

HELFORD

Voluntary Marine Conservation Area

Newsletter No. 41 Autumn 2010

Venturing into Volunteering through the 'Your Shore' project.

On Monday 5th July, 16 interested members of the Helford River community met at the Gweek Seal Sanctuary to mark the start of a new HMCG volunteer team. This team is being currently coordinated by the Your Shore project, run by Cornwall Wildlife Trust, which aims to support Cornwall's VMCA's and enable them to develop where necessary. In regards to Helford VMCA, the Your Shore project hopes to develop links with local education providers such as primary schools to show how they can use the River for educational activities, plus set up a more active volunteer group as mentioned in this article who will take on the role of carrying out more practical conservation activities such as beach cleans or environmental monitoring where able.

volunteers are being encouraged and supported to pass on their knowledge by leading an event that will allow others to learn. Cornwall Wildlife Trust will organise a series of training events over the following year to also support the development of volunteer's knowledge so that they are able to get involved in monitoring work that may be set up once again, such as rocky shore studies, cockle surveys or bird counts. Volunteers are also encouraged to attend some of the many events run by the HMCG annually as they provide an excellent opportunity to learn more about the local environment.

With such a great response and support, the development of a volunteer group really does seem possible. Although now supported by the Your Shore project, it is hoped that in a few years time the Membership Group will naturally take over the job of coordinating enthusiastic members and keep activities going. If you wish to find out more about volunteering or the Your Shore project please check out our website www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/yourshore or email abby.crosby@cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk.

Abby Crosby, Your Shore project officer and HMCG coordinator



Abby with Coverack School on a Seashore Safari at St Anthony, photo by Emma Cunningham

In total, the number of interested people wanting to get involved in more practical conservation work on the river actually exceeds 30 as we had 19 apologies to match our 16 present! This just proves how interested the public are in conserving our local marine environment, which bodes well for a healthy and sustainable river for future generations to enjoy. After a fantastic introduction from Pamela Tompsett at the start of the meeting, discussions began about what volunteers are interested in and want to learn more about. From coastal flora to birds, plankton to boat monitoring, everyone came up with a plethora of ideas that we will take forward this autumn. Skilled



Ruth passing on her knoweldge and skills on a rockpool ramble - a great way for people to discover and learn more

HMCG Members Committee, Chairman's report Autumn 2010

As announced we were very pleased to appoint Abby Crosby as our new co-ordinator in April, replacing Rhiannon Pipkin who took on a full time job with Natural England (working with the fishing industry on the implementation of new marine legislation). Also delighted that Rhiannon is keen to continue helping us and therefore was elected to our committee at the AGM.

Even better to also be able to confirm that as I write we have learnt that we have successfully applied for and been awarded funding sufficient to run the co-ordinator role, one day per week, for a further 3 years from the Esmee Fairbank Foundation. In these difficult economic times this is great news as without the co-ordinator in place we would find it extremely difficult to pursue our aims. With this in mind we have also produced a new 5 year Strategic Guidelines document which outlines what we aim to do in future. If you are interested to see this, it is available on our website www.helfordmarineconservation.co.uk. The document also is important in order to gain funding from any available sources.

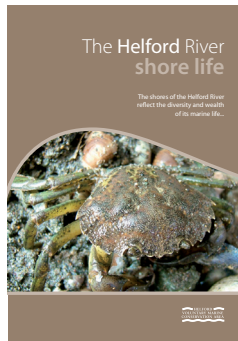


In a separate article, Abby updates you on her 'Your Shore' project which she presented at the AGM and kicked off at that time. We are

really pleased that this is going ahead as it gets nearby schools involved in the local environment as part of their studies.

This year's events are taking place as published and attracting good levels of participation (see separate reports on each event). Paul Garrard and his events committee is currently finalising the programme for next year which is certainly up to its previous high standards. The committee has been actively progressing with the things previously identified as current and future priorities. These are:

New leaflets: 5 additional leaflets (Fish, Fishing, Conservation, Shore Life and Geology) have been printed in the last year to be available at our future events or accessible from the website.



Website development: see the separate article in this newsletter to read about 'what's new'. Information is being added regularly which hopefully will prove interesting and useful for all who have a concern for the River. Let us know if there is anything else you would like to see there.

New information boards: our aim is to renew the current boards as soon as we can. Having investigated the costs involved this is not something that can be done in the near future unless we can secure sponsorship. All existing boards have recently been inspected and most are in good, serviceable condition. See separate article in this newsletter for more details.

Volunteers: this is progressing and the first volunteers meeting held a few weeks ago came up with a good action list of suggestions for things to be done – see separate article. Beach clean up work has been undertaken in several locations.

Schools involvement: as mentioned above, the 'Your Shore' project is up and running – full update in a separate article.

