

Jersey Seasearch Reef Survey 2016

Kevin McIlwee, Jersey Seasearch Coordinator

The Jersey Seasearch group operate on the southern limit of Britain. Lying close to Brittany and Normandy we have quite a different climate to the UK even though we are only 120 miles south. Sea temperatures in the Channel Islands consistently sit at 1 or 2 degrees above those along the South Coast of England. Winters are mild and throughout the year rainfall can be relatively low with long periods of sunshine. This year however summer seemed like it had forgotten us here in Jersey. On Sunday June 25th, the start of our annual Survey Week, it felt more like spring than summer with air and water temperatures showing no discernible rise for over a month. Neap tides and the approaching summer solstice have in the last three years provided fairly settled weather. The week's forecast this year suggested otherwise. This was to be the start of not only our annual survey but also a week long Surveyor Course. This followed a theory workshop held at the Société Jersiaise HQ, for our new trainees many of whom are currently at University or are school teachers. It would give them the unique opportunity to participate alongside experts in our fourth annual Reef Survey. Our long-term aim is to build up an accurate snapshot of species annual behaviour cycles, possible anomalies, migration due to climate change and the effects of human factors on habitats.

As we splashed into the water, our dive computers showed 15°C as we descended to the shale sea bed 21m below, located on the western fringe of Portelet Bay; a small steeply dropping cove, encircling a rocky pinnacle topped by Captain Janvrin's Tomb. *Returning from abroad he and his some of ship's crew brought with them the dreaded plague. Janvrin died within sight of his beloved island but was not allowed ashore even to be buried on the mainland. His crew decided to intern him on the island.* Inside his prominent but lonely resting place as we began surveying it was probably only 9°C, the same as our lowest sea temperature, recorded in Bouley in January.

The week is carefully chosen to coincide with Neap Tides and that Sunday the height reached would only be a measly 7m above Chart Datum, contrasting with a possible 11m a week later! We had hoped for some calm waters enabling us to venture out to the remote Sauvage Reef but unfortunately with high winds and choppy sea, this had to be postponed. We settled for an inshore site in the cove, nestling below the impressive homes of such celebrities as Nigel Mansell. This section of the coast, swept by up to three knot tides, holds a wide variety of sponges and colonies of beautiful of Bryozoans such as Potato Crisp (*Pentapora foliacea*, below left) and Hornwrack (*Flustra foliacea*, below right).



Potato Crisp Bryozoan *Pentapora foliacea* K; McIlwee 2016



Hornwrack *Flustra foliacea* ♂, Orange-cubbed Sea Slug *Cimacia clavijera* K; McIlwee 2016

One of our first significant finds on the dive that day reinforced investigations in past years. However, what we observed was particularly apparent this year since we were coming across a much greater number of nudibranch sea slugs, particularly two very colourful characters; the black and yellow spotted *Thecacera pennigera* (below left) and the yellow edged *Polycera faeroensis* (below right), often seen in pairs or small groups. Suggesting this time of year is

an important mating period which may pass more quickly and therefore be less apparent when sea temperatures rise as rapidly as they normally do. Both slugs appeared to like the Potato Crisp snacks but are particularly partial to varieties of Bugula for courtship and romantic meals.



Thecacera pennigera K,McIlwee 2016

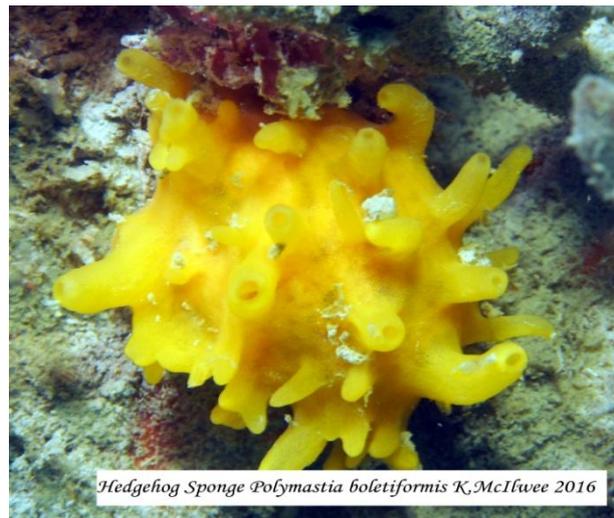


Polycera faeroensis K,McIlwee 2016

A sponge which seemed to appear at frequent intervals during our drift with the current that sweeps along the red granite cliffs, was the bright yellow aptly named Golf Ball sponge, *Tethya citrina* (below left). Often in close proximity is an equally prominent cluster of short stumpy yellow tubes known as a hedgehog sponge, *Polymastia boletiformis* (below right).



