



dive into conservation

Seasearch Northern Ireland Annual Report 2011



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1. Introduction

The aim of Seasearch is to gather information on seabed habitats and associated marine wildlife in Britain and Ireland through the participation of volunteer recreational divers. The scheme is coordinated by the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) and organised regionally by a series of coordinators. As well as recording marine life and habitats, volunteers record litter or any other man-made impacts that are apparent.

The objectives of Seasearch are:

- To encourage the participation of volunteer recreational divers in marine conservation through gathering data, particularly for areas where little data exists or where there is a conservation need.
- To provide training in recording skills to enable volunteer recreational divers to participate in Seasearch.
- To make quality assured Seasearch data available to partner organisations and the general public.
- To raise public awareness of the diversity of marine life and habitats in Britain and Ireland through the dissemination of information gathered and the identification of issues arising from it.

Through training and organised dives Seasearch recreational scuba divers are able to survey large areas of the seabed which would otherwise be inaccessible for monitoring authorities. All Seasearch Northern Ireland data is deposited at the regional recording centre, CeDAR, at the Ulster Museum (<http://www.nmni.com/cedar>). The data is also validated and available free through the NBN gateway <http://data.nbn.org.uk/>.

2. Diving Activities and Recording

Seasearch Northern Ireland has continued throughout 2011 and completed a wide range of surveys around the coast of Northern Ireland. During 2011 there were organised dives in Carlingford Lough, Strangford Lough, Rathlin and the North Coast (Figure 1). Despite bad weather there was an increase in records from 2010 from Northern Ireland including previously unrecorded sites. A limestone reef at Dunluce and a newly identified wall off the Skerries were two of the new sites investigated this year. The limestone reef was a feature identified in the recent Joint Irish Bathymetric Survey Project (JIBS). Some popular dive sites such as the Alastor wreck in Strangford Lough were used for surveys to allow trainee volunteers to begin comfortably recording in familiar dive sites. Shore dives were popular as there is no cost to volunteers and they provided a good opportunity for trainee recorders to improve their recording skills. Seasearch volunteers also submitted records from their own dives, totalling 56 forms (14 Survey and 42 Observation, appendix 1). There are a total 873 records of 192 species and genera recorded for 2011.



Figure 1. Map of general survey areas (GoogleEarth).



Figure 2. Volunteers beginning a shore dive at Greencastle.

A survey was organised with Newry Sub-Aqua Club in Carlingford Lough which is an area which is not well surveyed compared to other areas in Northern Ireland, both a shore and boat dive were completed. As well as recording marine life, Seasearchers noted litter including a toilet, fishing gear and metal scrap at Greencastle. This is a region which we plan to focus on in the 2012-2015 programme.

3. Species of conservation interest

Priority species *Pycnoclavella stolonialis*, known as the Pin Head Seasquirt was recorded by Surveyor Dr Claire Goodwin at Hunter Rock near Larne.



Figure 3. *Pycnoclavella stolonialis*, photograph by Claire Goodwin.

The red blenny (Fig. 4), *Parablennius ruber*, also known as the Portuguese blenny, has been recorded several times on the north coast by Seasearchers at Carrick-a-Rede and the Templemore Wreck at Ballycastle. This species was thought to be a warm water species which seems to be expanding its range around the north coast of Ireland (Goodwin and Picton, 2007). This is a small fish that hides in crevices in rocky areas so scuba divers are able to see and record it where other monitoring techniques such as towed fishing surveys may not be applicable.



Figure 4. *Parablennius ruber* at Carrick-a-Rede, photographed by Chris Wood.

The tube worms in figure 5 were photographed on limestone at Dunluce on the north coast. They couldn't be identified locally but an expert at the National Museums of Wales was able to confirm that they were *Pseudopotamilla reniformis*.



Figure 5. *Pseudopotamilla reniformis* at Dunluce Limestone Reef, photographed by Chris Wood.

The invasive non-native seaweed *Sargassum muticum*, also known as wireweed, was recorded as frequently occurring at Portrush Harbour. This species has been present since at least 1995 in Northern Ireland but has only begun to establish on the north coast since 2008, usually in sheltered areas.



