Dorset Seasearch: Annual summary report 2015

The 2015 Seasearch season in Dorset has been a story of good underwater visibility and strong winds, with the latter frequently preventing us making the most of the former! The winter of 2014-2015 was very quiet in comparison to the year before, which may help to explain why the viz has been good (into double figures at times) right from the start of the season. There was plenty of plankton about in the water column, for both the spring and autumn blooms, but the fine silt churned up by the 2013-2014 winter storms seemed to be settling down and consolidating again. Having started the 'official' Seasearch season with a weekend out of Poole in mid-May, Nick Owen and Rik Girdler organised hard boats from Lyme Regis and West Bay at the end of June, and again out of West Bay at the end of August, to survey some interesting new sites in the Lyme Bay and Torbay SAC chosen from the DORIS bathymetric map (www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/dorset_seasearch.html). A weekend from Weymouth to the Kimmeridge ledges and brittlestar beds at the start of September (organised by Sheilah Openshaw on the hard boat "Tango") was graced with beautiful weather, but frustratingly a whole weekend in October (Lin Baldock's 'season-closer' from Lyme Regis on "Blue Turtle") and two summer evenings (on "Peveril Myth" out of Poole) were lost from the schedule. Overall 11 full days of diving (two dives per day) and one evening dive were completed.

Update on MCZs in Dorset:

Studland Bay rMCZ was one of 27 MCZs listed for inclusion under 'tranche 2 designation' in February 2014[1] (and re-labelled as a 'candidate MCZ' or cMCZ) but was removed from the official consultation[2] in early 2015 as 'requiring further consideration'[3]. Officially[4] it remains under consideration for inclusion in the third tranche of consultation and designations (scheduled for 2017-2018). The consultation process also gave us the chance to submit additional evidence in support of features not included in the original designations for sites in 'tranche one' (November 2013). In the case of the Chesil Beach and Stennis Ledges MCZ the features was "high energy infralittoral rock"[5], and the evidence submitted was well-illustrated by photographs from Seasearch dives in 2008, 2011 and 2014.

Please visit www.wildlifetrusts.org/MCZfriends to sign up as a friend of Studland Bay and receive regular updates on the MCZ process.

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-conservation-zones-february-2014-update

[2] https://consult.defra.gov.uk/marine/tranche2mczs

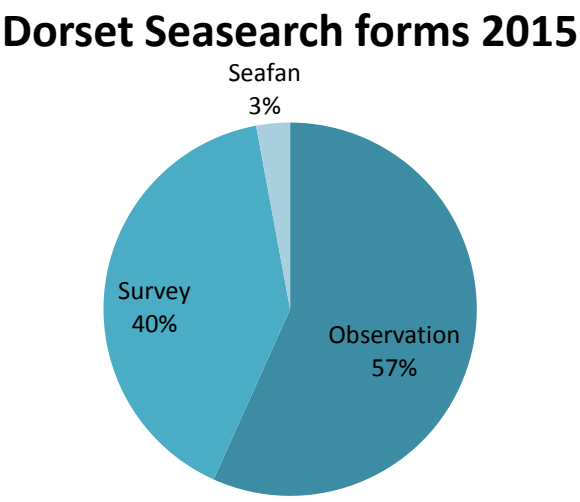
[3] https://consult.defra.gov.uk/marine/tranche2mczs/supporting_documents/Studland%20Bay%20cMCZ%20site%20summary.pdf

[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/492785/mcz-second-tranche-consult-sum-resp.pdf

[5] https://consult.defra.gov.uk/marine/tranche2mczs/supporting_documents/Annex%20A%20Additional%20features%20recommended%20for%20inclusion%20in%20first%20tranche%20MCZs.pdf

Recording

A total of 105 Dorset forms were sent directly to the local co-ordinator by 48 divers during 2015. The overall total (including forms sent in to other co-ordinators and forwarded on) was 171 forms (97 Observation, 5 seafan and 69 Survey). This total represents a 15% drop compared to 2014 which was almost a record year. Survey forms showed the greatest decrease from last year. The forms were transformed into 107 Marine Recorder survey events (created by combining forms when pairs or groups of divers carry out their surveys in essentially the same place).



