 2015:

Abbi Scott, Amy Marsden, Anastasiya Grachova, Andy Jackson, Andy Marsh, Barbara King, Beccy Oliver, Ben Robinson, Bob Wiles, Carol Horne, Cathryn Quick, Charlotte Bolton, Chris Webb, Chris Wood, Christine Lissoni, Desmond Curran, Edwina Cook, Emma Christison, Emma Collins, Hugh Waite, Ian Baker, Jackie O'Dowd, Jess Mead, Josie Pegg, Julie Hatcher, Karen Dunford, Kevin Jones, Leanne Collinson, Lin Baldock, Mark Harrison, Mark O'Loughlin, Matt Doggett, Martin Openshaw, Mike Markey, Neil Watson, Nick Owen, Nigel Topham, Phil Beale, Polly Whyte, Preeda Harish Kumar, Richard Yorke, Rik Girdler, Rod Sterland, Ros Hepple, Ross Bullimore, Sarah Turpin, Sheilah Openshaw, Simon Loveday, Stephen Turner, Steve Maclaurin, Steve Trehwella, Victor Pace

Neil Birdsall & Keith Ferris ("Ruby J"); Phil Corbin ("Tango"); Rob King ("Blue Turtle"); Mike Markey ("Peveril Myth")

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

Thanks also to everyone who has submitted photos; copyright remains with the original photographer as credited.



Dorset Wildlife Trust, Brooklands Farm, Forston, Dorchester, Dorset, DT2 7AA; Tel: 01305 264620; Fax: 01305 251120. 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)

DWT would like to acknowledge the support and funding received for Dorset Seasearch from the Marine Conservation Society.



## 2016 Dorset Seasearch Events

Date	Event	Contact for further information & booking
Saturday January 23 <sup>rd</sup> 1.30pm	Social gathering (jointly with Community Seagrass Initiative) at the Grasshopper pub in Parkstone	seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk or jessica.mead@national-aquarium.co.uk
Saturday May 14 <sup>th</sup>	Observer course (classroom)	seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk
Sunday May 15 <sup>th</sup>	Observer RIB dives (priority given to course attendees)	seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk
Wednesday May 25 <sup>th</sup>	Seasearch-friendly evening dive in Lyme Bay ("Ruby J" or "Blue Turtle")	Charlotte Bolton (warriorwomble@gmail.com)
Wednesday June 8 <sup>th</sup>	Seasearch-friendly evening dive in Lyme Bay ("Ruby J" or "Blue Turtle")	Charlotte Bolton (warriorwomble@gmail.com)
Wednesday June 15 <sup>th</sup>	Seasearch-friendly evening dive in Lyme Bay ("Ruby J" or "Blue Turtle")	Charlotte Bolton (warriorwomble@gmail.com)
June 18 <sup>th</sup> /19 <sup>th</sup> (weekend)	Lyme Bay survey dives (hard boat "Blue Turtle")	Nick Owen (n.owen865@btinternet.com)
Wednesday June 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Seasearch-friendly evening dive in Lyme Bay ("Ruby J" or "Blue Turtle")	Charlotte Bolton (warriorwomble@gmail.com)
Wednesday June 29 <sup>th</sup>	Seasearch-friendly evening dive in Lyme Bay ("Ruby J" or "Blue Turtle")	Charlotte Bolton (warriorwomble@gmail.com)
Wednesday July 6 <sup>th</sup>	Seasearch-friendly evening dive in Lyme Bay ("Ruby J" or "Blue Turtle")	Charlotte Bolton (warriorwomble@gmail.com)
Sunday July 17 <sup>th</sup>	Lyme Bay survey dives (hard boat "Ruby J")	Rik Girdler (rikgirdler@yahoo.com)
July 30 <sup>th</sup> /31 <sup>st</sup> (weekend)	Portland survey dives (hard boat "Scimitar")	seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk
August 13 <sup>th</sup> /14 <sup>th</sup> (weekend)	Swanage survey dives (hard boat "Viper"/"Mary Jo")	seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk
October 8 <sup>th</sup> / 9 <sup>th</sup> (weekend)	Lyme Bay survey dives (hard boat "Blue Turtle")	Lin Baldock (linbaldock@btinternet.com)