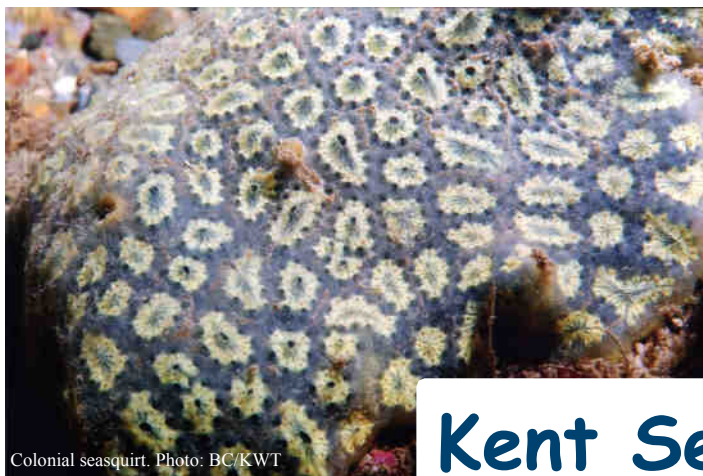




Greater pipefish. Photo: BC/KWT



Colonial seasquirt. Photo: BC/KWT



Tompot blenny. Photo: BC/KWT



Dead man's fingers. Photo: BC/KWT

Kent Seasearch 2003 Summary



Lobster. Photo: BC/KWT

Kent Seasearch forms part of a national programme of Seasearch diving and training for recreational divers to record information about marine habitats and species, thereby helping towards their protection.

Kent Seasearch was established in January 2003 as a collaborative project between Kent Wildlife Trust, British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, English Nature and Kent County Council. In the first year a total of 70 divers participated in Kent Seasearch. Six Seasearch Observer training courses and a marine life identification course were held during the year, and a total of 30 Seasearch Observation Forms were completed, recording details of habitats and species at eight diving locations.

The Target Area for the first year of Kent Seasearch was the seabed between Dover and Folkestone and survey activity ranged from shore diving on Sandgate Reef near Hythe, to wreck diving on the Orangeman, New Comet and Lusitania, and drift diving on the Varne Bank, towards the middle of the English Channel.



Photo: Kent Seasearch

Species recorded by Seasearch divers in Kent in 2003 include:

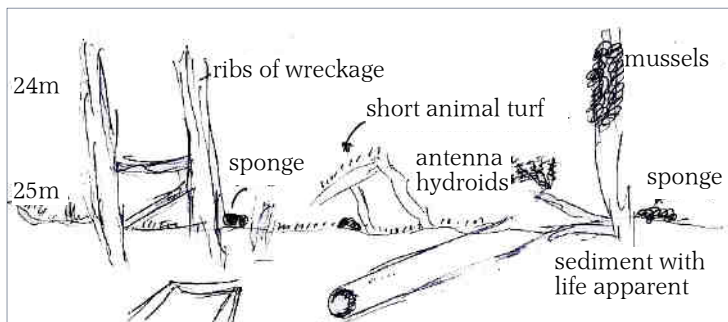
- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Dead man's fingers | Netted dogwhelk |
| Plumose anemone | Common mussel |
| Antenna hydroid | Cuttlefish |
| Keelworm | Light bulb sea squirt |
| Shrimp | Colonial sea squirt |
| Hermit crab | Greater sand eel |
| Velvet swimming crab | Plaice |
| Edible crab | Pouting |
| Spiny spider crab | Tompot blenny |
| Lobster | Dogfish |
| Hornwrack | Bass |
| Finger Bryozoan | Goldsinny wrasse |
| Common starfish | Dover sole |



Photo: Kent Seasearch
Paul Oliver about to make a splash as the first Seasearch diver for Kent in June 2003.

Sandgate reef offers a good shore dive. It rises about a metre up from the seabed in 5m of water and has areas of dense algal cover, making it an unusual dive for Kent. Diving in July found the reef teeming with marine life, particularly spider crabs, hydroids and shore fish.

