

Seasearch

Newsletter 17 - October 2011



This National Seasearch Newsletter is being circulated, by email, to our database of over 3,000 Seasearch participants and interested organisations. In it we want to bring you up to date with some of the Seasearch activities which have taken place in 2011 and also about how your data is being used in the Marine Conservation Zones projects.

Seasearch is a volunteer underwater survey project for recreational divers, enabling them to contribute to protecting marine wildlife through recording underwater habitats and the plants and animals they support. Seasearch provides training for volunteer divers and organises dives and survey expeditions.

We need your Seasearch data now!

Despite poor weather affecting some of our surveys over the summer we have already received over 1,500 Seasearch Forms from dives in 2011. We will be starting the data entry process for 2011 shortly and to make sure all the data is used **IF YOU HAVE ANY FORMS FROM YOUR DIVES THIS YEAR THAT YOU HAVE NOT SENT IN TO SEASEARCH PLEASE DO SO NOW**. You can either send them to your local coordinator or to Seasearch at the MCS address on the form and we will make sure they get to the right place. See the next two pages for a summary of our 2011 surveys.

Progress with Marine Conservation Zones

The four project groups working to recommend MCZs in England have come up with their proposals. They are for 127 MCZs covering an area of 15.3% of England's sea area. They include 65 'reference sites' which are broadly no take zones but these cover less than 1% of the network and all of the larger ones are offshore.

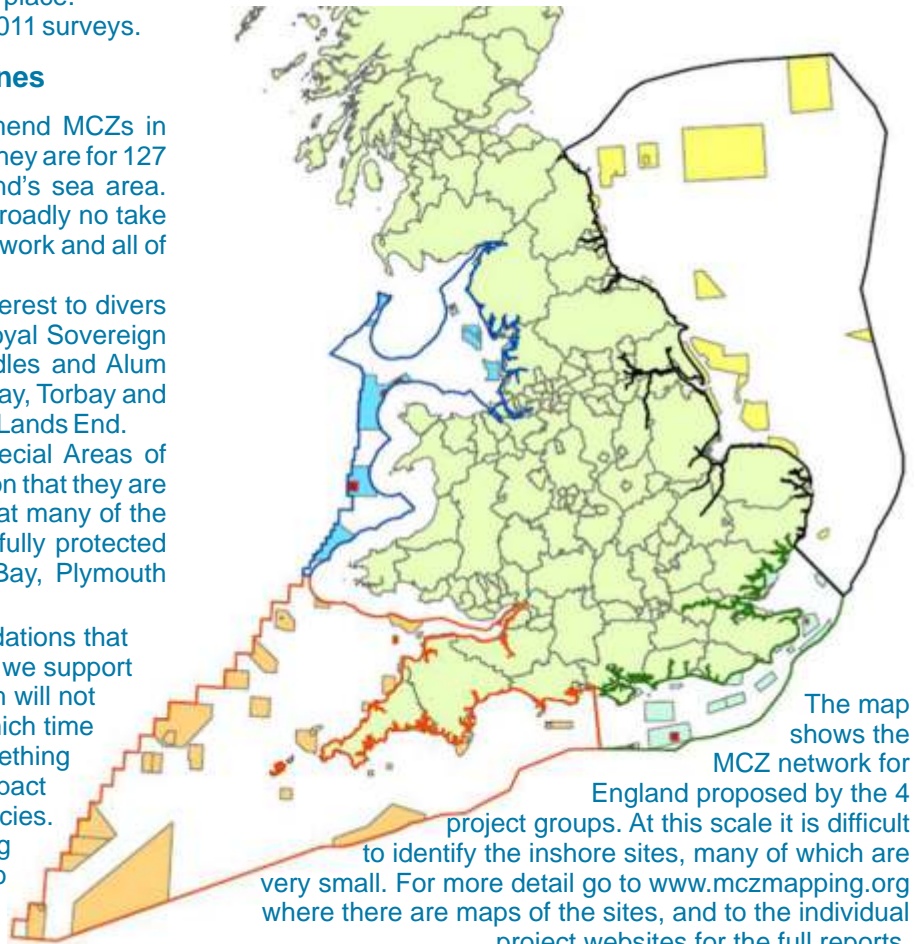
Sites included in the network of particular interest to divers are North Norfolk and Kent chalk reefs, Royal Sovereign Shoals, Worthing Lumps, Mixon Hole, Needles and Alum Bay, Studland Bay, Stennis Ledges in Lyme Bay, Torbay and Berry Head, Whitsand Bay, the Manacles and Lands End.