Scientific studies: this important subject is being progressed as part of the volunteers' aims at present. Initially we need to clearly identify exactly what we can get going in the short and medium term. Training for volunteers can then be organised. As ever, anyone interested in taking part can contact Abby Crosby to register their interest. All help is welcome and we recognise that most people can only commit limited time. (Some the earlier work is due to appear on the website soon)

David Tompson

www.helfordmarineconservation.co.uk

For those of you who have not visited our web site lately, we have a series of new information leaflets now available as downloads. To date we have geology, fishing, fish, shorelife, conservation, birds, eelgrass beds, bait digging, oysters and woods available.

Other downloadable files include the Helford VMCA diary of events, Cornwall Sea Fisheries District Guide to minimum fish and shellfish

sizes, Strategic Guidelines 2010 and Work programme 2010-2015 and all our newsletters going right back to number 26 published in Spring 2003.

Providing information in this way saves us both printing costs and postage and gets them to a much wider audience. They are all proving very popular with the Bait Digging proving to be the most popular. The download count for the information leaflets alone is

nearly two and a half thousand, and we only started publishing them in February this year.

There are plans to publish surveys and scientific reports on the site in the future, which are currently only available as hard copies. We hope they will be a useful resource.

Jayne Herbert (Web Design and Internet services)
<http://www.jayne-herbert.co.uk/>

Abigail Crosby



*New coordinator Abby Crosby,
Photo by Dan Ransom.*

A very warm welcome to Abby Crosby, our new Co-ordinator, whose energy and enthusiasm has already extended the work of marine conservation on the shores of the HVMCA with schools and events with people of all ages. We look forward to her cheerful smile at our meetings and workshops. Abby has an impressive background training in Biological and Applied Marine Science as well as diving, swimming and educational activities. The HVMCA part-time post fits well with her other employment which is directed to all the VMCA's in Cornwall developing marine conservation awareness and enjoyment amongst visitors and users of all ages. Abby has taken over from Rhiannon Pipkin who did some sterling work for the HMCG and has now moved on to a full-time position as a Marine Officer for Natural England in Truro. As well as moving house and finalising her PhD thesis, Rhiannon still maintains a close link with the Group. We thank her for all her efforts and wish her every success for the future and congratulate her on becoming Dr Rhiannon Pipkin.

Pamela E Tompsett

Fiona Beale 1933-2010

Helford Marine Conservation Group members were sad to lose a long-standing and staunch supporter in Fiona Beale who seldom missed a meeting, adding her local knowledge to great effect.

Fiona had a taste for adventure; in the 1950s she joined the 18-strong crew of a converted sailing barge called 'Agnes' enjoying a lively trip across the Atlantic to the West Indies. Climbing in the Himalayas was another sport she enjoyed.

Fiona arrived in Port Navas in 1965 on her beloved yacht 'Devon Maid'. She lived aboard while work was completed on the former garage, bought from Sally Thomas's father, which was to be her home for the next 45 years.

Fiona became well known around the village and the river as an active oarswoman and sailor, and as an accomplished artist and woodcarver. She was an enthusiastic contributor to many local organisations, particularly the Port Navas Regatta and the Helford Marine Conservation Group. In recent years she managed to turn the little village hall in Port Navas into an exhibition venue of choice for local artists. On the evening of April 30th many of Fiona's friends were with her at the launch of the Tom Cross Archive at University College Falmouth. It was a great party and Fiona was in fine form. She died suddenly at home early the next day. Port Navas will not be quite the same without her and the HMCG members will miss a valued colleague.



The HVMCA members are also very grateful for the generous donation received from the family and friends of the late Fiona Beale

Pamela E Tompsett

The Conservation of Bass



On Saturday 10th April John Leballeur, a leading campaigner for seabass conservation and restoration, sadly died suddenly at the age of 60. Although he

John Leballeur, photo from www.ukbass.com

may not be a household name to you or I, his death was an enormous shock and loss to those who work within the conservation of this important fish.

A keen fisherman himself, it was in 1999 that John decided to give back something to the environment and sport in which he so enjoyed spending his time in and doing – fishing. With fairly recent highly efficient fishing methods having seriously reduced the bass stock around the British coast, John work tirelessly throughout his life with other leading conservationists to try and give bass the protection they needed to return to the healthy levels of the past.

John inspired many people in the work that he did towards the protection for



Derek Goodwin Aug 2010 Polwheveral, Photo by Sam Davies

bass, including Helford's very own Derek Goodwin. Derek, as many of you may know, has been involved in recording the presence and growth of bass juveniles over a number of years in the Helford River. The river acts as a nursery for the bass, with the very young fish coming into estuaries for 2+ years to feed where the water is warmer and the food supply good before returning to the sea.