The dive locations are plotted on the map below which also shows the boundaries of the marine protected areas (west to east: Lyme Bay and Torbay cSAC, Chesil Beach & Stennis Ledges MCZ, Studland to Portland cSAC (2 parts), Poole Rocks MCZ):

The 'most-dived' site, using the metric of 'number of forms received', was unsurprisingly Swanage Pier (28 separate forms) – a total enhanced by the Observer course held there at the end of May (see below)!

Many of the markers around Weymouth indicate survey dives carried out by the Community Seagrass Initiative (CSI), a Heritage Lottery Fund-supported project for volunteer divers. The CSI project officer, Jess Mead, has been compiling observation forms based on the CSI survey dives to ensure that the data is captured and used as part of the larger Seasearch dataset.

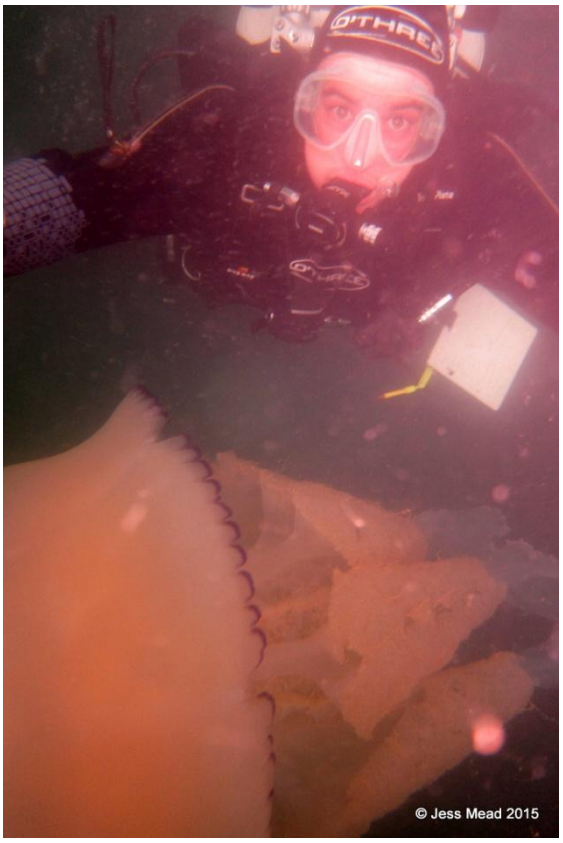
Dorset has a high proportion (36% of the area up to 6 nautical miles offshore) of its waters covered by MPA designation of one sort or another. One of the strategic targets for 2016 will be to investigate currently-undesignated areas, either for consideration in the third tranche of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs), to explore the possibility of boundary changes of existing MPAs (the process by which this may happen is not yet known, however) or to provide evidence for as-yet-undesignated features. The publication of the official conservation advice for designated MCZs means that these areas will be managed by the local IFCA, so our survey efforts will turn more towards monitoring than gathering new evidence.

Training

The 'official' 2014 Observer course was unfortunately cancelled due to lack of participants but Swanage hosted a Clidive-organised course (tutored by James Lucey and Nick Reed) at the end of May which has introduced more London-based divers to Seasearch. An Observer course is scheduled for May 2016 and is filling up fast; contact the Dorset Co-ordinator (email seasearch@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk for more details and a booking form).

2015 Highlights (in pictures)

In terms of marine life in 2015, lots of jellyfish were reported (but unfortunately no turtles, at least until many became stranded in the winter); it was also a boom year for many species of nudibranchs (especially *Crimora papillata*).



Barrel jellyfish (*Rhizostoma pulmo*; LEFT) and compass jellyfish (*Chrysaora hysoscella*; ABOVE) in **Lyme Bay**.

Other less-recorded species spotted this year include spiny seahorses (*Hippocampus guttulatus*) in both Studland Bay and Portland Harbour, *Aplysia fasciata* (a larger, darker Southern species than our more common sea hare species *A. punctata*), also in Portland Harbour and the pogge (*Agonus cataphractus*; BELOW LEFT) and streaked gurnard (*Triglopterus lastoviza*; BELOW RIGHT) both in Chesil Cove.