There is very little overlap with existing Special Areas of Conservation as there has been an assumption that they are already sufficiently protected. That means that many of the best known and loved sites will not receive fully protected status, including the Farne Islands, Lyme Bay, Plymouth offshore reefs and the Isles of Scilly.

There are many things about the recommendations that can be criticised but what is important is that we support them in the public consultation process which will not take place until at least Summer 2012, by which time they may have already been reduced to something even less effective following an economic impact assessment & advice from government agencies. Much of the Seasearch planned survey diving next year will focus on providing more data to justify the inclusion of some of these sites in the final MCZ network.

MCZ progress in Wales, Scotland & N. Ireland

No site recommendations have yet been published outside England. In Wales there are to be three rounds of consultation, the first in January 2012 and covering about 16 sites, all within existing SACs. In Scotland a number of stakeholder workshops have taken place and more are planned for 2012. Northern Ireland is yet to enact similar legislation.



The map shows the MCZ network for England proposed by the 4 project groups. At this scale it is difficult to identify the inshore sites, many of which are very small. For more detail go to www.mczmapping.org where there are maps of the sites, and to the individual project websites for the full reports.

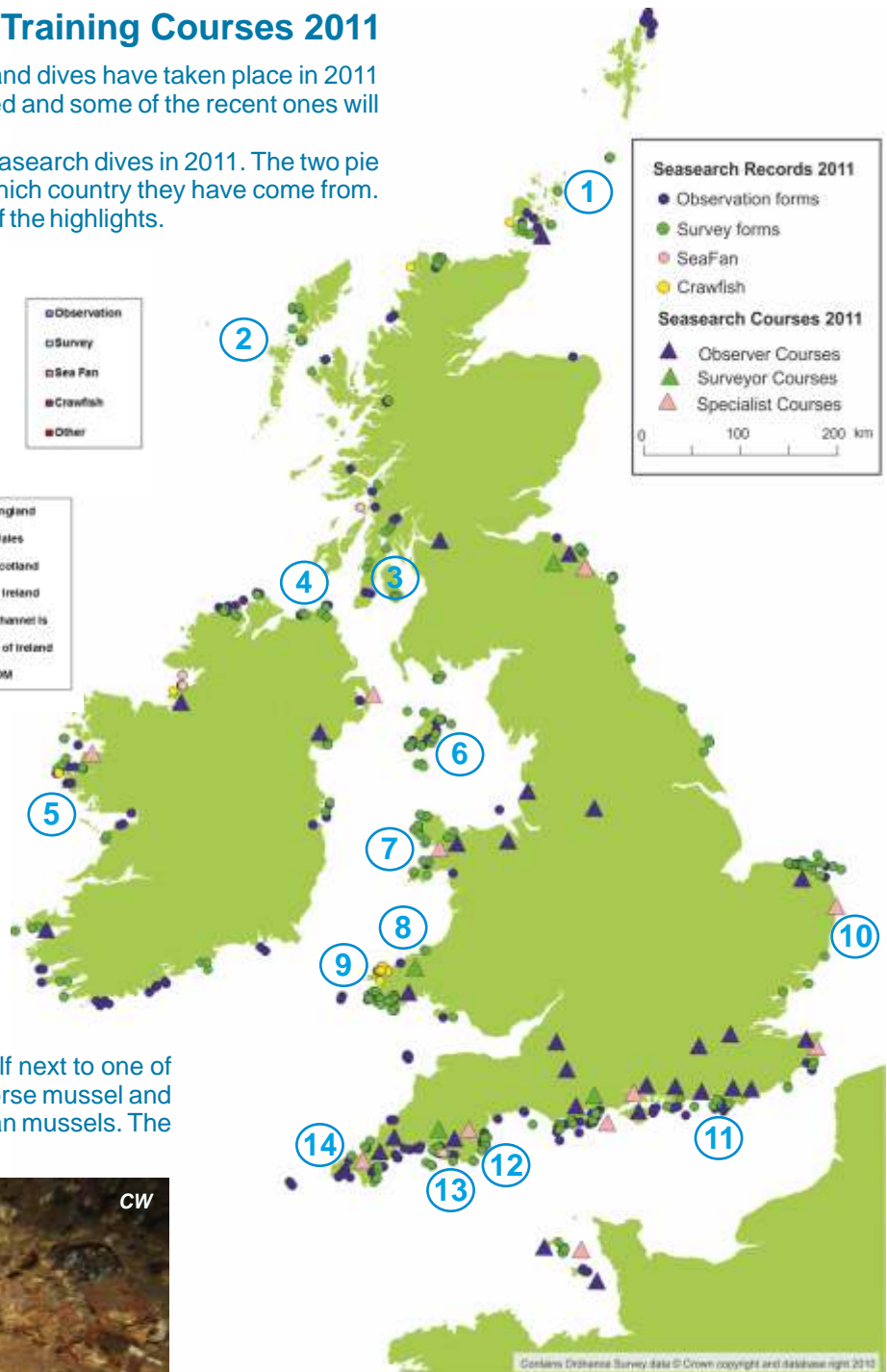
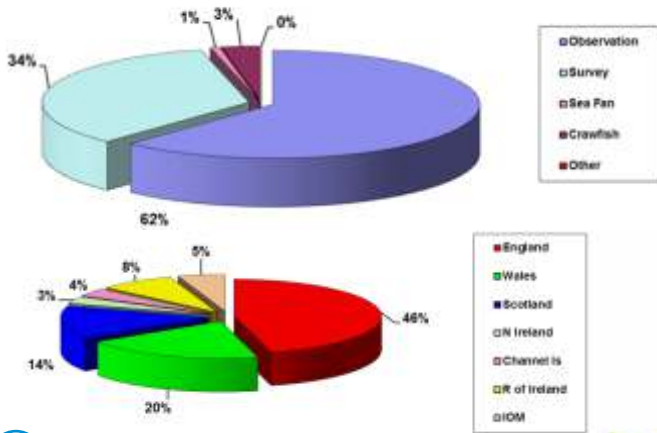