Helford Bass Netting Project 2010

The Helford was netted ten times this year which is a greater effort than usual, but not quite as much as DEFRA scientists at Lowestoft have asked us to do. First I must assure you that every effort was made to avoid casualties. The main casualties must have been to the billions of mysid shrimps, the other ones were to the numerous small sandsmelt, clupeids (sprats herrings etc') and very small post larval grey mullet. These casualties, although regrettable, were minimal and should not have any effect on the huge numbers of these fish

The catch of 91 of last year's bass, or year 1 bass, was better than expected compared with the 27 of them which were caught last year. Even though netting last year was constrained due to the awful weather and the "red tide" algal bloom, the recruitment of post larval bass into the River in 2009 had to be classed as 'very poor'. The catch of 91 bass this summer proved at least they survived last winter's cold weather, and we can upgrade it as just 'poor'.



Netting the river, photo by Nigel Knight



Bass 0 group photo by Sam Davies

So far this year we have only caught 27 of this year's bass "O" group in four nettings in August when conditions and tides were good, with a best catch of 22 at Bonallack. This is truly an extremely poor catch, especially if, for a quick comparison, it is compared with 378 caught at Merthen on 30th August 2007. For the time being I can only describe it as another bad year. Perhaps

we may yet find better numbers and next year's netting may prove 2010 to be not so bad after all. It is a feature of these investigations that the following year's netting provides confirmation of the strength of the previous year's stock.

Although fewer nettings have been made in the Fal they compare similarly to those in the Helford. To be brief one thing is certain - we now have sufficiently good evidential records to prove that 2002 and 2007 were the last good years for bass recruitment in the Helford, and that the stocks are in decline. This must fly in the face of what some anglers and fishermen are saying that there are plenty of bass out there. Perhaps the cold sea water temperatures due to last Winter's cold weather may have affected the spawning. Persistent strong offshore

winds could have prevented the post larval bass entering the River. Excessive predation by birds and fish could be another cause.

Finally brief mention must be made concerning other fish caught. One unusual catch was a shad 35.6cm long at Merthen. Small common sole and a turbot have been caught, also plenty of pipefish, small herrings, pilchards and some gilthead bream. All fish are returned including a nice 50cm long bass, minus a few scales (taken for ageing), which proved it to be eight years old (2002 year class).

If you would like to read Derek's reports in more detail, please contact Abby Crosby on abby@helfordvmca.co.uk.

Derek Goodwin and Abby Crosby

HVMCA Information Boards

You will probably have seen one or more of the Information Boards about the Helford Voluntary Marine Conservation Area. There are about a dozen of these boards positioned at key points around the Helford River such as Trebah Beach, Helford Village car park, Mawnan Church etc.. We would be very interested to hear any thoughts you may have about these information boards.



The Members Committee of HVMCA has been debating whether it is time to replace these boards and, if so, how we could improve them? This is by no means a one-sided debate for three reasons in particular : (i) the

existing boards are well liked, (ii) they are generally in good condition, and (iii) it would be expensive to replace them. So, the committee members do not feel this is an urgent issue but we do feel that we could improve the boards and it would be good to refresh these important displays at some stage.

The purpose of the boards is to provide an appreciation of the special nature of the conservation area and to encourage visitors to help to protect this important area and not to damage it. Do you think they do this well? Could they be improved? What additional information, if any, should they cover?

The main audience for the information boards is first time visitors, especially parents and their children. But they are also intended for regular walkers and river users, especially fishermen. Do you have any thoughts on the priority for these audiences? Do you know someone who could help us with the design and/or production of these boards? It will cost several thousand pounds to replace these boards and we are unlikely to have sufficient funds to do this unless we can obtain generous grants and/or commercial sponsorship. If your organisation or business would be interested in helping with this funding we would be very keen to hear from you! With sufficient funds we would probably extend the coverage of the boards by adding a few new locations around the river. If you have any comments or suggestions, please email abby@helfordvmca.co.uk

Charles Richardson

New underwater eyes for Cornwall Sea Fisheries Committee

Whilst the sight of 'Saint Piran', Cornwall Sea Fisheries Committee's (CSFC) patrol vessel, is familiar to many boat owners around the Helford River, the latest addition to her equipment will be virtually invisible when it is at work.

Through an innovative project established this summer, Natural England (NE) has provided funding for new underwater survey equipment. In return, CSFC has committed to carrying out a number of survey days for Natural England over the next few years.



Colin with ROV maiden voyage, photo by Sam Davies

The ROV or Remotely Operated Vehicle is a self propelled robot weighing 4.8kg and about the size of a small rucksack. It has a movable camera which can record digital video and stills photographs. A second, rear-facing camera and a movable claw can also be attached, as well as other monitoring or survey tools. The unit is controlled via an umbilical or tether, a slender but deceptively strong cable which carries power down to the ROV and receives the survey pictures, which are stored onto a laptop. The ROV system including its tether and controls fits into three modestly sized cases making it very portable.