A first for Dorset (and indeed Seasearch) occurred in September with the sighting of the Mediterranean nudibranch species *Tritonia manicata* on the inshore reefs south of Durdle Door. Other nationally-rare or -scarce nudibranch species recorded this year were *Trapania pallida* and *Tritonia nilsodhneri* (Lyme Bay); although *Rostanga rubra* isn't officially designated as such, there are no Seasearch records for this species in Dorset on the National Biodiversity Network at present.

Trapania pallida (above) and *Okenia elegans* (right) in **Lyme Bay.**

Rostanga rubra (below) in **Swanage Bay** and *Tritonia manicata* (below right) off **South Dorset**.

Nationally-scarce (but not in Dorset in 2015!) *Tritonia nilsodhneri* (and egg coil) on *Eunicella verrucosa* (left) and on sediment (right), in **Lyme Bay**.

Southern species now well-established in Dorset and recorded on an annual basis include the black-faced blenny (*Tripterygion delaisi*; above left, in **Portland Harbour**), Baillon's wrasse with nest (*Symphodus bailloni*; above, in **Ringstead Bay**) and the snakelocks anemone shrimp (*Periclimenes sagittifer*; left, at Bournemouth Rocks, **Poole Bay**).

2015 Summary (in numbers)

Using the MNCR 15.03 key (available on the JNCC website at jncc.defra.gov.uk/marinehabitatclassification) the total number of biotopes assigned was 240 (39 unique), of which 94 (39.2%) were identified as circalittoral rock (CR), 53 (22%) as infralittoral rock (IR) and 93 (38.8%) as sublittoral sediment (SS).

All biotopes were keyed out to Level 3 or greater (99 of these, or 41.25%, to Level 4 or higher), of which the most commonly occurring were CR.HCR.XFa (Mixed faunal turf communities; 52 occurrences), SS.SCS.ICS (Infralittoral coarse sediment; 28 occurrences), IR.FIR.IFou (Infralittoral fouling seaweed communities; 20 occurrences), IR.MIR.KR.XFoR (Dense foliose red seaweeds on silty moderately exposed infralittoral rock; 16 occurrences), SS.SMp.SSgr.Zmar (*Zostera marina/angustifolia* beds on lower shore or infralittoral clean or muddy sand; also 16 occurrences) and CR.HCR.XFa.ByErSp (Bryozoan turf and erect sponges on tide-swept circalittoral rock; 9 occurrences). The higher incidence than normal of biotope SS.SMp.SSgr.Zmar reflects the contribution of data from the Community Seagrass Initiative project which has concentrated all those surveys on this habitat. Nine biotopes were keyed out to the highest level (Level 5 or 6), split 5:3:1 between CR:IR:SS. It is almost impossible to identify sediment biotopes to that level without infaunal sampling.

Biotope Code	Biotope Description	Location[#]
CR.FCR.FouFa	Circalittoral fouling faunal communities	5,6
CR.FCR.FouFa.Aasp	*Ascidiella aspersa* on circalittoral artificial substrata	3
CR.HCR.XFa	Mixed faunal turf communities	1,3,5,6
CR.HCR.XFa.ByErSp	Bryozoan turf and erect sponges on tide-swept circalittoral rock	3,6
CR.HCR.XFa.ByErSp.Eun	*Eunicella verrucosa* and *Pentapora foliacea* on wave-exposed circalittoral rock	1
CR.HCR.XFa.CvirCri	*Corynactis viridis* and a mixed turf of crisiids, *Bugula*, *Scrupocellaria*, and *Cellaria* on moderately tide-swept exposed circalittoral rock	1
CR.HCR.XFa.FluCoAs	*Flustra foliacea* and colonial ascidians on tide-swept moderately wave-exposed circalittoral rock	3,5
CR.HCR.XFa.FluCoAs.X	*Flustra foliacea* and colonial ascidians on tide-swept exposed circalittoral mixed substrata	3
CR.MCR.CSab.Sspi	*Sabellaria spinulosa* encrusted circalittoral rock	5
CR.MCR.CSab.Sspi.As	*Sabellaria spinulosa*, didemnids and other small ascidians on tide-swept moderately wave-exposed circalittoral rock	6
CR.MCR.EcCr	Echinoderms and crustose communities	3
CR.MCR.EcCr.FaAlCr.Bri	Brittlestars on faunal and algal encrusted exposed to moderately wave-exposed circalittoral rock	3
CR.MCR.EcCr.FaAlCr.Flu	*Flustra foliacea* on slightly scoured silty circalittoral rock	3
IR.FIR.IFou	Infralittoral fouling seaweed communities	3,5
IR.HIR.KFaR.FoR	Foliose red seaweeds on exposed lower infralittoral rock	1