Figure 6. *Sargassum muticum* at the slip way in Portrush Harbour.

4. Training Activities

4.1. Observer Training

An Observer Course at Killowen Outdoor Center near Warrenpoint in March 2011 was well attended with support for dives the following day in Carlingford Lough with Newry and Mourne Sub Aqua Club, tutored by Charmaine Beer and Claire Goodwin. Barbara Irvine, Robert Irvine and Bertie Gault qualified as Observers during 2011.



Figure 7. Dr Claire Goodwin tutoring at Killowen Outdoor Centre.

4.2. Seaweed Workshop

A dive during April in Portrush Harbour was followed by a short seaweed workshop in the Coastal Zone Centre. Tutored by Charmaine Beer.



Figure 8. Diver survey of Portrush Harbour.



Figure 9. Rich seaweed community with *Saccorhiza polyschides* at Portrush Harbour.

4.3. Marine Life Identification (Introduction)

This course ran in September 2011 at Exploris Aquarium Portaferry and was extremely popular with volunteer divers. A repeat course is planned for 2013 or 2014 following revising of some of the lecture material. Diving was cancelled due to unfavourable weather but a practical session on the shore and local marina along with video dives and photography workshop completed the practical component of this course. Tutored by Claire Goodwin and Charmaine Beer.



Figure 10. Claire Goodwin teaching at the Marine Life Identification course.



Figure 11. Some participants exploring Ballyhenry Island, Strangford Lough.



Figure 12. Examination of specimens on the Marine Life course.

5. Promotional activities

During 2011 Seasearch NI held a photography competition with prizes sponsored by two local dive companies. This proved to be a great way of promoting Seasearch to scuba divers in Northern Ireland, but also as a way of collecting images to showcase the wonderful and colourful marine life. All entrants agreed that their images could be used for Seasearch publicity and the winning images are on the website (<http://www.seasearch.co.uk/northernireland/gallery/2011competition.htm>).

Digital photography has becoming a great tool for awareness of marine life and also to enable volunteers to improve their recording skills. The underwater photographer Nigel Motyer kindly judged the competition and also presented an end of season talk on his adventures which was open to all divers and volunteers.



Figure 13. Winners of the underwater photography competition with Nigel Motyer.

The website has been modernised and is more attractive and this should increase usage and access to Seasearch Northern Ireland. Information on sightings and species of interest will be added, along with a species of the month feature.

Charmaine Beer and Chris Wood made a lunchtime presentation on the Seasearch project to NIEA staff in September.

6. Seasearch Northern Ireland Programme for 2012 onwards

Continued funding from NIEA has been secured for 2012-2015 and a work programme will be agreed with marine scientists in NIEA, May 2012 and continually reviewed. Additional volunteer support from the Ulster Wildlife Trust has been funded for a small survey around Muck Island, Island Magee in 2012.

7. Acknowledgments

Thanks to all volunteers and the dive community who have contributed to the Seasearch scheme for Northern Ireland in 2011. Thanks to Dr Claire Goodwin who has continued to tutor, marshal dives and provide taxonomic expertise to support the programme. Additional thanks to Melina McMullan for marshalling, Newry and Mourne Sub Aqua Club for providing a boat and local knowledge for Carlingford Lough dives. Thanks to Aquaholics and DV Diving for sponsoring the photography competition. Many thanks to Nigel Motyer for judging the 2011 photography competition and also for giving a talk on his underwater photography.

We also thank the Northern Ireland Environment Agency for its continued financial support for Seasearch.

8. References

C.E. Goodwin and B.E. Picton (2007). The red blenny *Parablennius ruber* in the British Isles, with notes on field identification characteristics and ecology. Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom 87 : 1309-1313.

