

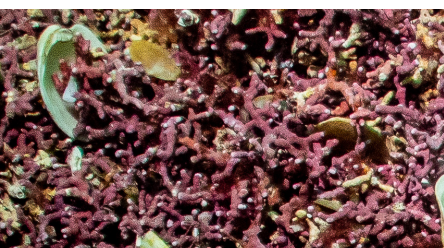
Seasearch West of Scotland

2019 Report

Owen Paisley, Seasearch West Co-ordinator



The Lewis dive team during some unusually fine weather

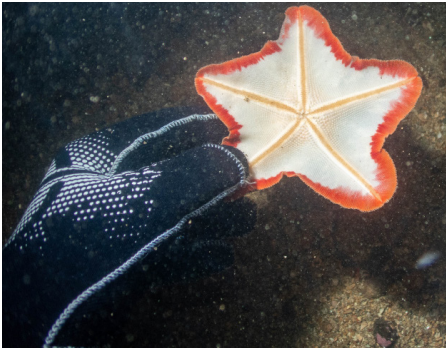


A Summer Isles maerl bed

The Year's Achievements

The 2018 season was exceptional with 200 forms submitted from the West of Scotland area and, in early 2019, it seemed an uphill task to equal that total. However, thanks to a great deal of effort by volunteer divers, the 2018 record of 200 forms was actually exceeded. In all 214 forms were submitted, of which 39% were Surveyor and 61% Observer with one Crawfish form. This was identical to the 2018 Surveyor/Observer split and, just as in 2018, the high proportion of Observer forms was due to extra effort put into arranging Observer training dives. Even so, 84 Surveyor forms being returned from the West of Scotland represented a new record. Seasearch diving took place over 78 days, involving 60 volunteer divers. As in previous years, essential logistical support during surveys was provided by community groups including SeaChange Wester Ross, CAOLAS at Loch Sunnart and CROMACH at Loch Craignish.

Three Observer courses were run during 2019. The first in Glasgow, at the request of Eastwood Sub-aqua Club, involved 16 participants.



A Loch Sunnart Goosefoot Starfish

The second course was in Oban, hosted by SAMS, with 5 participants and the third in Dundee, hosted by Dundee University, with 10 participants, making a total of 31 participants over the year. All three courses benefitted greatly from the generosity of Aquatron, SAMS and Dundee University. The free use of facilities at all three sites helped keep costs down making all the courses viable.

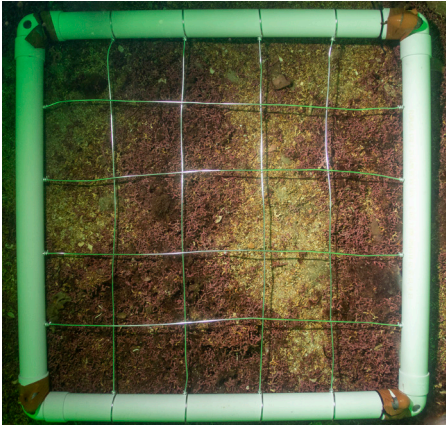
The Seasearch Year

January

As usual, January was a period of planning and tidying up loose ends from the previous year. The final 2018 forms were received and processed. Progress was made on a report on the survey work carried out around the Summer Isles in conjunction with the community group SeaChange Wester Ross. Plans were progressed for 2019 courses in Glasgow and Oban. Finally, a meeting was held with the Harbour Master in Tarbert, Argyll during which he was informed about the Horse Mussels, Native Oysters and *A. nodosum mackii* present in the harbour. This later led to a request for photographs of marine life to use in the local community-owned information centre.

