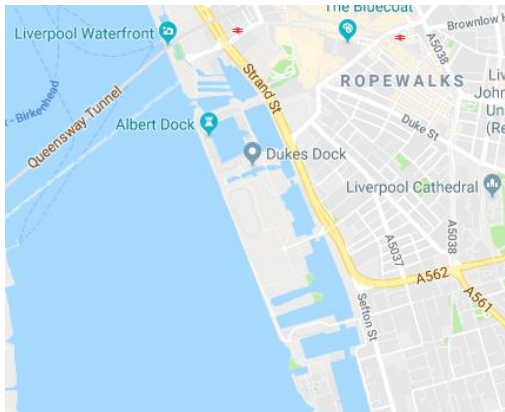


North West England

Seasearch Site Surveys 2020

This report summarises the results of surveys carried out during 2020 by Seasearch divers in North West England. The year started off well with lots of good intentions of diving however Covid-19 put paid to most of the planned activities.



Duke's Dock Liverpool

Since the opening of The Albert Dock complex for leisure purposes in 1986, the marine life has taken hold and continues to flourish. The main features of the habitat are silty seabed and stone dock walls. Water quality is paramount as this is a public place thus the marine life is very important in helping to achieve this. Diving is restricted to November – March inclusive as there is an Aqua Gym in place during the summer months, which precludes diving.

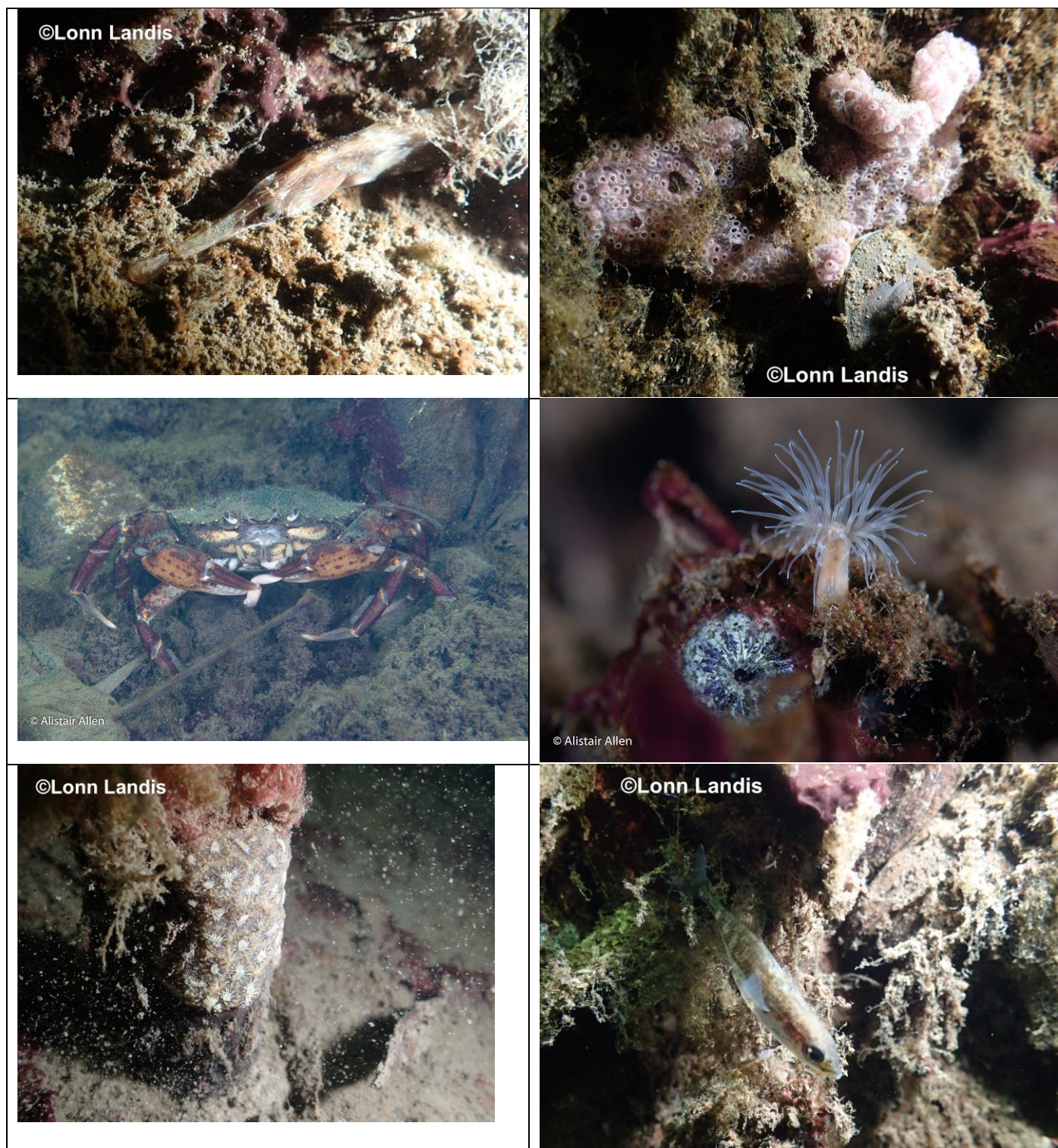
The year was kicked off in February at the end of Storm Denis – I have never seen white caps on the Docks before. It is usually considered to be a sheltered area but the strong winds seemed to cut straight through the 3 Graces! We named this dive *the Diadumene blitz* as we were determined to identify our much-debated little orange stalked anemone. I asked all photographers to take as many snaps of the specimens they saw, with particular action of side on so we can clearly see the stalk. 8 divers produced 1 surveyor form and 4 observer forms. The walls of the dock were roughly zoned. The first metre or so was covered in straggly brown unidentified algae. As we descended deeper to about 2 -4 m, *Halichondria bowerbanki* and *Ciona intestinalis* (yellow ringed sea squirt) dominated with a smattering of *Mytilus edulis* (edible mussels). This was all covered in a fine red algal mat which occupied spaces between the attached life. Towards the bottom of the wall, no deeper than 4.5m, *Mytilus edulis* dominated. *Gobius niger* peeked out of any crevices in the wall and *Gasterosteus aculeatus* (sticklebacks) darted about as did Mysid shrimps. In the shade of the footbridge, *Aurelia aurita* scyphistoma (moon jelly babies) were found hibernating away waiting to erupt come the warmer weather. The dock floor was littered with various debris such as – glass bottles, plastics, clothing, bikes, trolleys and bizarrely a hot water bottle. These all provided substrate for seaweeds and squirts on which to settle. The highlight of the dock floor has to be *Cerastoderma edulis* which are being seen on more dives. One of the strangest things we found was *Lumbricus terrestris* – in non scientific terms, the common earth worm! The preceding days have been very wet and have charmed out worms from the grass then sadly washed into the dock where not only did they meet a watery demise, a passing shore crab found they made quite a tasty meal!