Biotope Code	Biotope Description	Location[#]
IR.HIR.KFaR.FoR.Dic	Foliose red seaweeds with dense *Dictyota dichotoma* and/or *Dictyopteris membranacea* on exposed lower infralittoral rock	3
IR.HIR.KFaR.LhypR.Pk	*Laminaria hyperborea* park with dense foliose red seaweeds on exposed lower infralittoral rock	1
IR.HIR.KSed.XKHal	*Halidrys siliquosa* and mixed kelps on tide-swept infralittoral rock with coarse sediment	1
IR.MIR.KR	Kelp and red seaweeds (moderate energy infralittoral rock)	4
IR.MIR.KR.Lhyp.Pk	*Laminaria hyperborea* park and foliose red seaweeds on moderately exposed lower infralittoral rock	5
IR.MIR.KR.XFoR	Dense foliose red seaweeds on silty moderately exposed infralittoral rock	2,3,5,6
SS.SBR.PoR.SspiMx	*Sabellaria spinulosa* on stable circalittoral mixed sediment	3,5
SS.SCS.CCS	Circalittoral coarse sediment	1,3,6
SS.SCS.CCS.Nmix	*Neopentadactyla mixta* in circalittoral shell gravel or coarse sand	3
SS.SCS.ICS	Infralittoral coarse sediment	1,2,3,5,6
SS.SCS.ICS.SSh	Sparse fauna on highly mobile sublittoral shingle (cobbles and pebbles)	1
SS.SMp.KSwSS.LsacR.Gv	*Laminaria saccharina* and robust red algae on infralittoral gravel and pebbles	5
S.SMp.Mrl	Maerl beds	6
SS.SMp.SSgr.Zmar	*Zostera marina/angustifolia* beds on lower shore or infralittoral clean or muddy sand	2,3,5,6
SS.SMu.CFiMu	Circalittoral fine mud	6
SS.SMu.ISaMu.AmpPlon	*Ampelisca* spp., *Photis longicaudata* and other tube-building amphipods and polychaetes in infralittoral sandy mud	5
SS.SMx.CMx	Circalittoral mixed sediment	1,3
SS.SMx.IMx	Infralittoral mixed sediment	5,6
SS.SMx.IMx.CreAsAn	*Crepidula fornicata* with ascidians and anemones on infralittoral coarse mixed sediment	5,6
SS.SSa.CFiSa	Circalittoral fine sand	6
SS.SSa.CMuSa	Circalittoral muddy sand	1,3,6
SS.SSa.IFiSa	Infralittoral fine sand	3,5
SS.SSa.IFiSa.IMoSa	Infralittoral mobile clean sand with sparse fauna	3,6

Biotope Code	Biotope Description	Location[#]
SS.SSa.IMuSa	Infralittoral muddy sand	2

