

The table to the right shows how many species in each Phylum were found and what the most common species were. Listed below are records of particular interest.

Sponges one record was made of the branching sponge *Axinella dissimilis*. This is a southern species and is quite rare in Northern Ireland.

Bryozoans two branching bryozoan species were recorded: the stag's horn bryozoan *Porella compressa* and the monkey puzzle bryozoan *Omalosecosa ramulosa*.

Anemones, Corals, Hydroids and Jellyfish several records of the slender sea pen *Virgularia mirabilis* were made from Church Bay.

This is a protected Northern Ireland Conservation Priority species. The burrowing anemone *Edwardsia clapedreii* was spotted by eagle eyed surveyors at a site south of the wreck of the 'Drake' in Church Bay.

Crustaceans the masked crab *Corystes cassivelaunus* was recorded at several sites in Church Bay. This is a Northern Ireland Species of Conservation Concern.

Molluscs we went back to monitor a fan mussel *Atrina fragilis* which was first recorded earlier in the season - it appeared to be in good condition.

Phylum/sub-phylum	Common name	Number of species	Total records	Common species (number of records in brackets)
Porifera	Sponges	15	29	<i>Cliona celata</i> (11) – Boring sponge
Cnidaria	Anemones, corals, hydroids, jellyfish	25	77	<i>Caryophyllia smithii</i> (16)– Devonshire cup coral <i>Cerianthus lloydii</i> (7) – Burrowing anemone <i>Virgularia mirabilis</i> (7) – Slender Sea Pen
Annelida	Segmented worms	7	13	<i>Chaetopterus variopedatus</i> (3) – Parchment worm <i>Janice conchilega</i> (3) – Sand mason worm
Crustacea	Lobsters, crabs, barnacles	14	52	<i>Cancer pagurus</i> (12) – Edible crab <i>Necora puber</i> (7) – Velvet swimming crab <i>Corystes cassivelaunus</i> (7) – masked crab
Mollusca	Shells, sea slugs, cuttlefish, octopus	35	64	<i>Calliostoma zizyphinum</i> (14) – Painted top shell <i>Mytilus edulis</i> (6) – Common mussel
Bryozoa	Sea mats	9	20	<i>Crisia</i> spp. (3) – White claw sea moss <i>Porella compressa</i> (2) – Stags horn bryozoan
Echinodermata	Starfish, urchins, sea cucumbers	12	69	<i>Echinus esculentus</i> (11) – Edible urchin <i>Asterias rubens</i> (13) – Common starfish
Tunicata	Sea squirts	10	33	<i>Clavelina lepadiformis</i> (11) – lightbulb sea squirt
Pisces	Fishes	20	65	<i>Pollachius pollachius</i> (8) – Pollack <i>Labrus bergylla</i> (8) – Ballan Wrasse <i>Labrus mixtus</i> (6) – Cuckoo Wrasse
Algae	Seaweeds	26	73	<i>Delesseria sanguinea</i> (7) – Sea beech <i>Laminaria hyperborea</i> (7) – Forest kelp <i>Laminaria saccharina</i> (8) – Sugar kelp
Total		173	495	

Echinoderms in Church Bay we recorded the sea cucumber *Labidoplax digitata*. This worm-like cucumber feeds on detritus scraped from the surface of the sand around its burrow. This makes a star shape of grooves around the burrow entrance. Several records were made in Church Bay of the Northern Ireland Conservation Priority Species the sand star *Astropecten irregularis*.

Fish both the common dragonet *Callionymus lyra* and the reticulated dragonet *Callionymus reticulata* were recorded on sandy areas in Church Bay. Wrasse were common on rocky areas and near wrecks, particularly the cuckoo wrasse *Labrus mixtus* and the ballan wrasse *Labrus bergylla*.

Seasquirts the lightbulb seasquirt *Clavelina lepadiformis* was common on rocky areas.

Seaweeds kelp forest was common in rocky areas and on wreckage. On sandy areas there were patches of red weed including red fringe weed *Calliblepharis ciliata* and the branching weed *Callophyllis laciniata*.

Worms the sea mouse *Aphrodita aculeata* was recorded. This attractive iridescent worm is named after Aphrodite the Greek goddess of love (well it is quite pretty for a worm!). The name sea mouse derives from the dense layer of hairs which cover its body.



Above: Slender Sea Pen *Virgularia mirabilis*



Rathlin Survey 2007



Fan Mussel *Atrina fragilis*



Cuttlefish *Sepiolo atlantica*



Seasearchers join the MCS campaign



Sponges in Damicornis Bay - CW



Sand star – *Astropecten irregularis*



Recording on Rathlin



Surveyors taking part were: Lin Baldock, Graham Day, Sharon Doake, Colin Ferguson, Claire Goodwin, David Goodwin, Alasdair Kennedy, Paul McIlwaine, Julia Nunn, Mark Patton, Franklyn Riemann, Ronnie Snyder, Chris Wood. Thanks to Aquaholics, who were used for boat cover and supplied site info.