There is an optional additional section of the ROV umbilical which can be attached, called a Smart Tether. This has a series of nodes along its length which connect to a GPS (Global Positioning System) unit. This allows the accurate underwater position of the ROV to be recorded within a few metres, rather than estimating its location by the distance and

angle of the umbilical from the boat.

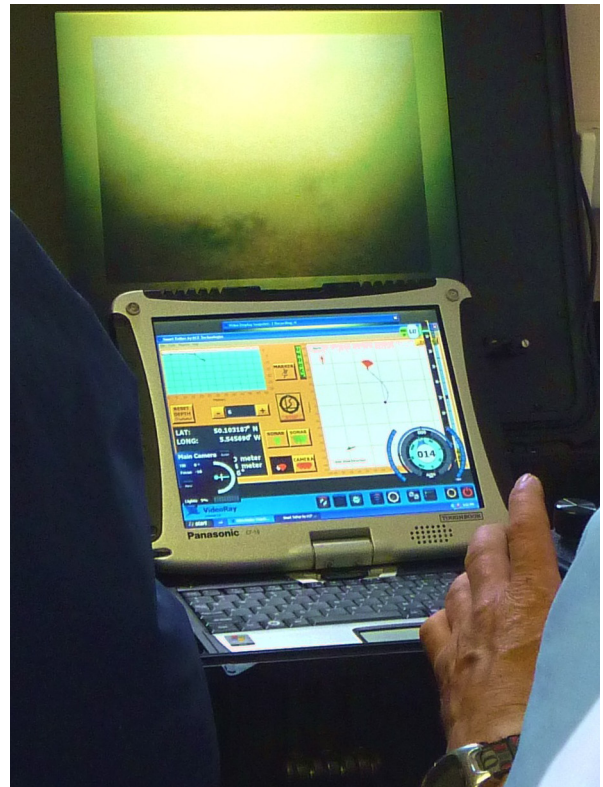
The ROV had its inaugural flight (they are flown rather than driven) in July and the photos show Fishery Officer Colin Trundle launching it (cautiously!) for the first time and a close up of the control box.

'Saint Piran' has also been equipped with an Olex Ground Discrimination System, which analyses data from the vessel's transducer or sounder which records information about the hardness and roughness of the seabed. This enables the vessel to build up 2D and 3D images of the seabed. This information can then be used to identify particular areas for camera or ROV surveys, as well as being a general aid to navigation.

The first major survey work to be carried out as part of the project with Natural England has been a detailed camera survey of the proposed Special Areas of Conservation off the Lizard and Lands End. We aim to bring the ROV into the Helford River this autumn to survey the eelgrass beds off Durgan, time and weather permitting.

CSFC has also purchased the Truro Harbour Master's ex-patrol boat, now renamed 'Kerwyn', to use as a research/patrol vessel around the Fal and Helford estuaries, once our district enlarges to include these areas from April 2011. It will be possible to use the ROV aboard 'Kerwyn' which will enable surveys in the shallow waters in the rivers and around the coast.

Sam Davies



ROV control box close up, photo by Sam Davies

Marine and Coastal Access Bill update

As many of you will remember, this time last year we were eagerly awaiting the enactment of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill. Almost one year on from its royal assent plans for new Marine Conservation Zones, one of the new marine protection measures introduced by the Act, are well underway.

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) will protect nationally important marine wildlife, habitats, geology and geomorphology and sites will be selected to protect not just the rare and threatened, but a range of marine wildlife. MCZs will not all be no-take zones; the management measures will be decided on a site-by-site basis and will depend on what the site has been designated for. Together with other existing designations such as European Marine sites (SACs and SPAs) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) will help to create a wider network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

In England four regional MCZ projects are charged with making the recommendations for Marine Conservation Zones to Government through a collaborative, stakeholder-led process. Finding Sanctuary is the project conducting this work for the south-west.

Stakeholders on the Finding Sanctuary Steering Group, including conservationists, sea users and industry, have recently completed the first stage of planning Marine Conservation Zones. The outputs of this first phase of planning are summarised in the first progress report which is available to read on the Resources pages of the Finding Sanctuary website www.finding-sanctuary.org. The progress report was submitted to the national Science Advisory Panel for feedback to help ensure the Group meets the Ecological Network Guidance.

The guidance is Natural England's and the JNCC's statutory advice on what is required to meet the Government's UK Marine Protected Area network design principles, and the objectives for the selection of individual Marine Conservation Zones.



FINDING SANCTUARY

The first progress report highlights the progress that has been made towards the ultimate goal of making a set of recommendations. Encouragingly, there was unanimous agreement to put forward a set of sites off the Isles of Scilly which had originally been suggested by the Isles of Scilly Local Group. There will be two further planning stages and progress reports for the Science Advisory Panel to comment on before the recommendations are finalised. In June 2012 Finding Sanctuary's recommendations will be given to Natural England and the JNCC to compile with the other three regional projects' recommendations and to then submit to Defra. Defra will run a public consultation before announcing which sites will be designated as MCZs in late 2012.