February

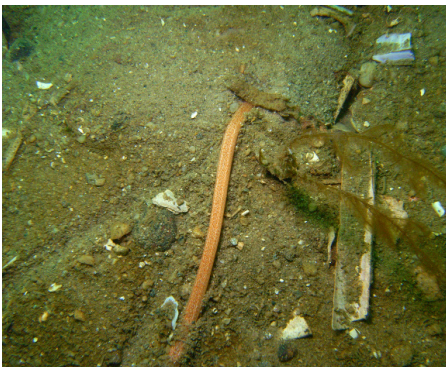
Advantage was taken of unusually good weather to carry out some diving around the Summer Isles Maerl beds and to check on a report of Native Oysters in Loch Broom. Tanera Estate kindly provided a boat and skipper allowing the volunteer dive team to carry out 2 days diving around the Summer Isles. A new transect was established, existing transects photographed and new sites surveyed. A third day's diving took place towards the head of Loch Broom, following reports of Native Oysters in the vicinity. Sadly no oysters were located.



A monitoring quadrat in use at the Summer Isles

March

With improving weather, Seasearch activity began to ramp up. An Observer course was run at Aquatron, followed by training dives in Upper Loch Fyne. Two articles were written in March; the first for the Scottish Diver magazine, detailing plans for the coming year and the second for the MCS magazine describing surveys carried out by Seasearch within the Wester Ross MPA.



One of the many *Labidoplax* burrowing holothurians recorded at Largs

April

The improving weather in April led to yet more diving activity with searches for Native Oysters at Largs and West Loch Tarbert, and an expedition to West Loch Roag on Lewis. The diving at Largs involved 6 volunteers assisted by Fairlie Coastal Trust. Unfortunately, no oysters were seen but an extensive bed of the burrowing holouthurian *Labidoplax* was recorded. The expedition to Lewis once again involved 6 volunteers, mainly from Bingham Sub-aqua Club. Over 5 days, 20 dives were undertaken with 9 Observer and 4 Surveyor forms completed. Despite benign weather, there was a continual swell which made diving conditions challenging at times, but a wide range of species was recorded.

May

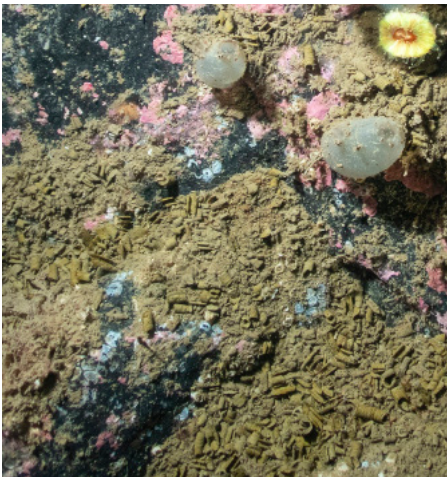
During May, a survey trip to the Sound of Mull was organised with a group of GUE divers, as part of their Project Baseline. The Fireworks Anemone monitoring site in Loch Shira was visited twice, though poor



Live Native Oysters recorded during west coast oyster surveys



A tiny juvenile Thornback Ray in West Loch Tarbert



Fish farm waste on the cliff at Camas Glas, Loch Sunnart



The Craignish survey team



Flame Shells were recorded at several locations during 2019

visibility prevented a full photographic survey. A second Observer course was run at Oban, followed by diving in Dunstaffnage Bay.

The Friends of the Sound of Jura contacted the project, enquiring about seahorses, as they had been told that they were present in the Sound. This led to an interesting exchange of e-mails with the Seahorse Trust about historical records of Seahorses in Scottish waters.

June

A third Observer course was run, this time in Dundee, followed by diving in Loch Long. Another dive in Loch Shira was carried out, this time on the western side with help from a group of Edinburgh University divers. Interestingly, an area dominated by small Fireworks Anemones was recorded. This was very encouraging and possible evidence of an expanding population.

A talk about Seasearch was given to a Community Monitoring workshop organised by SNH at Dunstaffnage Marine Laboratory.

Forms coming in during June covered a wide geographical range, from Loch Ryan in the south to Wester Ross in the north.

July

A quieter month for diving, with two training dives organised for members of the community group CROMACH, who had attend a training course in 2018 but never completed their qualifying dives.

A report on the 2018 Wester Ross diving was completed and work on a report on Loch Sunnart diving was started. Advice was given to SNH about Native Oyster sites in West Loch Tarbert and to CROMACH about Native Oysters in Loch Craignish. The yearly cumulative total for forms reached 90.