Appendix 1. Summary of data forms

Date	Site Name	Form Type	Surveyors	Comment
01-Jan-11	The Annagher, near Groomsport	1 Survey	Claire Goodwin	Wreck of the Annagher, very broken up but many large plates remaining. Large Lobster. Potting and recreational fishing litter. Visibility poor on this dive so species record incomplete.
03-Apr-11	Carlingford, Vidal Rock, buoy 9.	3 Survey, 1 Observation	Deirdre Greer, David Goodwin, Jerome McGrady, Daniel O'Neill,	Series of rock ledges covered in hydroid turf down to a boulder field. Ledges were surveyed. Rich in hydroid turf with feeding nudibranchs, mainly Coryphella. Snagged fishing line present. Largely circalittoral rocky slope and wall in tidally swept area. Lots of fishing weights and line.
03-Apr-11	Carlingford Lough, Greencastle	7 Observation	Stephen Collins, Michaela Fox, Bertie Gault, Robert Irvine, Barbara Irvine, Niall O'Hare, Paula O'Hare	Shore dive by Greencastle pier. Lots of litter including metal, fishermans gloves and a toilet.
17-Apr-11	Portrush Harbour	1 Survey, 3 Observation	Bertie Gault, David Goodwin, Robert Irvine, Barbara Irvine	Lots of typical harbour litter present, bottles, cans, fishing waste, angling gear. Lots of crustaceans.
04-Jun-11	Damicornis Bay, Rathlin	1 Survey, 7 Observation	Stephanie Bennett, Anne Cummings, Bertie Gault, Barbara Irvine, Robert Irvine, Stewart Jones, Aaron Todd, Mary Peahill	Boulders and kelp park going down to mixed ground of sand and gravel. Double prawn cracker sponge at 28m (photograph). Boulder slope with high diversity seaweed and animal communities visible. Noted as healthy marine environment. <i>L. hyperborea</i> at 10-12m. No man-made objects. Large amount of <i>Porania pulvillus</i> over entire site.
04-Jun-11	Templemore Ballycastle	1 Survey, 3 Observation	Stephanie Bennett, Bertie Gault, Stewart Jones, Mary Peahill	Templemore wreck outside Ballycastle sitting on small boulders and cobbles.
12-Jun-11, 06-Aug-11	M.V. Alastor, Ringhaddy	6 Observation	Michaela Fox, Bertie Gault, Barbara Irvine, Robert Irvine	Lots of litter, tyres rope, chain, bottles, litter. Survey of wreckage and seabed on way to wreckage. Tyres and concrete blokes for moorings.

Date	Site Name	Form Type	Surveyors	Comment
03-Jul-11	State of Louisiana, near Larne	1 Survey	Claire Goodwin	Broken up wreckage of State of Louisiana, 3 masted steamer sunk in 1878. Pinhead squirt <i>Pycnoclavella stolonialis</i> recorded (NI Priority species). Tackle from angling around. Photographs taken but not a large species list as photography was priority.
16-Jul-11, 28-Aug-11, 25-Sept-11	Rathlin - North Wall and Black Rock	1 Survey, 6 Observation	Desmond Curran, Bertie Gault, Mary O'Donohoe, Chris Wood, Darren Johnson	Steep wall covered in dead mens fingers, shoal of pollock. Dense kelp rocky reef with mixed seaweeds and boulders. Steep vertical wall. Dense mixed animal turf especially rich in anemones. Boulders and rock with crevices on a plateau, then drop to wall at 12m Wall covered in short and tall animal turf.
21-Aug-11	Ballyhenry Island Drop-off, Strangford	1 Survey	Claire Goodwin	Ledges of limestone bedrock and boulders on sand. No visible impacts of humans but popular dive site.
24-Sep-11	Dunluce Reef, North Coast	2 Survey, 3 Observation	Neil Armour, Noel Black, Stewart Jones, Chris Wood, Andrew Young	Infralittoral limestone reef with sandy gullies, predominately kelp covered. Pitted limestone extensively bored with <i>Hiatella arctica</i> . Litter, cans and tennis ball. <i>Pseudopotamilla reniformis</i> .
24-Sep-11	Black Rock Wall, Skerries	1 Survey, 4 Observation	Neil Armour, Noel Black, Stewart Jones, Chris Wood, Andrew Young	North facing wall, vertical rock with dense turf of anthozoans and sponges.
25-Sep-11	Carrick-a-Rede	1 Survey, 2 Observation,	Bertie Gault, Darren Johnston, Chris Wood	Wall with kelp on upper parts, short animal turf. Base of wall extensive boulder bed with kelp park. Red blenny present. Larry Bane Bay at Carrick-a-Rede.