Finding Sanctuary is currently in the final stages of its stakeholder mapping project. The data collected through this work will help to inform the Steering Group on how the seas around the south-west are currently used, to help them plan MCZs carefully in a way that minimises impacts to sea users. If you are a sailor, kayaker, diver, fishermen or sea angler please share your information with Finding Sanctuary before the end of October. You can do this online via our interactive map www.mczmapping.org or by contacting your local liaison officer, Spike Searle on 07815 942 420.

Joana Smith, Communications Coordinator, Finding Sanctuary



Divers collecting important underwater data, photo by Simon Burt

Seaquest Netsafe

Seaquest Netsafe is all about cetaceans – dolphins, porpoises and whales – and how we can strive to protect them. We have elements of high technology combined with the dedication and time given by many local volunteers. The results of this project will provide us with a much clearer picture of what is really going on around our coastline and work towards a future of much needed protection for these wonderful creatures.



Bottlenose dolphin, photo Colin Froud

The background...

In the past, Cornwall Wildlife Trust has collected data on cetaceans which highlights the need for us to develop measures to protect these creatures in this region of the UK. For instance, our research into cetacean strandings has shown that there has been a significant increase in strandings reports in Cornwall since 1970. In addition, it has been seen that the accidental entanglement in fishing gear (called bycatch) has been the most common cause of death in UK stranded cetaceans subjected to post mortem examination. The fact that Cornwall has the highest level of cetacean strandings and that the seas off Cornwall are some of the most intensively fished in the whole of the UK make it an obvious starting point for pioneering the establishment of bycatch mitigation measures, a key part of the Seaquest Netsafe project.

So what are we proposing to do?

1. Monitor cetacean species at 7 key sites to develop a picture of the distribution, behaviour and movement of the populations.

The latest underwater acoustic monitoring devices (C-PoDs) have been deployed at key sites around the coast to collect data on the presence and behaviour of cetaceans, 24 hours a day. We have also set up a network of volunteer sightings recorders who have been trained to conduct effort-based surveys to collect data on cetaceans seen from the cliffs at sites overlooking where the C-PoDs have been deployed. The permanent survey sites are at St Austell Bay, the



Sightings volunteers at Rinsey head, photo Emma Cunningham

Manacles, Mullion, Rinsey Head near Praa Sands, St Ives, and Boscastle. Using both these surveys methods we aim to get a much more holistic view of cetacean activity throughout the year, as well as a measure of how effective the two types of survey are. At present there are 40 volunteers doing a fantastic job of visually surveying and recording what they see, recording many hundreds of hours of survey data, and getting some fantastic sightings. Data will be analysed and reports produced that will aim to highlight cetacean 'hotspots' to inform potential management strategies for cetacean conservation.

2. Gather data to establish the distribution, numbers and causes of cetacean strandings.

Cornwall Wildlife Trust has been collecting strandings records for many years and has built up a dedicated network of volunteers. We aim to develop this area of work by extending the Trust's Marine Strandings Network (MSN) of volunteers who collect and record information from dead stranded cetaceans. Records of dead cetaceans provide an important source of information about the status and health of these species in our waters. Trends in the number and distribution of strandings can give us clues about the movements and population size of cetacean species. Post-mortem examination yields vital information about the cause of death and also provides information about cetacean biology, ecology and cetacean population health and structure.



C-PoD, photo Nick Tregenza

3. Trial BEEP (Bycatch Evidence Evaluation Project) methodology

In Cornwall only a small percentage of stranded cetaceans are suitable for post mortem examination. In addition to this, there is currently no accepted method for diagnosing bycatch in cetaceans from observations made on the beach. Consequently, a lot of valuable information from animals that are not subject to post-mortem is lost or ignored and the current data may not reflect the true scale of bycatch mortalities. Cornwall Wildlife Trust has come up with a new methodology we have called BEEP – Bycatch Evidence Evaluation Project - which aims to break new ground by developing a validated method for diagnosing bycatch on the beach, in the absence of post mortems and observer schemes. This will be done by identifying marks which we think might be 'bycatch indicators' and then examining a large number of cetacean carcasses which will also undergo post mortem examination. We will then compare the results of our analysis to that of the post mortem examinations to determine which type of 'marks' can reliably be used as indicators of bycatch.

