

The table to the right shows how many species in each Phylum were found, and what the most common species were. Listed below are records of particular interest.

Sponges: the most common species was the sea orange *Suberites ficus*. This tends to be associated with sand and mud habitats.

Bryozoans: *Vesicularia spinosa* was recorded from Red Bay. This is not known from many sites in Northern Ireland.

Anemones, Corals, Hydroids and Jellyfish: the white cluster anemone *Parazoanthus anguicomus* was recorded from sea caves near Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge. This is a Northern Ireland Species of Conservation Concern.

Crustaceans: three records were made of the spiny spider crab *Maja brachydactyla* from near Portrush. This is a southern species, one of the first NI records was from a Seasearch dive in 2006. It may be increasing in numbers due to climate change.

Phylum/sub-phylum	Common name	Total records	Number of Species	Common species (number of records in brackets)
Porifera	Sponges	46	16	<i>Suberites ficus</i> – Sea Orange (14) <i>Pachymatisma johnstonia</i> – Elephant Hide Sponge (9)
Cnidaria	Anemones, corals, hydroids, jellyfish	163	23	<i>Cerianthus lloydii</i> – Burrowing anemone (28) <i>Aurelia aurita</i> – Moon jellyfish – (19)
Annelida	Segmented worms	42	12	<i>Arenicola marina</i> - Lug worm (11) <i>Eupolyminia nebulosa</i> - Strawberry worm (6)
Crustacea	Lobsters, crabs, barnacles	204	21	<i>Liocarcinus depurator</i> – Harbour swimming crab (29) <i>Pagurus bernhardus</i> – Common hermit crab (26)
Mollusca	Shells, sea slugs, cuttlefish, octopus	89	27	<i>Calliostoma zephyrinum</i> – Painted top shell (18) <i>Pecten maximus</i> – King Scallop (8)
Bryozoa	Sea mats	41	8	<i>Membranipora membranacea</i> – Sea mat (11) <i>Flustra foliacea</i> – Hornwrack (6)
Echinodermata	Starfish, urchins, sea cucumbers	89	18	<i>Echinus esculentus</i> – Edible urchin (20) <i>Asterias rubens</i> – Common starfish (20)
Tunicata	Sea squirts	36	9	<i>Clavelina lepadiformis</i> - Light bulb seasquirt (14) <i>Botryllus schlosseri</i> - Star sea squirt (7)
Pisces	Fishes	195	2	<i>Pomatoschistus spp</i> - Sand/common goby (28) <i>Labrus bergylla</i> – Ballan wrasse (16)
Algae and Seagrasses	Seaweeds and Seagrass	398	79	<i>Laminaria saccharina</i> – Sugar kelp (33) <i>Ulva lactuca</i> - Sea lettuce (25)
Total		1310	242	

Molluscs: the sea slug *Crimora papillata* was spotted off Ramore head, Portrush. This is another southern species, with very few Northern Ireland records.

Echinoderms: the sea cucumber *Neopentadactyla mixta* was recorded from inside of the Skerries. This small white sea cucumber buries in clean sand or gravel.

Fish: two species of pipefish - the snake pipefish *Entelurus aequoreus* and the worm pipefish *Nerophis lumbriciformis* were recorded in association with seagrass beds. No seahorses yet though!

Seaweeds: 79 species of seaweed were recorded, a considerable improvement on last year's total of 45. We suspect that this may be down to the participation of Charmaine Blake, an NIEA algae expert, in the surveys, and are hoping some of her knowledge will rub off on the rest of us!



The bryozoan *Vesicularia spinosa* - DG



Snake pipefish *Entelurus aequoreus*

Northern Ireland Summary Report 2008



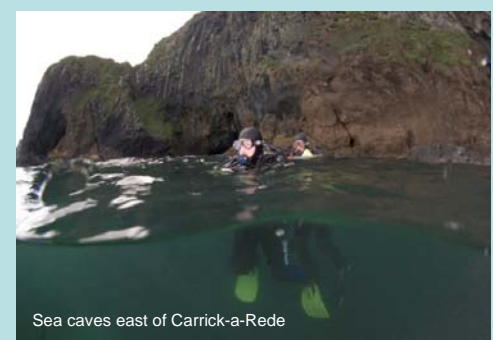
Edible crab *Cancer pagurus* - DG



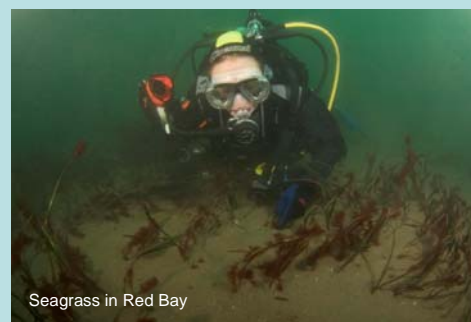
Seasearching in Red Bay - DG



Maeri in Red Bay



Sea caves east of Carrick-a-Rede



Seagrass in Red Bay



Close up of edible urchin *Echinus esculentus* - DG



Surveyors taking part were: Orea Anderson, Charmaine Blake, Andrew Blight, Sharon Doake, Colin Ferguson, Allan Goodwin, Claire Goodwin, Dave Goodwin, Melvyn Heath, Catherin Higgins, Alasdair Kennedy, Sven Laming, Adrian Marshall, Dearn McClintock, Brian McKinstry, Melina McMullan, Julia Nunn, Daniel O'Neill, and Ronnie Snyder

Thanks to DV diving and Aquaholics, who were used for boat cover and supplied site information.

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 Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

This report was written by Claire Goodwin (thanks to Julia Nunn and Chris Wood for editorial comments). Photos are by Claire Goodwin and Dave Goodwin (DG).