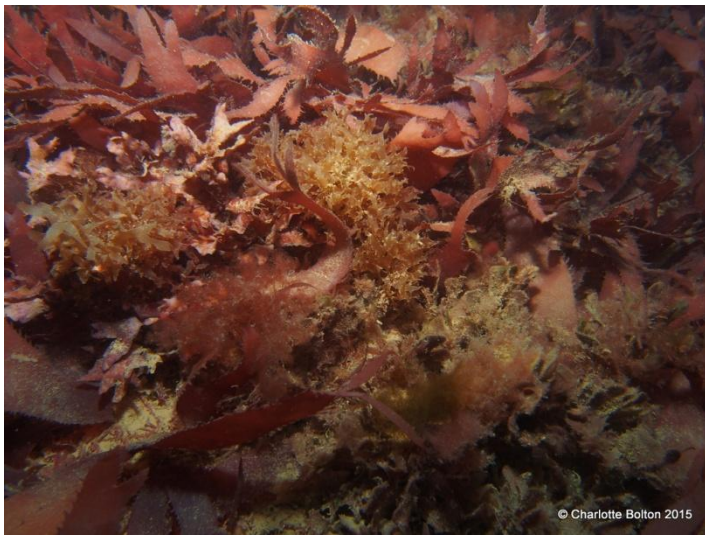
[#] **Location (as defined in Marine Recorder):** 1 = Lyme Bay; 2 = Portland Harbour; 3 = Mupe Rocks to Portland Bill; 4 = Purbeck Marine Wildlife Reserve; 5 = Durlston Marine Research Area; 6 = Poole Bay

CR.HCR.XFa.ByErSp

"Bryozoan turf and erect sponges on tide-swept circalittoral rock."

CR.MCR.EcCr.FaAlCr.Bri

"Brittlestars on faunal and algal encrusted exposed to moderately wave-exposed circalittoral rock" (**Kimmeridge**)



IR.MIR.KR.XFoR

"Dense foliose red seaweeds on silty moderately exposed infralittoral rock."

The biotope description begins "Upward-facing surfaces of shallow, infralittoral bedrock and boulders in areas of turbid water dominated by dense red seaweeds, with the notable absence of kelp. The stable rock, which can be cobbles or boulders but is more typically bedrock, is usually silted." Regular divers in **Poole Bay** will be well acquainted with this description!

These photos shows 'mats' of the tube-building amphipod *Ampelisca*, identified in Dorset over a decade ago[6], which form a special but very fragile habitat particularly susceptible to damage.

TOP: SS.SBR.PoR.SspiMx

"Sabellaria spinulosa encrusted circalittoral rock."

Ampelisca is included in the biotope description as follows: "The infauna comprises typical sublittoral polychaete species such as …and tube building amphipods such as *Ampelisca* spp." In this example, off **Kimmeridge**, the *Sabellaria* forms a thin, inconspicuous crust which is undoubtedly under-recorded.

BOTTOM: *Ampelisca* 'mats' are also found in **Swanage Bay** but on softer sediment (and hence assigned the biotope SS.SMu.ISaMu.AmpPlon "*Ampelisca* spp., *Photis longicaudata* and other tube-building amphipods and polychaetes in infralittoral sandy mud").

SS.SMx.IMx.CreAsAn

"*Crepidula fornicata* with ascidians and anemones on infralittoral coarse mixed sediment" (**Ballard Maerl Bed**).

[6] http://www.seasearch.org.uk/downloads/dorset2004report.pdf

Non-native and climate change indicator species

Many of the species listed as non-native (NNS; not necessarily invasive) have become so common in Dorset that we hardly think of them as such (*e.g. Crepidula fornicata*). Other species are labelled as climate change indicators (CCI) since they may signify range expansions (usually southerly/south-western species heading north and/or east, in Dorset). This list is compiled from the GB Non-native Secretariat[7], the 2005 audit of non-native species by Natural England[8], the non-native species guide from the Bishop group at the Marine Biological Association[9] and the Shore Thing project[10].