4. Pingers trial

Nick Trengenzas fascinating talk on Cornish Dolphins in the Spring 2010 edition of the HMCG newsletter informed you about this interesting little device designed to alert small cetaceans to the presence of fishing nets. Current EU law states that vessels over 12m length setting bottom set static fishing nets must use pingers, however there is no such regulation for smaller inshore fishing vessels. 4 inshore fishing vessels have volunteered over the last 12 months to collect data for this trial, without which the project would have been impossible. The main purpose of the trial was to test the practicalities of deploying pingers on nets, both in terms of safety of crews and as a cetacean deterrent to minimize bycatch. This trial is coming to an end now and the results of the last 12 months data is ready for analysis to determine whether pingers are effective as a bycatch mitigation tool or not. Feedback from fishermen on the practical aspects of pinger use so far has been very good, stating that pingers caused no major problems with their normal fishing activity, though there were some concerns with battery life and cost.

We will bring you more news on these results in future newsletters.

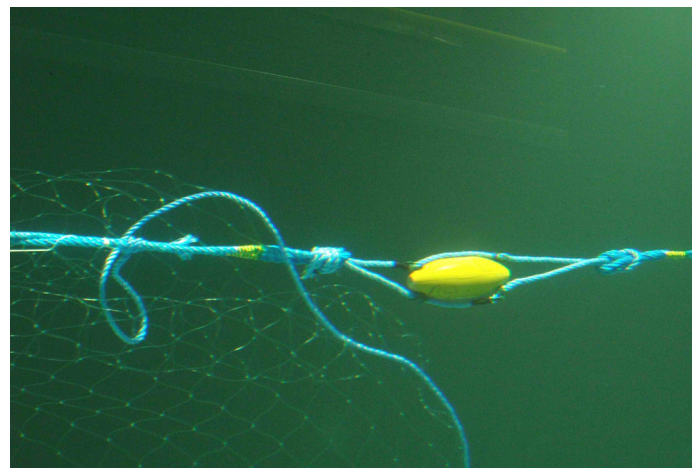


MSN volunteer Caroline Curtis recording a stranded dolphin, photo Jan Loveridge

5. Develop management strategies around Cornwall to protect cetaceans and their ecosystem

The aim is that the results of the monitoring and data gathering activities detailed above can be used to inform the implementation of practical protection measures for areas where cetaceans occur in greatest abundance and are currently not protected. The Trust aims to pioneer the development of management strategies for cetacean conservation in Cornwall through working in partnership with, amongst others, the Cornwall Sea Fisheries Committee, the Cornwall MCZ working group, Natural England and Finding Sanctuary. For more information on the project please checkout www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/conservation/livingseas/seaquest_netsafe

Ruth Williams, Marine Conservation Officer, Cornwall Wildlife Trust



Aquatec Inline pinger in a gill net, photo Richard caslake

Wild Foods Walk

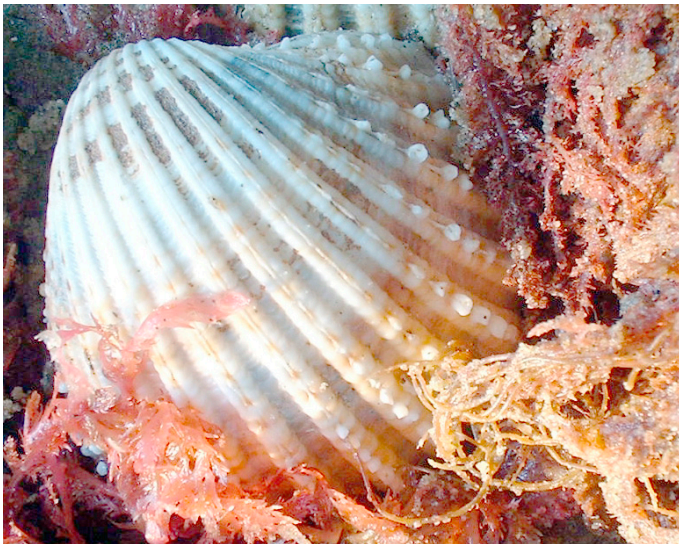
Sun 16 May 2010, Helford Car Park, Organised by Caroline Davey and Ruth Williams

Despite the unpromising weather – overcast and drizzly, 35 enthusiastic members and friends, including 5 children, gathered in Helford Car Park to meet Caroline Davey, the 'Fat Hen' food forager from St Buryan, and Ruth Williams from CWT, to learn about what natural foods can be gleaned from the vicinity of the Helford.

Our first pause was down by the ford in Helford village. Caroline showed us the rather luxuriant green leaves of Sea Beet, also known as Sea Spinach. This is a common seashore plant, growing in coastal walls, salt marshes and the backs of some beaches. Basically, leaves can be cropped and used just like spinach. A tip from Caroline which was to be repeated during the walk is not to give up if your first taste is bitter – individual plants will vary in their taste and palatability from place to place and at different times of year – so, persevere!



Wild garlic Allium ursinum, photo Liz Cox



Up close cockle, photo Alan Price

Ruth had earlier collected a range of edible sea creatures. These included cockle, mussel, oyster, periwinkle and even limpet. Again a tip: much of the attractiveness of wild foods depends on the recipe. I fear this is where I need to learn a lot.....identifying and collecting I would do with relish, but the other type I would struggle with right now....