The photos of the small anemone were studied and in consultation with Chris Wood, we came to the conclusion that we have *Diadumene cincta*. We postulated that we may have *Diadumene lineata* present but on scouring all the photographs taken, we did not observe any distinctive stripes on the column. Thus we concluded *Diadumene cincta*. This was very satisfying to finally come to a conclusion as to the identity.

The dock life continues to thrive and thanks to the efforts of many divers, we strive to keep the docks as clean as possible for healthy life to continue and thus the enjoyment of all who visit the docks.

Owing to Covid – 19 no further diving was carried out in the Docks this year.

Photos



Training

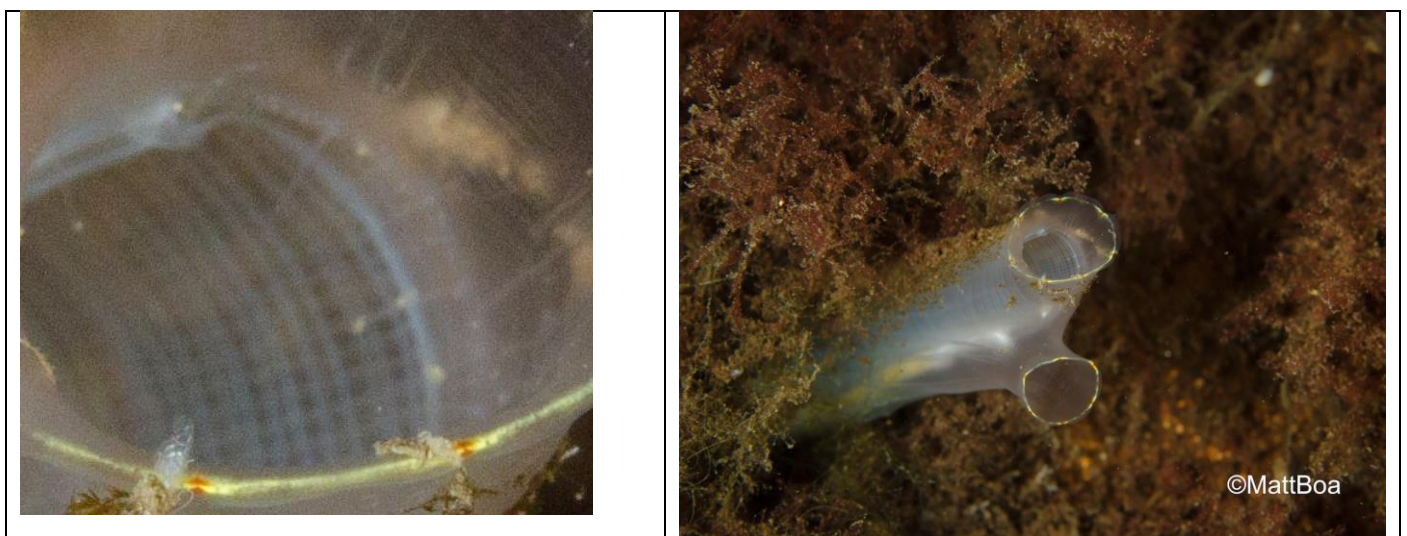
The planned Observer course for Liverpool University in March fell victim to Covid - 19 and had to be cancelled. This was a shame from many points particularly as it was the last opportunity to get in the water

