



Unlucky in Love

POPULAR WITH Lotharios, luvvies and food connoisseurs the world over, oysters have certainly never lost their appeal nor their pull as the food of choice to 'get you in the mood'. Unfortunately Scotland's native oysters are currently under threat of extinction due to unlawful poaching to meet with the demand for these popular delicacies. It is ironic indeed that the small bivalves - so famed for their aphrodisiac qualities are now under threat because diminishing and isolated populations mean that they have difficulty in synchronising spawning times, which means few eggs are fertilised.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) recently teamed up with Strathclyde Police, Argyll and Bute Council and The Crown Estate in a leaflet campaign to help raise awareness about the plight of the native oyster. Leaflets and posters have been distributed throughout the west coast of Scotland to urge people to watch out for oyster poachers and they urge people to look out for any signs of poaching and report it to the police or SNH immediately.

Jane Dodd, marine adviser for Scottish Natural Heritage said: "Scotland's native oyster population is now extremely fragile because the species depends on a combination of factors to help it reproduce. If the population is low or small



SNH's Jane Dodd with Finlay Christine, Strathclyde's wildlife crime officer

populations become isolated, which is now the case in Scotland, the oysters may spawn at different times and very few eggs will be fertilised.

"Although it is now unlawful to gather native oysters without permission from the Crown Estate, poaching still continues and has a dramatic impact on already small populations. I would urge people to look out for any signs of poaching and report it to the police or SNH, and also ask your fishmonger or restaurant where the oysters came from."

The native oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) is also known as the flat or common oyster and grows wild in the shallow coastal waters of Scotland. They are rounded in shape unlike the non-native Pacific oyster

(*Crassostrea gigas*), which is tear-drop shaped, and tends to be used for farming as it grows faster and to a larger size.

Scotland once supported a prolific native oyster fishery, the most famous being in the Firth of Forth, but there are now only a few dwindling and isolated populations left on the west coast and it is these that we must all work together to preserve and protect from the illegal poaching that threatens their existence.

You can help by reporting collection of native oysters to the Police and reporting sightings of the native oyster to your local SNH office. For more information contact Jane Dodd, SNH on: 01631 567228 or Sarah Roe on: 07787 836010

Know Your Fish

IF YOU WOULD like to brush up on your fish identification skills and enhance your underwater experiences by being able to name more than a few of the creatures that pass you by then get yourself along to Deep Sea World on Saturday, May 20 where Dr Frances Dipper will be holding a day long Fish Identification Course for Divers.

Dipper is of course the author of British Sea Fishes and an authority on the identification of sea life; included in the course is an introduction to the form and function of fish - their life history, feeding and reproductive mechanisms.

The course will then go on to look at the range of fish that can be seen in British and Irish waters and how to identify them when under-

water.

Conservation issue will also be looked at - so that those attending can attain a greater grasp of the main issues affecting our marine life.

If you would like to attend, the course costs £45.00 for adults and £35.00 for students. To reserve your place, or if you would like more information contact Marion Perutz on: seasearch_nescotland@yahoo.co.uk or call: 07745 656978.



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Maybe a Mako?

THE IDEA of sharks patrolling Britain's coastline is something that is of interest to pretty much everyone in these post Jaws times and if scientists are to be believed that is exactly what is going on at the moment!

The shark in question might not be of the Great White variety but there is a growing suspicion that we have our very own Mako shark (in fact a relative of the great white) making itself at home in waters between the Scottish Borders and North Lincolnshire.

More than 45 porpoises have been found dead along the North East coast – some of which had 12-inch bites on their torsos; and there has also been a rise in the number of

decapitated seals found in the area – all consistent with the work of a large Mako shark experts believe.

The porpoises have been sent to the Natural History Museum for autopsies and it is hoped that the results will prove that the deaths were shark related. Zara D'Aronville, of the Blue Reef Aquarium, North Tyneside, said, "It is possible that mako sharks are in the water, but we will not know for sure what is happening until we get the autopsy results. "There is definitely an unusual amount of dead porpoises being washed up. "Sharks are often spotted in the waters, but quite far off the coast, it is possible that one could have strayed closer to the



could there be a mako shark patrolling our coast?

shore looking for food."

Cleaner water in the North-East thanks to conservation schemes has meant that there has been an increase in the natural porpoise population, which it is thought may have attracted the shark to the area.

Although no sharks have been spotted at this time – the Maritime and Coastguard Agency is advising anyone using these waters to be, "...especially careful and vigilant."



examples of corals and fish to be found off Khao Lak

New Thai Reef

GREAT NEWS for holiday divers and fans of coral – a new reef the size of 300 football pitches has been found off the coast of Khao Lak – a popular Thai resort on the Andaman Sea.

Thanks to information supplied by Thai fisherman, divers working for the World Wide Fund for Nature found the reef and believe that yet more reefs may be discovered in the same way in the future thanks to information being shared

between fishermen and the conservation societies.

Ran properly, the reef is likely to be a spectacular diving destination with more than 30 types of hard coral and at least 112 species of fish already discovered.

Thankfully it escaped the devastation of the tsunami which affected many reefs around Thailand, Indonesia Sri Lanka and India on Boxing day 2004; its discovery will hopefully raise awareness of the reefs

that suffered at the hands of the great wave and continually suffer due to over fishing and over development. It is interesting to note that reefs affected by the tsunami will have recovered in about ten years whereas the threat posed by such things as illegal fishing, climate change and over development of resorts is far greater and will more long lasting and damaging. For more information: Tel: +66 66894784 E-mail: songpol@wwfthai.org

Good Beach Guide 2006

THE MARINE Conservation Society (MCS) will launch its annual Good Beach Guide on Friday, May 26, 2006.

The 19th edition of the Good Beach Guide is published in support of MCS' Campaign for Clean Seas, and will now be available exclusively online at www.goodbeachguide.co.uk

The Good Beach Guide is the only comprehensive and independent guide to the quality of Britain's coastal bathing waters. It provides information on water quality and sewage discharges at 1,100 UK beaches, allowing readers to make the best decision about

where to find the UK's cleanest bathing sites. The Good Beach Guide also provides information on lifeguard cover, facilities, activities, access, parking, transport, an OS map and a photograph for each beach. The Good Beach Guide 2006 is supported by the Crown Estate, RNLI, and Encams (Keep Britain Tidy group).

Further information and a selection of images are

available from Thomas Bell, MCS Coastal Pollution Officer, on 01989 561 589 or thomas@mcsuk.org

Marine Conservation Society, Unit 3, Wolf Business Park, Alton Road, Ross-on-Wye Herefordshire HR9 5NB Tel: 01989 566017

Good Beach Guide Home Page - www.goodbeachguide.co.uk / MCS Home Site - www.mcsuk.org



CONTRIBUTIONS TO SHOTLINES

SCOTTISH DIVER is actively seeking contributions from divers for our **SHOTLINES NEWS SECTION.**

If you have a diving-related story please contact Louise McFarlane on 0141 332 3933 or email: freetime@tfti.demon.co.uk