Seasearch is co-ordinated by the Marine Conservation Society on behalf of the Seasearch Steering Group which comprises the Marine Conservation Society, The Wildlife Trusts, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage, Environment and Heritage Service Northern Ireland, Environment Agency, Marine Biological Association, Nautical Archaeological Society, British Sub Aqua Club, Sub Aqua Association, Professional Association of Diving Instructors, Scottish Sub Aqua Club, Irish Underwater Council and independent marine life experts. Financial support at a National level is secured for 2011/2 from the organisations with logos above and there are a number of other supporters at a local level.

Seasearch Dive Surveys and Training Courses 2011

The map shows where Seasearch Courses and dives have taken place in 2011. The data on dives is continually being updated and some of the recent ones will not yet have been included in the map.

So far we have received 1,575 forms from Seasearch dives in 2011. The two pie charts show what sort of data they are and which country they have come from. On the next two pages we summarise some of the highlights.



1 Orkney and Fair Isle

A week-long liveaboard expedition dived Orkney and Fair Isle in August. Fair Isle had not been surveyed at all by Seasearch before and 4 sites were dived on the more sheltered, eastern, side of the island.

Despite its relative isolation, the diversity of marine life was less than, for instance, Rona and Sula Sgeir which were visited on the same boat in 2010.

New sites for Seasearch were also dived on Orkney both inside and outside Scapa Flow.

The most exciting finds were in the Flow itself next to one of the WW1 wrecks where we found a large horse mussel and brittlestar bed containing one of the elusive fan mussels. The first record for some years (below).



2 South Harris

Perfect weather conditions enabled the Seasearch team to reach a number of very exposed sites on the west side of South Harris, from which there was no previous Seasearch data. Although some of the sites were heavily urchin grazed, which the team put down to the distinct lack of crabs and lobsters, where the urchins could not hang on, such as at the wall on Scarp shown right, there was a dizzying wallpaper of yellow and white elegant anemones, jewel anemones, tiny plumose anemones and soft corals.

In the surge zone at another exposed site, Toe Head, there was a colourful orange, white and blue-grey wall of red sea-squirts and sponges thriving on the swell-facing reefs.

3 Kintyre

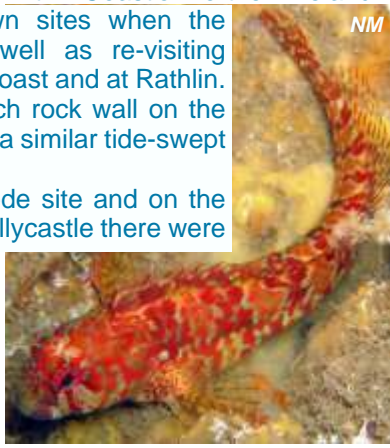
Surveys included a new pinnacle site at the entrance to Campbeltown Loch and trialing a low cost diver tracking system for use in plotting habitat positions in detail and relating underwater images to known locations.