Species name	Phylum	No. of records (2015)	Classification (CCI, NNS)	Where recorded (2015 Seasearch only)
Actinia fragacea	Cnidaria	5	CCI	Lyme Bay
Anemonia viridis	Cnidaria	54	CCI	Durlston Marine Research Area, Lyme Bay, Mupe Rocks to Portland Bill, Poole Bay, Portland Harbour, Purbeck Marine Wildlife Reserve
Anotrichium furcellatum	Algae	1	NNS	Durlston Marine Research Area
Asparagopsis armata	Algae	10	NNS	Durlston Marine Research Area, Mupe Rocks to Portland Bill, Poole Bay, Purbeck Marine Wildlife Reserve
Bonnemaisonia hamifera	Algae	4	NNS	Durlston Marine Research Area, Purbeck Marine Wildlife Reserve
Botrylloides diegensis	Tunicata	1	NNS	Durlston Marine Research Area
Bugula neritina	Bryozoa	1	NNS	Portland Harbour
Calliostoma zizyphinum	Mollusca	64	CCI	Durlston Marine Research Area, Lyme Bay, Mupe Rocks to Portland Bill, Poole Bay
Colpomenia peregrina	Algae	3	NNS	Portland Harbour, Purbeck Marine Wildlife Reserve
Crepidula fornicata	Mollusca	27	NNS	Durlston Marine Research Area, Mupe Rocks to Portland Bill, Poole Bay, Portland Harbour
Gibbula umbilicalis	Mollusca	5	CCI	Lyme Bay, Mupe Rocks to Portland Bill, Poole Bay, Portland Harbour
Halidrys siliquosa	Algae	14	CCI	Durlston Marine Research Area, Lyme Bay, Mupe Rocks to Portland Bill

[7] http://www.nonnativespecies.org/
[8] http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/98016
[9] http://www.mba.ac.uk/bishop/non-native-species-guides/
[10] http://www.mba.ac.uk/shore_thing/

Species name	Phylum	No. of records (2015)	Classification (CCI, NNS)	Where recorded (2015 Seasearch only)
Heterosiphonia japonica	Algae	5	NNS	Durlston Marine Research Area, Poole Bay
Mesophyllum lichenoides	Algae	1	CCI	Purbeck Marine Wildlife Reserve
Sargassum muticum	Algae	16	NNS	Durlston Marine Research Area, Poole Bay, Portland Harbour, Purbeck Marine Wildlife Reserve
Solieria chordalis	Algae	5	NNS	Durlston Marine Research Area, Mupe Rocks to Portland Bill, Portland Harbour
Styela clava	Tunicata	24	NNS	Durlston Marine Research Area, Mupe Rocks to Portland Bill, Poole Bay, Portland Harbour
Undaria pinnatifada	Algae	1	NNS	Poole Bay

Not unexpectedly, the majority of the non-native species (NNS) are found in the vicinity of commercial or recreational hotspots for water-based activities. However, records show that these species are spreading throughout Dorset so volunteer records are important in monitoring the expanded distribution.

Styela clava (**Poole Bay**)

Sargassum muticum (**Swanage Pier**)

Actinia fragacea (**Chesil Cove**)

Bugula neritina framing a serpulid worm (**Portland Harbour**)

Groups, species and records of conservation interest recorded in Dorset during 2015

Total number of species records = 4870.
Total number of unique taxa = 678. (**N.B.** This includes the same taxon with a different qualifier *e.g.* 'Porifera indet. crusts YELLOW/ORANGE/RED' *etc*. When these duplicates are removed the number of unique taxa drops to 550.)