August

A survey weekend was organised in Loch Craignish, working with the community group CROMACH. The weekend was attended by volunteer divers as well as representatives from SNH and CROMACH.

During the weekend, the divers surveyed around 2 km of coastline looking for Native Oysters, as well as recording some Northern Sea Fans at the mouth of the loch. Searching for Native Oysters was made difficult by a blanketing growth of filamentous algae covering the seabed, but a small number were recorded.

September

September was an exceptionally busy month, with 13 days diving and two expeditions. The month started with a 6 day expedition to Loch Sunnart, involving 7 divers. As in previous years, logistical support, in the form of accommodation, transport and a compressor, was provided by Andy Jackson of CAOLAS. Heavy rain resulted in poor visibility in upper Loch Teacuis, so the surveyors were unable to check on the health or otherwise of the Serpulid reefs. Instead, the opportunity was taken to dive three new sites in the main loch, including cliffs close to the Camas Glas fish farm. In contrast to rocky areas dived previously, the cliffs by the fish farm had an impoverished fauna with obvious waste from the fish farm present. Later in the month, a six day survey took place around the Summer Isles and Loch Ewe, involving 9 divers and using the Seasearch RHIB, provided by Campbeltown Sub Aqua Club. Once again, logistical support was provided by SeaChange



Brachiopods and Sea Loch Anemones in Loch Fyne



A Loch Fyne marine gnome

Wester Ross, in the form of accommodation and air. Highlights of the expedition included a Flapper Skate soaring over the head of one of the survey divers and a Maerl bed apparently, in the process of being colonised by Flame Shells. By the end of the month the cumulative total of forms received was 151.

October

October was a much quieter month, with the available time taken up processing the data from the Summer Isles and Loch Sunnart. In addition, a report on the 2018 Wester Ross surveys was completed, and advice was given to a community monitoring project in Loch Duich.

November

As in previous years, diving activity slowed down by November. However, one interesting survey took place in Loch Fyne during which a fine collection of garden gnomes and Brachiopods was recorded. By the end of the month the cumulative total of forms received reached 195.

December

December was a very quiet month diving wise, with available time taken up by checking forms and planning for 2020. By the end of the month, 212 forms had been received for the year, checked and scanned and planning started for 2020.

Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to the sixty volunteer divers who gave freely of their time and energy in 2019.

They included, in no particular order: Aidan Gregory, Alana Dempsey, Alistair Eberst, Brittany Barr, Caitlin McGee, Caroline Bishop, Catriona Hoon, Chris Rickard, Chrissie Pritchard, Christina Sinclair, Dawn Watson, Des Kay, Diogo Matias, Edward Dillon, Ellyse Geddes, Euan Mackenzie, Frank Melvin, Gary Williams, Genine Keogh, George Brown, Graham Jackson, Grant Pollock, Helen Paulsen, Helene Corrieu, Isla Hodgson, Jane Paulsen, Jason Guthrie, Jennifer Cocking, John Townshend, Karen Boswarva, Lauren Donachie, Lin Baldock, Louie Plenderleith, Lucy Roberts, Lynn MacKay, Marcus Rose, Mark Mcleitchie, Martin Maple, Matthew Smith, Michael Child, Nick Worthington, Owen Paisley, Paul Miller, Rob Spray, Ross MacDonald, Richard Yorke, Robert Gormley, Ryan McShane, Sarah Bowen, Sara Nason, Sarah Roddick, Stephen Frew, Steve Bishop, Steven Benjamins, Susan Shipley, Torsten Diem, Trevor Davies, Virginia Maria Donald and William Goudy.

Thanks also for the support of the following: Aquatron dive shop, SAMS and Dundee University for the free use of their facilities. Tanera Estate for the generous provision of a boat and skipper during the February survey. Seachange Wester Ross, CROMACH and Caolas for logistical support during surveys and Campbeltown Sub Aqua Club for the use of their RHIB at Craignish and the Summer Isles.

Seasearch in Scotland gratefully acknowledge the financial support provided by Scottish Natural Heritage in 2019.



**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.