4 Antrim Coast and Rathlin

Seasearch surveys on the Antrim Coast of Northern Ireland targeted less well known sites when the weather permitted, as well as re-visiting known sites on both the coast and at Rathlin. Two new sites were a rich rock wall on the Skerries off Portrush and a similar tide-swept wall at Carrick a Rede.

At both the Carrick a Rede site and on the Templemore wreck off Ballycastle there were records of red blennies, once thought not to occur in the UK (it is also known as Portuguese Blenny) but which is being increasingly recorded in Ireland.



5 Worm reefs in Killary Harbour

The only benefit of less than perfect weather is that you get to different places. On our anemone weekend in Connemara we asked to visit a sediment site in Killary Harbour which turned out to be less than impressive as far as anemones were concerned but contained huge expanses of serpulid worm reefs (below). These are a BAP priority habitat in the UK, but not protected in Ireland. Seasearch Ireland intends to do more work in Killary, Ireland's only fjord. next year.



6 Seasearch helps monitor new marine reserve in the Isle of Man

Seasearch divers in the Isle of Man have helped provide data for the new Ramsey Marine Nature Reserve which was designated by the Manx government in October. The reserve covers a large area at the north east end of the island where the seabed consists largely of sediments and has been highly impacted by dredging for scallops. There are five different zones within the area.

Off the Point of Ayre is a horse mussel zone which is closed to all dredging, trawling and potting. There is a less highly protected coastal zone along north of Ramsey which is permanently closed to dredging and trawling but where potting is allowed. South of Ramsey is a small area of eelgrass which is closed to all fishing and extraction of marine life, and between it an Maughold Head an inshore zone closed to dredging and trawling on a voluntary basis.

Seasearch IOM will be helping to monitor the impact of the new marine reserve working with the Manx Department of Environment.

7 North Wales priority species surveyed

Seasearch dives have targeted locally important species including carpet mussel beds off the Llyn Peninsula, a newly discovered shallow horse mussel bed in Caernarfon Bay and ocean quahog in mud off West Anglesey. Similar surveys in Pembrokeshire have looked at native oysters and invasive slipper limpets.

8 Are there seahorses in Cardigan Bay?

Seasearch divers were asked to look at places where there are historic records of seahorses in Cardigan Bay to assess the suitability of the habitat for a possible re-stocking programme from captive-bred specimens from Anglesey Sea Zoo. Needless to say no seahorses were seen but suitable seaweed habitats were present and a report has been produced which can be downloaded from the Seasearch website (on the Achievements page)

9 North Pembrokeshire Crawfish Survey

Six days of crawfish surveys took place in North Pembrokeshire over the summer, visiting 7 different reefs. The aim of the surveys was to record baseline information on the number and size of crawfish at different sites and to identify habitat preferences to aid any future re-stocking proposals. A total of 44 crawfish were recorded, of which just over half were juveniles. This compares to only 5 crawfish records this year from our on-line recording scheme (3 from Scotland and 2 from Ireland), though there may well be more in the general Seasearch records which have not yet been looked at in detail.



10 Seaweeds and sponges in the East

A mixed group of experts, Seasearch divers and shore based recorders undertook a North Sea coastal survey taking in sites from Essex to Northumberland.

Diving wasn't possible in all locations due to weather conditions and a mechanical breakdown but the team discovered one entirely new species of sponge (right), and more which weren't expected on the East coast. 352 different species were recorded, of which 126 were seaweeds.

The survey was filmed for the BBC and has been shown on regional television.



11 Newhaven Harbour surveyed

The first Seasearch surveys have taken place on the Newhaven Harbour Arm. This man-made structure is rich in marine life and diving has only recently been possible having previously been closed by the Newhaven Harbour Authority.

12 Anemone prawns reach Devon



The diminutive anemone prawn previously known on the northern side of the English Channel only from Dorset, has been recorded this autumn from Babbacombe Bay in Devon. This follows the pattern in Dorset where the first records were also in October though this year they occurred there as early as April.

13 Bioblitzing Devon

Seasearch has provided the sublittoral element to two bioblitzes in Devon. In one at Charlton Bay, Lyme Bay 156 species were recorded, including trigger fish. The other at Barn Pool, Plymouth recorded 60 species in low visibility.

14 Cornwall's North Coast

In May there was a week-long survey expedition of the storm battered north coast of Cornwall which involved a number of experts including Claire Goodwin who helped with the sponges, Teresa Darbyshire who looked at the worms, Ali Bessell who did the hydroid and bryozoan turf species and Juliet Brodie who, although a non-diver, helped us press and identify over 180 species of seaweeds.