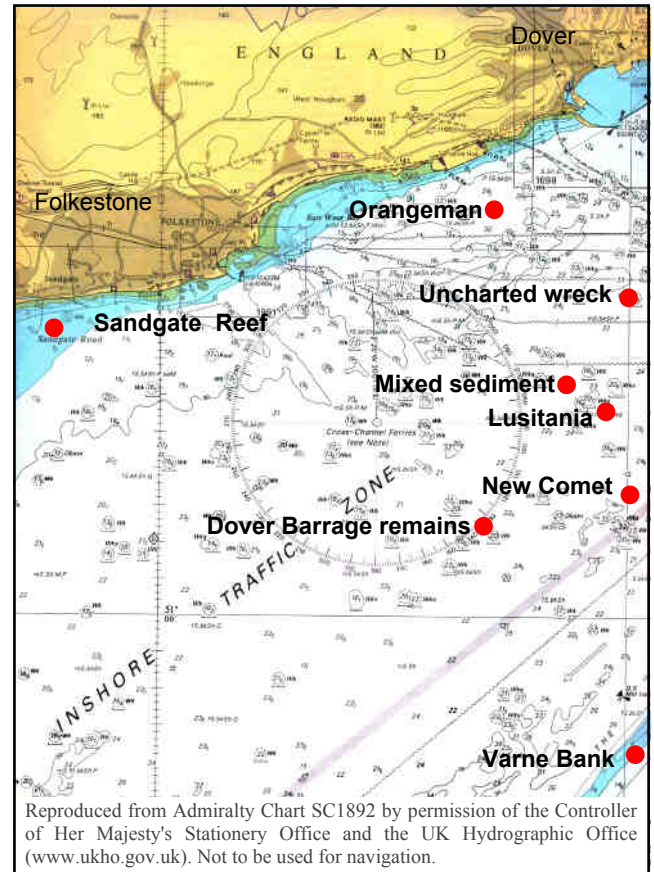
The wrecks. Kent diving would not be complete without a few wreck dives and Seasearch visited a number in 2003, including the Orangeman and Lusitania. These man-made reefs harbour a variety of wildlife, including many fish and crab species. They are often also covered with animal-dominated turf of hydroids, anemones and bryozoans.



Diver's sketch of area dived on Lusitania wreck, showing major structures seen on the dive, depths and main types of marine life.

Mixed sediment areas. Two areas of mixed gravel and sand sediment were dived in 2003. A wide variety of marine life was recorded, from plaice and other flatfish, to sea squirts, mussels, starfish and numerous anemone species.

The Varne Bank is a large sand bank situated towards the middle of the English Channel. Large submerged sand waves in the bank provide a variety of habitats for species. Highlights of this dive included shoals of sandeels being chased around the Bank by bass, and the discovery of dead fragments of maerl, a hard, calcified red alga. This was an unexpected find, and is being investigated.



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Location of 2003 Kent Seasearch dives in 2003

Kent Seasearch would like to thank all those divers who took part in Seasearch events in 2003, with a very special thanks to those who carried out surveys. We hope to see you all Seasearching again!

Kent Seasearch will continue to offer introductory Observer courses, intermediate Surveyor courses and dedicated marine life identification courses, as well as several Seasearch dives around the coast.

Much of the seabed around the UK has never been surveyed, and Kent is no exception. With the establishment of Kent Seasearch and the efforts of recreational divers, we can build a better picture of the marine wildlife off our shores. If you would like to get involved, or to find out more, please contact Bryony Chapman at Kent Wildlife Trust, Tyland Barn, Sandling, Maidstone Kent ME14 3BD e-mail: bryony.chapman@kentwildlife.org.uk Tel: 01622 662012, or visit www.kentwildlife.org.uk or www.seasearch.org.uk.

For course and dive bookings in Kent, please contact Jon Bramley on 01227 750092, mobile 07810 278372 or e-mail jonathan.bramley@btopenworld.com



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