Seasearch is a volunteer underwater survey project for recreational divers to actively contribute to the conservation of the marine environment (see www.seasearch.org.uk for more information). Financial support for the project was given by the Environment and Heritage service Northern Ireland. This report was written by Claire Goodwin (thanks to Julia Nunn and Chris Wood for editorial comments). Photos are by Claire Goodwin and where specified Chris Wood and Andrea Graeb.



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South of 'HMS Drake' Cardinal Mark

On gently sloping sandy seabed in Church Bay (13-16m). A diatom mat was present on the surface of the sand. There were many sea cucumber burrows (*Labidoplax digitata*). This cucumber uses its tentacles to scrape food from the sand surface, leaving a star shaped pattern around its burrow. The solitary stalked hydroid *Corymorpha nutans* was also present, with the nudibranch *Eubranchus farrani* feeding on it. Many echinoderms were present including the NICP species *Astropecten irregularis*. Other interesting species were the slender sea pen *Virgularia mirabilis* and the masked crab *Corystes cassivelaunus*. The worm anemone *Edwardsia clapedii* was also sighted.



Pollack *Pollachius pollachius*



Masked crab *Corystes cassivelaunus*. CW.

Damicornis Bay

Gentle south facing slope of small boulders with kelp forest to 15m, red algal zone to 25m, and faunal turf below 25m. Kelp forest *Laminaria hyperborea* and *saccharina*, dog fish egg cases were frequent on kelp. Below 25m, the boulders were dominated by sponges and cup corals. Axinellid sponges including the crumpled duster sponge *Axinella damicornis* and the prawn cracker sponge *Axinella infundibuliformis* were common below 25m. The boulder slope continued beyond depths surveyed to 70m+.



Sea cucumber *Labidoplax digitata*

White Cliffs

South facing boulder slope, fairly flat at top covered in kelp forest (14.4m) then dropping steeply, up to 29m surveyed. Lower areas of slope were dominated by red seaweeds and hydroids (antenna hydroid *Nemertesia antennina*, branched antenna hydroid *Nemertesia ramosa* and herring bone hydroid *Halecium halecinum* all common).



Sea cucumber *Labidoplax digitata*

Rathlin Survey

This was a largely opportunistic survey. Church Bay provided a sheltered alternative site when poor weather prevented diving at the intended survey sites on the North Coast. Three days diving took place, and in total seven sites were surveyed.

One fan shell *Atrina fragilis* was recorded (from a secret location!). This is the only living individual known from Northern Ireland and was first discovered on an EHS/Ulster Museum dive earlier in the month. It appeared have been disturbed when found - the purpose of the Seasearch dive was to check its current status. Divers observed that it appeared to be healthy and had re-buried itself well.

The wreck of the 'HMS Drake'

Wreck of the 'HMS Drake', lying on the east side of Church Bay Rathlin Island. The wreck was quite broken up, and lay on fine sand. The topside of wreck was densely covered in kelp and red weeds. Shaded wreck surfaces were dominated by cup corals *Caryophyllia smithii*, white claw sea moss *Crisia* spp. and other bryozoans, and the light bulb sea squirt *Clavelina lepadiformis*. Soft rippled sand surrounded the wreck - this had a brown algal mat on its surface. The sand was scoured deeper close to wreck. The slender sea pen *Virgularia mirabilis* was present in the sand.



Church Bay

Level sandy seabed (approx 15m). Ripples of fine sand with sparse shell fragments and small pebbles. *Virgularia mirabilis* and *Astropecten irregularis* were recorded (NI Conservation Priority species). The area was dived as a drift dive. Divers drifted approx. 500m from the entry point: as the current was relatively strong and visibility quite poor it was not possible to record some things to species level (e.g. red weeds).

A second habitat was encountered by some surveyors. This was an area of gravel waves, very unusual for Church Bay. It looked very silty, as if it may have been recently disturbed, possibly by the recent installation of a pipeline in the bay.



Some of the survey team on Rathlin. Photo: Andrea Graeb



Burrowing anemone *Edwardsia clapedii* CW



Masked crab *Corystes cassivelaunus*.

'The Lochgarry'

Dive on port (east) side of 'Lochgarry' wreck, a large upright wreck on the eastern side of Rathlin Island. Level seabed on east side of wreck (33-33.8m below chart datum), composed of sand, gravel, cobbles, pebbles and scattered small boulders. Some fauna on the pebbles but mostly present on boulders, including sponges, hydroids and anemones.

On a dive later in the year, the wreck itself was surveyed. The deck is at approx. 25m. A very large shoal (>100) of pollack was observed. There was much evidence of angling at the site: sinkers, lures and monofilament were present on the wreck and tangled in the shot line.

Inshore of the 'Lochgarry' wreck

Mainly bedrock reef (5-18m in depth), with kelp and red weeds such as the toothed weed *Odonthalia dentata* on upper faces. Sand patches between bedrock ridges with occasional king scallops (*Pecten maximus*).