This summary only gives a hint of the full range of Seasearch activities this year. Thanks to all of the volunteers who have taken part in organised surveys or provided data from their own dives. We also thank all of the organisations who have supported Seasearch activities locally and who are far too numerous to mention individually.

Seasearch Training 2011



The spring and summer is always the busiest time of year for Seasearch Courses. This year we have run 52 courses involving over 500 volunteers, and there are 2 more to come. The majority of courses have been Observer Courses. They have taken place from Orkney in the north to Jersey in the south and from Dingle in the west to Sheringham in the east and have been the most widespread ever. The image above is of a group of Guernsey and Jersey divers about to carry out their practice dives after one of the last courses of the year in St Peter Port and enjoying the October sun.

There have been 4 Surveyor courses, two in England and one each in Wales and Scotland.

There have also been 18 Specialist courses with topics including fish, anemones, sponges, hydroids, and seaweeds, as well as non-native species and underwater photography for recording marine life. This is also the most ever and is a part of our aim to continually improve the skills of our volunteers and thus the value of their records.

We shall be putting together the programme of courses for 2012 over the winter so now is the time to contact your local coordinator or National Coordinator Chris Wood if you want us to arrange a course in your area, or a specialist course covering a particular topic. Look out for the new programme at the end of December.

New Seasearch Tutors join the team

Our training programme relies on our team of Seasearch tutors and a number of visiting experts, with assistance from a variety of other expert Seasearchers.

This year we have welcomed 4 new Observer Tutors and one new Surveyor Tutor. The Observer tutors are James Lucey, Amy Dale, Mandy Knott and Chris Rickard and the new Surveyor Tutor is Kathryn Dawson. We also have 3 more observer tutors going through the, on the job, training process and who we hope will complete it early next year.

First Seasearch Coordinator for North West England

We also now have a local coordinator for North-West England for the first time. She is Mandy Knott, who is based in Lancashire and works in fisheries. The North-West is one of the most challenging areas in Britain and Ireland to dive and Mandy has no illusions about the task ahead. She is running our third course for the year at Capernwray in December and has plans for dives in 2012.

New Seasearch Observers and Surveyors

Since the last Newsletter in April, 45 divers have achieved the Seasearch Observer qualification. They are:

Andy Marsh (E), Julie Morrissey (W), Edith Roland (S), Raymond Buchanan (S), Shon Roberts (W), Paula Young (E), Mattias Biber (W), Julia Riddell (W), Mark Card, (E), Andy Hathaway (E), Graham Brown (E), Zoe Caals (E), Bertie Gault (NI), Chris Sargeant (W), Tim Mapstone (E), Carole Mapstone (E), Alan Goulding (E), Jon Chamberlain (E), Sabrina Heiser (E), Colin Engel (E), Charlotte Bolton (E), Heather Ogden (E), Christopher Hanson (E), Sean Staunton (I), Suzanne Morton (E), Richard Morton (E), Paddy Maher (E), Alex Bevan (E), Miha Zakotnik (E), Bernd Baufield (W), Sam Pountney (E), Ray Furlong (I), Ethel Geohegan (I), Mary O'Donohoe (I), Richard Thorn (I), Suzanne Thorn (I), Robert Irvine (NI), Barbara Irvine (NI), Naomi Davies (E), Rebecca Oliver (E), Richard Clegg (E), Ian Kenney (E), Penny Martin (S), Keith Best (E), Suzanne Beal (E) and Paul Firth (E).

In the same period there have been 8 new Seasearch Surveyors. They are Ralf Huebner (W), Carrie Pillow (E), Emily Williams (W), Thomas Kerr (S), Allison Gleadhill (E), Rob Adams (E), Charlotte Bolton (E) & Wendy Northway (E). Congratulations to them all.



This Newsletter is produced twice a year and is sent by email to over 3,000 individuals and organisations. Please let us know by phone or email if you change your email address, or if you want to be deleted from our database.

The Seasearch website is the place to look for the latest Seasearch news, courses, dives and results. You can find it at:

www.seasearch.org.uk

email: info@seasearch.org.uk

phone: 07776 142096

Newsletter edited by Chris Wood with contributions from coordinators and Jean-Luc Solandt. Images by Calum Duncan, Chris Wood, Dan Bolt, James Lucey, Noel Moran and Rob Spray.

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