Phylum/subphylum	**Total number of records (not all to species level)**	**Most frequently recorded species (count)**	**Rare/scarce, Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), NERC Section 41 (NERC), Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) and MCZ FOCI (feature of conservation interest) species[#]**
Porifera (sponges)	693	*Dysidea fragilis* (80), Porifera indet. crusts (67), Cli*ona celata* (59), *Hemimycale columella* (57), *Amphilectus fucorum* (47), *Polymastia penicillus* (44)	Nationally rare species: *Suberites massa* (1) Nationally scarce species: *Adreus fascicularis* (5), *Tethyspira spinosa* (1)
Cnidaria (corals, anemones, hydroids)	629	*Anemonia viridis* (54), *Nemertesia antennina* (47), *Alcyonium digitatum* (38), *Actinothoe sphyrodeta* (29), *Epizoanthus couchii* (25), *Caryophyllia smithii* (25), *Eunicella verrucosa* (23), Hydrozoa (indet.) (23),	BAP/WCA/NERC/MCZ FOCI species: *Eunicella verrucosa* (23), *Haliclystus auricula* (1), *Lucernariopsis campanulata* (1), *L. cruxmelitensis* (1) Nationally scarce species: *Aiptasia mutabilis* (13), *Aglaophenia kirchenpaueria* (3), *Laomedea angulata* (1)
Platyhelminthes (flat worms)	9	*Prostheceraeus vittatus* (9)	
Annelida (segmented worms)	258	*Bispira volutacornis* (53), *Spirobranchus* (formerly *Pomatoceros*) sp. (43), Serpulidae (28), *Lanice conchilega* (27)	
Phoronida (horseshoe worms)	15	Phoronida (12), *Phoronis* sp. (2), *Phoronis hippocrepia* (1)	
Crustacea (crabs, shrimps etc.)	365	*Necora puber* (58), *Cancer pagurus* (55), Cirripedia indet. (39), *Maja squinado* (38)	
Mollusca (snails,	566	*Calliostoma zizyphinum* (64), *Nassarius*	BAP/MCZ FOCI species: *Ostrea*

Phylum/subphylum	Total number of records (not all to species level)	Most frequently recorded species (count)	Rare/scarce, Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), NERC Section 41 (NERC), Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) and MCZ FOCI (feature of conservation interest) species[#]
bivalves, sea slugs)		*reticulatus* (formerly *Hinia reticulata)* (28), *Crepidula fornicata* (27), *Sepia officinalis* (25), *Gibbula cineraria* (25), *Crimora papillata* (24)	*edulis* (18), *Atrina fragilis* (1) Nationally rare species: *Acanthocardia aculeata* (1), *Okenia elegans* (2) Nationally scarce species: *Trapania pallida* (4), *Tritonia nilsodhneri* (19)
Bryozoa (seamats)	470	*Chartella papyracea* (62)*, Flustra foliacea* (53), *Pentapora foliacea* (45), Bryozoa indet. crusts (39), *Alcyonidium diaphanum* (34)	
Echinodermata (starfish, sea cucumbers)	117	*Asterias rubens* (54), *Henricia* sp. (13), *Ophiura albida* (9), *Thyone* sp. (7), *Ophiothrix fragilis* (7),	
Tunicata (sea squirts)	382	*Aplidium punctum* (34), *Botryllus schlosseri* (33), *Phallusia mammillata* (27), *Clavelina lepadiformis* (27), *Styela clava* (24), *Ascidia mentula* (24)	Nationally scarce species: *Phallusia mammillata* (27), *Pycnoclavella aurilucens* (5)
Pisces (bony fish & elasmobranchs)	640	*Labrus bergylta* (66), *Trisopterus luscus* (55), *Parablennius gattorugine* (51)*, Ctenolabrus rupestris* (38), *Sympodus melops* (33), *Pollachius pollachius* (32), *Gobiusculus flavescens* (30)	BAP/WCA/NERC/MCZ FOCI species: *Hippocampus guttulatus* (5), *Molva molva* (1), *Pleuronectes platessa* (6), *Raja undulata* (5), *Solea solea* (4)
Algae (seaweed)	704 (202 brown) (56 green) (446 red)	Corallinaceae (encrusting) (74), Rhodophyta (69), *Calliblepharis ciliata* (31), Phaeophyceae (28), Laminariales (25), *Dictyopteris polypodioides* (22), *Ulva* sp. (18),*Ulva lactuca* (17)	Nationally scarce species: *Gracilaria bursa-pastoris* (2), *G. multipartita* (1)
Marine plants (angiosperms)	22	*Zostera marina* (22)	BAP/NERC/MCZ FOCI habitat: *Zostera marina*

Taken from the Conservations Designations Spreadsheet published by JNCC (jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-3408), version dated 20140822. Other designations (*e.g.* under the IUCN Global Red List) may also apply.

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Apologies to anyone whose name has been inadvertently omitted from this list.

www.facebook.com/groups/seasearch.dorset/

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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

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