

Dorset Seasearch 2005



www.seasearch.org.uk

2005 was the tenth year of Seasearch diving in Dorset. During these ten years over 200 divers have contributed more than 500 Seasearch forms, making a substantial contribution to the understanding of Dorset's marine environment.

The map below shows all 2005 Seasearch dives.



One of the big tasks of 2005 was to look back over all the Seasearch forms produced since 1995, making sure they were correctly entered onto Marine Recorder - the national marine species and habitats database. At the same time, each record was assigned a biotope code from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) Marine Habitat Classification version 04.05. 26 biotope complexes were identified from the data - rocky biotopes were easier to identify as much of the sediment biotopes can only be recognised from the sort of species lists produced by grab sampling.

Much of the requirement for marine biological data is for the distribution and extent of seabed habitats - this extra step makes the Seasearch data much more likely to be widely used and is a significant move towards producing a seabed habitat map for Dorset.

Poole Harbour Deepening

The winter of 2005 saw the start of a massive project to deepen the main shipping channel into Poole Harbour. Up to half of the material dredged is being used for beach recharge on local beaches - the rest (the siltier sediment) is disposed of at a licensed disposal ground in Swanage Bay. This is a significant increase in the scale of dredge spoil disposal at this site and the programme of Seasearch diving in 2005 included several sites in the vicinity of the disposal ground. This revealed some bedrock/large boulder sites, often dominated by small ascidians such as *Pycnoclavella aurilucens* and *Polycarpa scuba* but also including some impressive ross coral specimens.

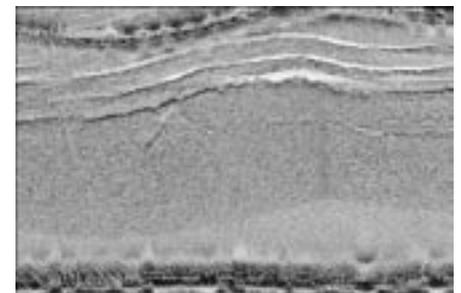


The deepening operation is ongoing at the time of going to press and the area will be revisited in 2006 to assess the impact.

Using remote-sensing data to target Seasearch diving

Choosing where to Seasearch can be a daunting task. Though we do need information from all parts of the seabed, it would be a waste of time, and of the enthusiasm of divers, to simply drop divers in every 100m or so. Large areas of the seabed can be quite uniform - but how can you tell without sending a diver down?

One answer is to use remote sensing data, such as sidescan or multibeam echosounder data. Such data can be expensive to gather, but, where it exists, can be extremely useful in planning dives.

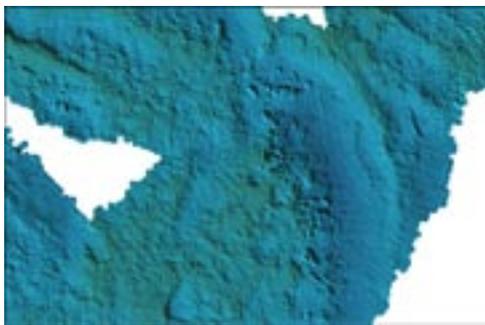


Sidescan data from Worbarrow Bay. The main reef running across the bay is clearly visible. Close examination also reveals a small wreck (thought to be the Patricia II) and parts of the Winfrith pipeline.

In Dorset we have access to three remote sensing datasets: a sidescan survey of Purbeck Marine Wildlife Reserve, undertaken by Dorset Wildlife Trust; a sidescan survey around Durlston Head, undertaken by Durlston Marine Project and a multibeam echosounder survey around the Swanage disposal ground, undertaken by CEFAS.

Seasearch in Dorset is co-ordinated by Dorset Wildlife Trust. The project has received funding support from English Nature, Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and Heritage Lottery fund





Section of multibeam data from CEFAS showing area of large boulders

All of these have been used in planning recent Seasearch dives. In a bid to make these data more available, Dorset Wildlife Trust is providing access to remote sensing datasets via its website (see below)

Internet access to Seasearch data

There is now an interactive map on the DWT website showing the position of Seasearch dives since 1995. This is based on a simple webGIS - the user can zoom, pan and interrogate the map, bringing up details of habitat descriptions and species lists, along with the name of the recorders.



