

In Reserve

Liza Cole, Ranger at the St Abbs & Eyemouth VMR reports on events at the Reserve

MY HOW time flies! It doesn't seem five minutes since I was writing the last In Reserve, but so much has happened here at St Abbs since then.

Regular readers will remember that I mentioned in my last article that I was working on the new Interpretation Trailer. Well, I am pleased to say that the trailer was up and running by mid-June and since then I have been taking it out and about to various sites along the length of the Marine Reserve. I have become a 'marine missionary', spreading the message of marine conservation to the wide variety of people who come to enjoy the waters off St Abbs and Eyemouth!

The trailer itself is hard to miss, as it is bedecked with colourful underwater images both inside and out. The aim being to dispel, at a glance, the idea some non-divers have of the North Sea. Essentially that it is - cold, grey, dirty and full of oil rigs!

Using these images as a backdrop, I have a variety of 'bolt on' displays and information that I can tailor to the target audience. So when I'm at St Abbs, the information is slanted towards the diving community, but at Coldingham Sands it is aimed at those who come to enjoy a day at the beach. It seems to work very well, so why not check it out when you are next visiting the Reserve?

Previously I've mentioned the fact that we are trying to gather together information on marine life sightings in the Reserve via Diver survey forms and encouraging more Seasearch activity. It may seem crazy when literally thousands of people dive St Abbs each year, but we actually only have limited information

on what's going on with the marine life.

All the information is locked in divers' heads and logbooks when it could be being used to argue the case for marine conservation with governmental decision makers. So, why not do your bit next time you're visiting the Reserve, and fill in a form, it only takes a couple of minutes? We have had a good few filled in already, and thank you to those of you who have done this, they make interesting reading!

One creature that has featured regularly is the Snake Pipefish (see Creature Feature), which appears to have had a population explosion over the last couple of years and are literally everywhere you look this year.

It is a bit of a mystery as to why numbers of these fish have risen so markedly but they are beautiful and fascinating animals to see. Other interesting fish sightings have been Pogge, Tadpole Fish and John Dory not to mention loads of Wolf-fish (the highest head count I've heard of is 8 in one dive!).

One sad event that has occurred in the Reserve this summer has been the slashing open of several creels in a string laid at Petticowick. I imagine this was done by people thinking they were doing their bit for conservation or animal liberation, but actually this contravenes the Code of Conduct and goes against the whole ethos of the Marine Reserve, which strives to balance the needs of conservation, recreation and a sustainable fishery.

On a lighter note, we are now on the count down to this year's Splash In, which will be taking place in the Reserve

on August 26/27. As in the last couple of years, the event will include a digital and a film competition, and there will be three categories for each: marine life portrait, marine atmospheric and most humorous shot.

There have been relatively few entries from Scots over the years, so whether you are a seasoned underwater photographer or have just taken it up, come and fly the flag for Scotland! Even if you are not a photographer, there's no need to feel left out. All the entries are shown at a slide show in St Abbs Village Hall on the Sunday to which all are welcome to come and judge the entries. See the Marine Reserve website for more details.

**Liza Cole can be contacted at
The Ranger's Cottage
Northfield, St Abbs
Eyemouth, Berwickshire TD14 5QF.
01890 771 443
lcole@nts.org.uk or via the website
www.marine-reserve.co.uk**

Scotland's only Voluntary Marine Reserve would not have a full time Marine Ranger without the generous support of The National Trust for Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, The Crown Estate.



CREATURE FEATURE

Snake Pipefish *Entelurus aequoreus*

Our largest and most colourful pipefish, with females growing up to 60cm long, and males up to 40cm. As the name suggests, it has a long, smooth snake-like body, roughly round in cross section and tapering into a thin tail with a tiny paddle-shaped fin on the end. The fish is generally orange-brown with transverse silvery blue stripes.

The Snake Pipefish can be found all around the British Isles in rocky areas amongst kelp and other brown seaweeds where it often uses its prehensile tail to hold on to the fronds.

Breeding takes place in mid

summer. Males and females pair up and the female attaches about 1000 eggs to the male's belly where they remain for about four weeks before the 1cm young hatch out into the water.

Interestingly, seabirds have been seen trying to feed Snake Pipefish to their young at some northern seabird colonies (not apparently at St Abbs though) presumably trying to make up for a lack of sandeels. However, the pipefish are pretty tough, hard to swallow and not as energy-rich as sandeels and many have been found uneaten on cliff ledges next to starving chicks.



Jack Laws



Jim Greenfield