As well as edible crab, Ruth also informed us that shore crab is edible. In France many are eaten, but it is important to remove the black 'dead man's fingers' from inside first. Certainly shore crabs are abundant on the Helford shore, supporting many other species if not humans just yet.

We then took the path inland towards Manaccan, passing into some woodland. It seemed that many plants here could contribute to a 'hedgerow salad', including sorrel, wood sorrel, wild garlic, primroses (whose flowers can also be painted with icing sugar, crystallised and used to decorate cakes etc), navelwort,

the tips of goosegrass and three-cornered leek. This later plant is also good in pesto. Caroline emphasised that all these are tastier in early spring, before the plants flower. Three-cornered leek bulbs can also be dug up easily in winter and pickled. This is an ideal way to help control this invasive species, so eat it with a clear conscience!

However, an essential note of caution was expressed here by Caroline. Certain plants – some of whom might look quite succulent and palatable – are actually deadly poisonous. These include hemlock water-dropwort and cuckoo pint (Lord's and Ladies). The group seemed to go a little quiet at this point and pressed Caroline on the key identification points. This underlines the need to be absolutely confident in your identification skills before heading for the kitchen.

Caroline lightened the mood by demonstrating how to dig out the small tuber of a pignut plant and eating it. It was described as having a nutty flavour, and they can be roasted like chestnuts as well as eaten raw. We were also shown wood avens, or herb Bennett, whose root can be used as a clove substitute. Our walk then took us out into the fields above Manaccan, but we paused on the way to look at some hard, black fungus on an ash tree. This is known as 'King Alfred's cakes' and can be used to hold an ember, enabling a fire to be coaxed into life quite readily.

Our next stop was beside a hedgerow by the Manaccan road. Here, another member of the Umbellifers was introduced to the group: Alexanders. Known to the Romans as 'The Parsley of Alexandria', they kindly introduced it to Britain, where it was used for many years as a form of celery. The stem can be chopped and steamed or boiled, leaves can be dried and used as seasoning and seeds can also be eaten – a useful plant. This is a very familiar plant in our coastal areas, coming to the fore in late February/March, when it is much more palatable. The plants we saw were certainly now



Pignut Coropodium majus,
photo Liz Cox

very mature and woody. The plant fell out of fashion in the 17th Century, with the introduction of celery.

We were also shown hedge bedstraw, whose fresh tips can be eaten. The famously-edible nettle was also discussed and an eating demonstration carried out by a few hardy souls. This plant is a useful spinach substitute and can also help to build up some resistance to hayfever. A little further on, Caroline pointed out hogweed – another Umbellifer – whose fresh tips can be eaten like asparagus. I must admit, that was probably my biggest surprise of the walk.

Via the road to Helford, we eventually found ourselves back at the car park, very much better informed as to the wealth of foods growing around us. I must admit that as a keen vegetable grower and an at-times obsessive blackberry picker, I did wonder why I don't make more use of the free larder we live in. It's partly down to my culinary skills, but the walk certainly gave me the impetus to expand my knowledge. We are all very grateful to Caroline and Ruth for sharing their knowledge with us.

Caroline runs more detailed courses for anyone wanting to learn more. Have a look at her website: www.fathen.org. In the meantime, the following list describes most of the foods discussed on the walk.

Martin Rule

Upcoming Events

October Saturday 16th

The National Trust around the Helford

From archaeology and barn owls to ancient woodland and eco-tourism, Justin Whitehouse tells of the pleasures and problems of managing properties around the Helford.

Cost: £2. Group members & children free.

Time: 7.30 p.m.

Venue: Gweek Village Hall, beside the National Seal Sanctuary, TR12 6UG

Contact: Paul 01326 341030 or David 01326 340686

November Saturday 13th

Plankton on Parade

The amazing diversity of microscopic plants and animals drifting in our seas and coastal waters and their importance to the marine ecosystem is revealed by Dr Tegwyn Harris, the well-known marine broadcaster and lecturer, in his inimitable style – not to be missed.

Cost: £2. Group members & children free.

Time: 7.30 p.m.

Venue: Gweek Village Hall, beside the National Seal Sanctuary, TR12 6UG

Contact: Pamela 01209 842316 or David 01326 340686

December Saturday 11th

Wildlife Photography

Cost: £2. Group members & children free.

Time: 7.30 p.m.

Venue: Gweek Village Hall, beside the National Seal Sanctuary, TR12 6UG

Contact: Rhiannon 07710 956734 or Ian 01872 863171

January 2011 Saturday 15th

The Fal-Helford marine SAC

Virtually the whole of the Helford VMCA lies within a site of European nature conservation importance: The Fal/Helford Special Area of Conservation. This offers huge protection but also many challenges to ensure businesses and livelihoods can continue. Kevan Cook, from Natural England, explains how this balance is struck – it lies at the heart of the ethos of HMCG – to enable community, commerce and conservation to co-exist.