This will be expanded to include site sketches, photos and possibly video clips. It is based on PlanWeb - a system used by planners in Dorset County Council.

www.dorsetwildlife.co.uk/marine/seasearch

Seasearch dive organiser's toolkit in development

For the past couple of years dive organisers in Dorset have been using sidescan and multibeam data to help plan Seasearch dives. These datasets are an extremely

useful resource for planning dives and it would be more productive if they could be made easily available to club diving officers and other interested divers, to plan their own exploratory dives.

As a trial, we have put the sidescan data from the Purbeck Marine Wildlife Reserve on the website, via the same webGIS as mentioned above. This also includes a tool to extract co-ordinates so that features identified from the sidescan can be dived (currently, this gives a UTM co-ordinate, which needs to be converted to Lat/Long). This will be publicised to Seasearchers on the Dorset mailing list. As an aid to interpreting the sidescan, we will add an invisible layer depicting the seabed geology as interpreted from the sidescan, so that the seabed type will appear alongside the co-ordinates when the map is interrogated.

Once this is working smoothly, additional datasets will be added.

Protection at last for Lyme Bay Reefs?

Seasearch records from Lyme Bay last summer, particularly from the Sawtooth Ledges, helped provide the necessary evidence that scallop dredging is damaging the reefs. For largely economic reasons, the intensity of dredging increased considerably last year, with damage noted within areas previously agreed as voluntary exclusion areas. Faced with this evidence, Devon and Southern Sea Fisheries Committees are now considering what action is necessary to protect the reefs of Lyme Bay.

Cucumber gardens

Seasearch divers in Worbarrow Bay in late May stumbled upon a surprising find. The dive started on the wreck of the Patricia II - a small wreck lying just outside

the main reef running across Worbarrow Bay, and close to the much-dived Black Hawk. After following the reef eastwards for a while, the divers swam up over the reef then continued north across a couple of smaller reefs to a patch of duned gravel - to find the seabed carpeted with the feeding tentacles of thousands of gravel sea cucumbers, *Neopentadactyla mixta*.



The larger cucumbers were estimated to be at a density of over 50 per square metre, but there were many more juveniles amongst the larger ones.

One of the more amusing aspects of this dive was the occasional explosive defecation of well-fed sea cucumbers.

2005 Training

The following training events took place in 2005 in Dorset:

23 April Drawing for Seasearch

A one-day workshop led by local artist, Jo Winzar. This was selectively advertised among a small number of regular contributors (but was not a comment on the quality of their sketches). The few who did attend found it useful in building confidence to draw, but felt that it would have been better to have a tutor who was both experienced in teaching drawing and had practical experience of Seasearch.

30 April Observer Course

9 divers took part in the one-day course. Diving was arranged for the following day for participants to log some qualifying dives.

4/5 June Surveyor Course

7 divers took part in a two day course at the Fine Foundation Marine Centre, Kimmeridge Bay. Diving on the second day was from Swanage Pier

18 June Seahorse survey

Neil Garrick-Maidment of the Seahorse Trust instructed 10 divers in techniques for surveying seahorses. This included a fingertip search among the eelgrass beds at Studland. No seahorses were found on the day.

2005 Diving

The following is a list of organised dives carried out in Dorset, through Dorset WildlifeTrust. In addition to this, Lin Baldock arranged two weekends through the Marine Conservation Society's Members Dives programme.

16/17 April - Swanage/Poole Bay.

Cancelled due to lack of interest

31 April - Kimmeridge.

Diving for those on Observer course. 8 divers

14 May Seahorse Survey, with Seahorse Trust, Studland Beach.

Postponed due to bad weather

5 June Seasearch Surveyor course

Kimmeridge – 10 divers

18 June Seahorse Survey

Studland 6 divers

30 June - evening dive

Kimmeridge – cancelled due to bad weather

11 July - evening dive

Kimmeridge – cancelled due to bad weather

30 July - Seasearch dive

Kimmeridge – 5 divers

31 July - Seasearch dive

Swanage/Poole Bay. 7 divers

14 August - Seasearch dive

Kimmeridge 5 divers

16 August - Seasearch dive

Poole Bay – 4 divers

27 August - Seasearch dive

Kimmeridge – 4 divers

30 August - Seasearch dive

Poole Bay – 5 divers

25 September - Seasearch dive

Swanage – 6 divers

23 October - Seasearch dive

Swanage cancelled due to bad weather