prior to the Aqua Gym coming back. However the pandemic saw us force to embrace technology and June saw us run the Observer course via Zoom. This was run over 3 evenings and 2 afternoons and was an incredible success. 14 students, 2 refreshers attended alongside Jersey Coordinator Kevin McIlwee and helped with Dawn Brange and Kerry Rennie. This delivery was a resounding success as we had students from as far north as Aberdeen and Guildford in the south. It was just a shame that there was no diving element attached to it.



Social Media engagement

During the 2 lockdowns, social media was used to maintain contact. Species of the day was delivered throughout the first lockdown which highlighted species found in NW waters. Photos from our waters were used. During the November lockdown a more cryptic engagement was sought whereby Seasearchers were encouraged to use their observational skills to determine a species from a small segment of a photograph. This proved to be much harder than anticipated and had some very interesting suggestions! Followers thoroughly enjoyed these distractions, were able to make some very good guesses but most of all, it proved to be fun!



What's Up Dock?

In May we made it into BSAC's SCUBA magazine with a 4-page article covering the life and times of the Liverpool Dock complex including the marine life seen. This was then delivered to BSAC via Zoom presentations and attended by over 70 divers.



End of Year Quiz

The year was wound up in collaboration with Seasearch NE England coordinator Natalie Hirst as we hosted a fiendishly hard online Zoom quiz. Over 50 questions in 5 rounds – usual general knowledge, music, sport etc. Examples of questions were 'odd one out' and I was party to the discussions in one breakout room – it was amazing the justifications for selected 'odd one out!' Over 50 Seasearchers joined this festive fun and the winners were Scotland with a resounding 71 points out of a possible humungous number (I lost count as there were so many bonus points available!) Runners up The Sea Fans came in with a respectable 65 points. Winners all received a Seasearch guide of their choice and the runners up are now proud owners of an official Seasearch beanie!



Species List

Scientific Name	Common Name	Duke's Dock
Porifera		
<i>Halichondria bowerbanki</i>		F
	Encrusting orange sponge	R
Cnidaria		
<i>Aurelia aurita</i>	Moon jelly	R
<i>Aurelia aurita (scyphistoma)</i>	Moon jelly (polyp stage)	R
<i>Diadumene cincta</i>	Small orange stalked anemone	F
Crustaceans		

<i>Mysid shrimp</i>		O
<i>Carcinus maenas</i>	Shore crab	R
<i>Liocarcinus depurator</i>	Harbour crab	R
Prawn		R
Molluscs		
<i>Mytilus edulis</i>		F
<i>Cerastoderma edule</i>	cockle	O
Ascidian		
<i>Ciona intestinalis</i>	Yellow ringed sea squirt	F
<i>Botryllus schlosseri</i>		R
<i>Ascidiella aspersa</i>		
<i>Botrylloides spp</i>		R
Fish		
<i>Gobius niger</i>		F
<i>Gasterosteus aculeatus aculeatus</i>	Stickleback	A
<i>Syngnathus acus</i>	Greater pipefish	R
Algae		
	Non-calcereous red algal mat	A
<i>Chaetomorpha linum</i>		R
Feathery Red Seaweed		O
Worms		
<i>Ficopomatus enigmaticus</i>		R

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all who have the tenacity to dive NW England. It is a challenging area but one which has a rich variety of life and we have been rewarded with some interesting dives.

Thanks to photographers Alistair Allen, Lonn Landis and Matt Boa.

This report has been compiled by Wendy Northway, based on Seasearch survey and observation records made by Wendy Northway, Joanne Langan, Alistair Allen, Sally & Lonn Landis and Tony Walker.

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 or email info@seasearch.org.uk

