



IN RESERVE

Liza Cole, Ranger at the St Abbs & Eyemouth VMR highlights some of the events planned to celebrate the Reserve's Silver Jubilee

HAPPY BIRTHDAY to us! It is a landmark year for the Marine Reserve, as this year we are celebrating our Silver Jubilee. 25 ago, on August 18, 1984 Sir David Bellamy flung himself into the water at St Abbs harbour so declaring Scotland's first Marine Reserve open. It was the culmination of much effort by a host of people over some time that got things to this stage, and I bet it was only in their wildest dreams that the founding members thought the VMR would still be a leading light in marine conservation in Scotland a quarter of a century later. So, how did it all come about?

People have been diving at St Abbs ever since they could get their hands on the right bits and pieces to construct their own dive kit. In the early days, there were just a handful of divers, who were seen by the locals as being strange but harmless eccentrics. However, as more and more people started coming to St Abbs to dive, a certain amount of friction began to build up between the local community and the diving community. Bear in mind, most of the diving was done from the shore in those days, so processions of divers could be seen trouping round the harbour wall, armed with lobster hooks and goody bags. Add to that the congestion caused by hoards of divers coming to a tiny fishing village such as St Abbs, and the fact that people would be getting undressed in the car park, and it's not surprising that the locals were somewhat put out!

To try and calm local concerns, which were mostly surrounding the taking of lobsters, crabs and, to a lesser extent, sea urchins; members of NORFED (The Northern Federation of BSAC) proposed a voluntary 'look and don't touch' area. A noticeboard was put up at the harbour, and clubs were encour-

aged to show that they would abide by this code of conduct by adding their names to the list. The noticeboard is still to be found at the harbour to this day, if you look carefully.

Two leading lights, as I understand it, were Ken Crow (NORFED) and George Colven, the harbourmaster at the time. Now, whilst this was all going on Lawson Wood, who owned the caravan site at Eyemouth and so could control shore access to great dive sites like Weasel Loch, established the Barefoots Marine Reserve.

The Wildlife & Countryside Act of 1981 had provision within it to form statutory Marine Nature Reserves (MNRs), and it was hoped that St Abbs would become one of these. However, the legislation turned out to be very cumbersome, and even after huge efforts only three MNRs were designated in the whole of the UK, and St Abbs was not one of them. Not to be deterred, a committee of fishermen, conservationists, divers and other interested parties got together and decided to combine the 'look and don't touch' area at St Abbs with the Barefoots Reserve and so St Abbs & Eyemouth VMR came into being.

Its aims have not changed to this day: conserving marine wildlife, raising awareness of the marine environment and promoting responsible recreation all alongside a sustainable creel fishery. And it all works pretty well on the whole really, so much so that the VMR is respected countrywide for its work.

So, what are we going to do to cel-

ebate such a prestigious occasion as a Silver Jubilee? There are all sorts of things planned, not least a ceremonial 'jump in' at St Abbs Harbour on August 18. We are hoping to get David Bellamy to come back and do it again, joined by 24 others, one person for each year of the VMR's existence.

We are also planning a birthday ceilidh, but we have decided that a Tuesday might not be the best day for it, so it will be held the previous weekend. Then in

the autumn, it is hoped that we will be able to host the Scottish Dive Conference here.

St Abbs holds a special place in many people's hearts, so we have decided that the most fitting tribute would be to give everyone the opportunity to do their bit toward the management of the VMR. We are launching a Friends Group for the Reserve, for just £1 per month you can do your bit for

St Abbs and have your name put on a virtual noticeboard on the website, our modern day equivalent of the original idea. More details of all the events and how to become a Friend are on the 'how you can help' page of our website.

You may, of course, have your own ideas as to how you would like to celebrate the Jubilee, whether this be organising an event or just paying your own private tribute at your favourite dive site. Please do let us know if you have ideas or are planning anything, I cannot promise you much help (I am a one woman band after all) but can offer advice and encouragement in abundance!



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 and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.



Dahlia Dilemma

THE DAHLIA anemone is a common sight in the VMR, so much so that it is used as the logo for the Reserve. Because of this I thought it only fitting that there should be a creature feature about it in this, our Silver Jubilee year.

The Dahlia anemone is an animal that belongs to the same phylum as jellyfish and corals, the phylum Cnidaria. This is a word that is derived from the Greek for stinging nettle, reflecting the fact that all cnidaria use stinging tentacles to catch and stun their food. Dahlia anemones have short, stout tentacles that are arranged in multiples of ten. They are often banded and of a contrasting colour to the rest of the animal, which can come in a variety of colour forms, some creatures being very brightly coloured.

The Dahlia is a large anemone, reaching up to 20cm across, and can be found anywhere from the lower shore down to a depth of 100m. Sometimes you will come across a cluster of animals, with different coloured individuals living side



A side view of a Horseman anemone, notice the lack of debris stuck to the column. Image courtesy of Ken Sullivan.



Most often these anemones are viewed from above which gives you a great view of the banding on the tentacles, but is this a Dahlia or a Horseman anemone? Image courtesy of Steve Bateman

by side. This leads scientists to think that this anemone only reproduces sexually, rather than by dividing themselves in half as some anemones do. The Dahlia anemone feeds on anything that comes in range of its tentacles including prawns, small fish and even more sizeable prey such as jellyfish.

It is easy to confuse the Dahlia anemone with another large, colourful anemone called the Horseman anemone *Urticina eques*, and the two can often be found together in the Reserve. The best way to tell them apart is by looking at the side of the column, the Dahlia's is

covered in adhesive warts to which bits of shell and gravel get stuck whereas the Horseman has a series of pale, non-adhesive spots. On a day to day basis however, not many people will double check the species by checking the column and tend to use the generic term Dahlia anemone for any large, colourful anemone with short, stout, banded tentacles that they come across.

Main photo overpage The early days - today's VMR Vice Chair, Jack Laws (left) putting dive gear together at St Abbs. Image courtesy of Jack Laws

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