



Seasearch divers enter off the Faxi in the Clyde (Owen Paisley)

MCS's Calum Duncan provides an update on Seasearch activities that have taken place throughout the summer months across Scotland ...

Eyes Beneath The Waves

Calum Duncan

WITH THE digital revolution upon us, divers can now almost literally be our 'eyes under the water' recording species, habitats and evidence of human impacts on their dives. Throughout the summer, intrepid Seasearch divers from all over the UK have been sending in both forms and photos from historic wrecks and rocky reefs, from Loch Melfort to St Kilda, more of which later.

Iron reefs

As we sub-aquatic types know, fish are often attracted to wrecks like magnets and nowhere was this more evident than with the saithe and poor cod recorded at Merchant Fishing Vessel *Pheron* in the Moray Firth by *Top Cat's* Bill Ruck.

Although less crowded, records also came in from a wreck at the Isle of May (Thomas Kerr), the *Stassa* off Harris (Vicki Billings), the *Rondo* (Jan Ziolo and Vicki both) and the *Shuna* (Jan again), the

latter two of course Sound of Mull wrecks. From Lamlash Bay, Sean Ferris has continued sending in records of the intriguing resident tadpole fish (*Raniceps raninus*), an unusual rarely sighted cousin of the cod.

Sea pen thickets

Further north in Loch Duich, Chris Rickard recorded densities of tall (*Funiculina quadrangularis*), slender (*Virgularia mirabilis*) and phosphorescent (*Pennatula phosphorea*) sea pens of up to three per metre squared, a veritable forest of these spectacular colonial cousins of the sea anemone.

Meanwhile, two sea lochs further south, Jim Greenfield recorded a group of about 20 tall sea pens and the rare Fries Goby (*Lesueurigobius friesii*) in Loch Nevis. This colourful little fish shares the burrows of Scottish langoustine (*Nephrops norvegicus*), along with tall sea pens, another deeper water mud dweller.

From one relative of the sea anemone to another. Following MCS and Seasearch suggestion, the northern sea fan (*Swiftia pallida*) was a welcome recent addition to the updated UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) list.

As regular readers will know, Seasearch has been involved over the last few years recording and measuring these delicate fan corals. Records this summer were returned by Vicki from the east coast of Harris and the Canna wall and by **SCOTTISH DIVER'S** Alison Fish from

further down the coast at Glas Eileanan, east Benbecula. On the same dive Alison also recorded a stalked jellyfish, as did Fiona Ravenscroft from seagrass beds in Taransay.

Fragile habitats

Sea grass beds, deep muds, maerl beds, northern sea fan communities, horse mussel reefs, flame (or file) shell reefs and a range of other features that Seasearch plays an important role in recording, are all BAP habitats, listed because they are rare, declining, under threat of decline or of proportional importance in this part of the world. Fiona recorded maerl in the Sound of Scalpay, Harris - they thrive in tide-swept channels - as did Seasearch west coast co-ordinator Owen Paisley at Tra Na H-Uil and Shearwater rock in Loch Fyne.

Unfortunately, at both Clyde sites, the maerl appeared heavily impacted by scallop dredging, with only 10% still alive at the former site. To deliver proper protection for all our nationally important species and seabed habitats, including maerl; very biologically diverse areas; sites best representing the habitats found in Scottish waters and critical feeding, spawning, courting and migrating areas for mobile species (such as basking sharks and cetaceans), MCS is chairing an exciting new phase in our campaign for a Scottish Marine Bill. You can find out more at: www.savescottishseas.org.



Marine Conservation Society

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Seasearcher on a wreck site (credit: Sue Scott)



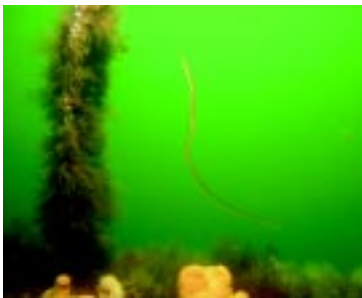
Tadpole fish in Lamlash Bay, Arran (Sean Ferris)



Fries Goby, Loch Nevis (Jim Greenfield)

Credit Where Credit's Due

IN THE September/October edition of **SCOTTISH DIVER** there was a error with one of the picture credits found in the Seasearch article, Diving In for Pipefish. The photo of a freeswimming pipefish above a wreck, pictured here, should have been entitled: Snake pipefish on the *MV Pheron* and credited to Alan Bellerby.



Declared edible crab, St Kilda (anonymous)

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