Golf Ball Sponge *Tethya citrina* K,McIlwee 2016



Hedgehog Sponge *Polymastia boletiformis* K,McIlwee 2016



A particularly unique and large anemone, affectionately christened 'Dorothy' by a former Guernsey Aquarium Curator, was found nestled amongst the angular boulders in these relatively shallow waters (left).

In search of a contrasting seabed we then journeyed up to the North East of the Island to an area much changed by the influence of a man-made construction, the St Catherine's Breakwater. This 700m long construction completed just too late for the Napoleonic wars, proved to be an expensive disaster for the British Navy. The enclosed bay rapidly began silting up on commencement of the construction. Out of this

fully a surprising development has been the expansion of a seagrass area into one of the largest in Europe. The outer boundary drops through small rounded bluffs surrounded by Maerl (coralline red algae, see below right) onto muddy sand. The slack water next to the Le Fara Cardinal, the largest of these outcrops, allowed the divers the chance to examine the sponge encrusted outcrops, adjacent calcified deposits and extensive scallop beds, protected by the hazardous nature of the reef.



On the following day conditions looked reasonable and we set off to visit our most southerly site; The Sauvages, lying south east of the more extensive Minquiers reef.

The journey down did not favour some of the team and getting into the water provided a respite from the constant motion. Reaching the seabed below a towering cliff we were presented with a beautiful display of projecting polyps of the sunset cup coral (*Leptopsammia pruvoti*, below left), radiating out from the central disk. Beautiful male cuckoo wrasse (*Labrus mixtus*, below right) cruised back and forth as if guarding this unique, enchanting display.



Kevin Mollwee Sauvage 2016



George Wheeler CalPine reserves Reef S. Mollwee 2016

It's easy when enraptured by such an array so delightful to photograph, to overlook the many other species such as the pink sea fan (*Eunicella verrucosa*) found on the overhanging walls and fringe of cobbles. With a little imagination we could visualise that this could possibly be a submerged river bed from the Ice Age at a time when this cliff was many miles from the sea. Rock samples were taken by Dr Paul Chambers, a Seasearch Surveyor and geologist and an expert on the Minquiers Reef, on our 2015 survey. These have been analysed by the University of Paris and Seasearch can proudly announce it has uncovered quite a potential revelation particularly if further samples can be found on our subsequent visits. Places like this urgently deserve recognition and protection; we hope that our findings will lead to Jersey's first sub-tidal heritage site.

Sadly conditions did not improve as the week unfolded and attention was drawn to our shore dive sites along the north coast: L'Islet in Bouley Bay provided an opportunity to explore tidal gullies revealing the Feather Duster worm (*Sabella spallanzani*). The adjacent stepped boulders provided footholds for the newly grown expanses of Sea Oak, Kelp and many varieties of red and brown weeds encrusted with Kelp Fir, sunlight glinting through the fronds while corkwing and ballan wrasse peered out of the carefully constructed nests they would guard throughout the summer once the females had entrusted them with their eggs.



Giant Goby K. McIlwee 2016

Our final day took us to Rozel Harbour a tricky site with its cyclic currents and tidal outfalls. Here we found a huge example of the giant goby (*Gobius cobitis*, see left) attended by inquisitive shanny, peering through the sea lettuce at our camera lenses.

Despite the weather a significant number of surveys were completed and our trainees were given some expert coaching in techniques and report compilation.

We hope to make a further visit to the Sauvages before the approach of winter beats us. Already our long term planners are looking at dates for the 2017 Reef Survey and a possible extended expedition to Alderney.



The 2016 reef survey team (L-R): Charlotte Bolton, Lin Baldock, Kevin McIlwee, James Matthews, Paul Chambers, Adam West, Jessi Jennings, Terry Ozanne and (front) Sam Blampied and Chantelle de Gruchy. Thanks to all the divers!

We would like to say a big thank you to the Jersey Ecology Trust Fund, Association of Jersey Charities, Channel Islands Cooperative Society, Société Jersiaise and of course our members for the financial assistance. Jersey Seasearch also receives financial support from the Marine Conservation Society for co-ordination activities. Also we greatly appreciate the ongoing support and presence of Lin Baldock whose help has been invaluable. Charlotte Bolton gave a great deal of valuable coaching to the Trainee Surveyors and team members. Also we have been honoured to have Chris Wood as part of the team in past years and hope he will be able to join us even though he has retired from the post of National Co-ordinator. Grateful thanks also to Jim O'Connor of Wreck and Reef Charters (dive boat 'Magic'; www.wreckandreefcharters.com) for his expert skippering.