An Agency within the Department of the Environment
www.doeni.gov.uk

For more information on Seasearch Northern Ireland email claire.goodwin@gmail.com.

www.seasearch.org.uk



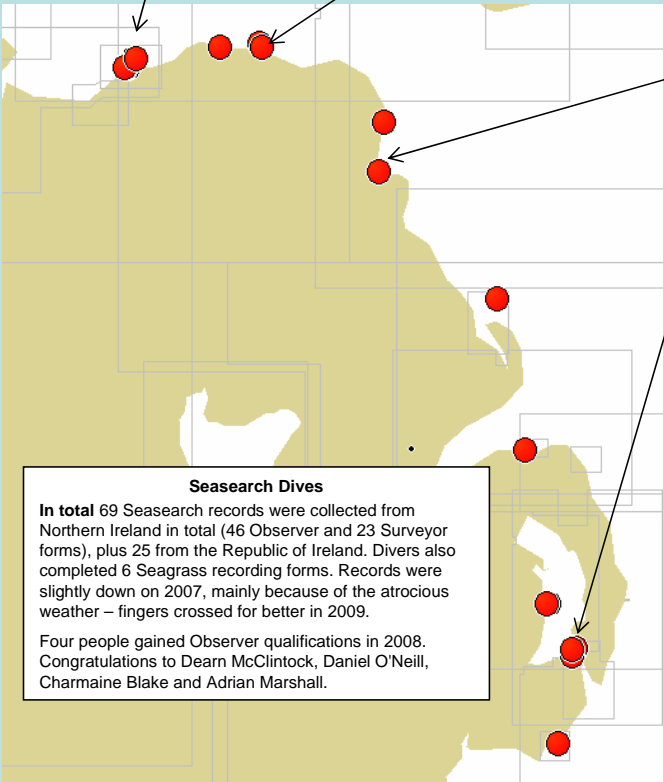
Sea Cave Survey
 Poor weather thwarted many of the sea cave surveys planned for 2008 as for safety non-swelly conditions were needed. We did manage to survey one set of caves to the east of Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge. Some interesting species were recorded, including the white cluster anemone *Parazoanthus anguicomus*, and the stalked jellyfish *Halicyclystus auricula* which is a UK Biodiversity Action Priority species.



Recording seagrass density using a quadrat

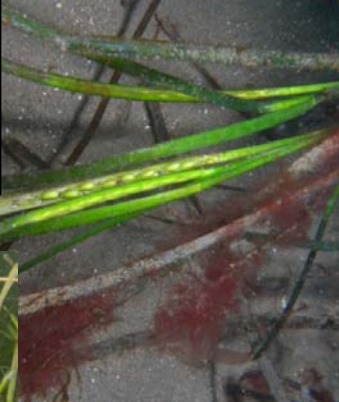
Training
 A **Seagrass Specialist** course was run on 31st May and 1st June. This course gave an introduction to seagrass ecology, survey methods, and the identification of associated species. Seagrass survey is a major part of the Seasearch NI work programme over the next three years, and this course provided training to those who will be participating in the project. A series of lectures on Saturday was followed by two survey dives on Sunday (see dive report section for more information). There were 11 participants.
 Two Seasearch **Observer Courses** were held. The first in Portaferry on the 8 and 9th of March was attended by 10 divers. The second was at Ballyholme Yacht Club in Bangor, attended by six people.
 A **Marine Life Identification course** was held at Portaferry on 30th-31st August. This gave Seasearch participants a chance to improve their marine life identification skills through a mixture of lectures, and field and classroom practical sessions. NIEA staff member Charmaine Blake came along to enthuse participants about seaweeds. There were 16 participants.

Ramore Head Survey
 In 2006, the sewage outfall pipe on Ramore Head (Portrush) was turned off. Over the next three years, we will be surveying this site to see what effect this has on the species present here. One day of surveying took place in 2008.



Seagrass Surveys
 Our main target in 2008 was to survey some of the Seagrass beds present in Northern Ireland. Very little was previously known about these, with information from only a few spot dives. Seagrass is a UK Biodiversity Action Priority Habitat. The sublittoral seagrass species found in the UK is *Zostera marina*, which is scarce in the UK. Seagrass plants stabilise the substratum, are an important source of organic matter, and provide shelter and a surface for attachment by other species. Seagrass beds are an important habitat, providing nursery areas for species such as flat fish and habitat for rare species such as seahorses.
 We surveyed beds in Strangford Lough and in Red Bay on the east coast of Northern Ireland. The extent of two beds in Strangford Lough (Ballyhenry and Quoile) was mapped and quadrat measurements were taken to indicate density. The edges were mapped by a diver swimming around them with a surface marker buoy to which a GPS was attached. The Ballyhenry bed was found to be much bigger than previously suspected. Some of the seagrass in Red Bay and Strangford Lough was found to be bearing seeds. This is unusual as in water of our temperature most reproduction is thought to occur vegetatively. We will return to the beds in 2009 to map them in more detail.

Seagrass *Zostera marina* bearing seeds - DG



Seasearch Dives
 In total 69 Seasearch records were collected from Northern Ireland in total (46 Observer and 23 Surveyor forms), plus 25 from the Republic of Ireland. Divers also completed 6 Seagrass recording forms. Records were slightly down on 2007, mainly because of the atrocious weather – fingers crossed for better in 2009.
 Four people gained Observer qualifications in 2008. Congratulations to Dearn McClintock, Daniel O'Neill, Charmaine Blake and Adrian Marshall.

Edible Crab *Cancer pagurus* in seagrass bed - DG



Charmaine Blake trying to impart enthusiasm for algae to Marine ID course participants.