Cost: £2. Group members & children free.

Time: 7.30 p.m.

Venue: Gweek Village Hall, beside the National Seal Sanctuary, TR12 6UG

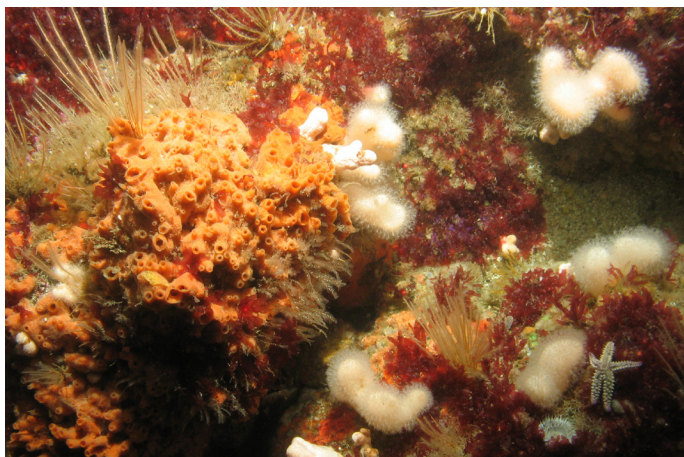
Contact: Rhiannon 07710 956734 or Martin 01326 561952



Special Area's of Conservation update

Fantastic reef habitats now designated as Special Areas of Conservation in Cornwall

Following a public consultation, two new marine Special Areas of Conservation (a type of marine protected area) have now been designated in southwest Cornwall. Lizard Point and Lands End & Cape Bank were identified as SACs by Natural England due to the fantastic reef habitat that they were shown to have in them., supporting a colourful array of sponges, sea



Underwater reefs by Cape Bank, photo CEFAS

squirts and corals that provide shelter for crabs, lobsters and fish such as the multi-coloured cuckoo wrasse.

Survey work undertaken this summer has photographed the seabed in these areas and further demonstrated the abundant marine life present there, as colourful walls of sponges and anemones were captured on camera.

Similar to the local Fal & Helford, the designation of these areas as SACs will offer greater levels of protection for these habitats to ensure their long term sustainability. SACs are protected under The Habitats and Birds Directives which aims to protect areas for important or threatened wildlife habitats and species across the European Union, known as 'Natura 2000'. Working hand-in-hand with the creation of Marine Conservation Zones, created under the groundbreaking Marine and Coastal Access Act, these sites will contribute to the delivery of an ecological network of Marine Protected Areas by 2012.

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/marine/sacconsultation/default.aspx>

Rhiannon Pipkin, Marine Advisor, Natural England

Supporting businesses profile, Cornish Holiday Cottages

I am proud to join with other notable sponsors in supporting the work the HVMCA does to enhance and protect the Helford River area. This area is designated as a Cornwall Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a voluntary organization such as this deserves recognition for the wonderful work it does in helping to protect the beautiful tidal creeks making up the Helford River.

As a Cornish business owner; a parent of two young children, a dog lover and boat owner, I often frequent the Helford River. For visitors and locals alike the enjoyment in being in, around, or nearby these waters and the surrounding area is made more pleasurable by the work the HMCG participates in. Their care for the marine life within the waters is second to none whilst also organising not only sponsorship but also local participation in their activities.

Some properties within my Cornish Holiday Cottages' portfolio have Helford River frontage and all are within a few minute's drive of the many creeks, beaches & coastal paths which make up the Helford River. I am very grateful that we can rely on such a wonderful group of volunteers to keep the natural beauty of the Helford River protected. I feel honored to be part of this organisation, as a corporate supporter, and lucky to be living in such a beautiful part of the world.

Emily Boriosi, Cornish Holiday Cottages in Maenporth

www.cornishholidaycottages.net

Killibrae, West Bay,

Maenporth,

Falmouth,

TR11 5HP



Environment Agency



DUCHY of CORNWALL



Aim: To safeguard the marine life of the Helford River by any appropriate means within its status as a Voluntary Marine Conservation Area, to increase the diversity of its intertidal community and raise awareness of its marine interest and importance.

For further information relating to the Helford Voluntary Marine Conservation Area please contact

the **HMC Group Co-ordinator:** Abby Crosby Tel: 07917 765581 Email: abby@helfordvmca.co.uk

Newsletter Editor Abby Crosby, Email: abby@helfordvmca.co.uk **Chairman:** David Muirhead

Design: Sheila McCann-Downes, Cornwall Wildlife Trust **Illustration:** Sarah McCartney, Cornwall Wildlife Trust