



Welcome to the 10th Anniversary Helford VMCA Newsletter! This edition features articles from members old and new as well as surveys, activities and campaigns to get involved in on and around the Helford.

The Marine Science Project

Sea squirts, bryozoans, hydroids and crustaceans are amongst the likely suspects to be found colonising settlement panels positioned in the Helford River this summer.

From August onwards, the panels will be taken out of the water for assessment, having been submerged for a period of between 8-12 weeks. A photographic record of each panel will be compiled to aid species identification and verification, the results of which will be available online at ERCCIS.

The use of settlement panels to monitor underwater environments is nothing new, but this is the first time that individuals, local businesses and stakeholders have joined together to deploy and monitor panels to detect non-native species living amongst our Cornish marine life. The project was launched in the Fal and Helford SAC this summer, but over the course of the next few years we will be extending to deploy panels at strategic points around the entire Cornish coast. The project builds on survey work carried out in 2010-2011 where 11 non-native species were recorded in the vicinity of Tolverne on the River Fal. These included the usual suspects like Wireweed (*Sargassum muticum*) and Slipper limpets (*Crepidula fornicata*) but also Wakame (*Undaria pinnatifida*) and the Compass sea squirt (*Asterocarpa humilis*) – two previously unrecorded species for the area.

As well as adding to baseline data on presence and



Carpet sea squirt (Didemnum vexillum) extremely invasive and a threat to mussel and oyster growers.

Photo by Sarah McCartney

distribution, it is hoped that the settlement panels will also serve as an early warning system for new biological introductions and they have been welcomed by local oyster and mussel growers. The panels offer a quick detection tool to assess for species known to have a detrimental effect on shellfish survival; in particular the carpet sea squirt (*Didemnum vexillum*), capable of over-growing and smothering sediment and hard substratum.

To compliment the settlement panel monitoring a number of workshops have taken place over the summer which featured the identification of non-native species and a Biological Recording Tutorial is now available online at www.ercis.org.uk/innstutorial. Our aim is to develop a network of enthusiasts on the look-out for non-native species whilst out enjoying recreational activities. So, it's not just boat owners who can get involved in the project – we would like to hear from anyone who spends time by the coast.

For further information about the project and how you can take part, please contact Lisa Rennocks, Marine Science Project Officer, lisa.rennocks@cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk Tel 01872 240777 ext.242

The Marine Science Project is managed by the Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, in collaboration with Cornwall Wildlife Trust and the Marine Biological Association. It is funded by DEFRA and Ideas Tap.



Removing a settlement panel from under a pontoon.
Photo by Sarah McCartney

HMCG Members Committee Chairman's report Autumn 2012

Being not great at doing more than one thing at a time it is perhaps not a good idea trying as I am to write this with one eye and ear on the Olympics. However, we just won our first gold medal! Who knows what the count will be by the time I have finished. This report might therefore be a bit disjointed as events unfold...

Our summer HMCG programme of events is well underway and the autumn programme is fast approaching. Let's hope we get a repeat of that warm spell before the season is out. Having said that we were fortunate with the weather on 1st of July for the Conservation Cruise, which once again was a sell out with a reserve list. Uncharacteristically for this summer it stayed dry, continuing our own fortunate trend for the event. The team of experts did a great job taking turns to provide interesting and informative commentary on the subjects of birds, woodlands, mudflats, fisheries, bass nursery, geology, 'Your Shore' activities, marine protection and general information about the Helford. It is amazing how each year the cruise has something new to offer, providing extra insight into our amazing 'River' on each trip. A full report of the events of the day is included later in the newsletter.

This year is the 10th Anniversary of the founding of the HMCG Member's Section. This is a significant milestone for the group and reflects commitment and enthusiasm from all concerned. Most of the founders are still very much supporting us and playing an active part. You probably know that the Helford Voluntary Marine Conservation Area (HVMCA) was established 24 years ago, supported by the HMCG Advisory Committee. This was, and still is, made up of organisations and individuals who have expertise and interest in the Helford and its wellbeing for the future. The Member's Section was set up in order to involve everyone with the same interest in mind. The most noticeable feature of the Member's section is the annual events programme, which in itself takes a team of volunteers considerable time to set up and put on; however, there is also a great deal of good work, usually unseen going on with other activities.

Committee news: At the AGM we informed you that Charles Richardson is taking over from Paul Garrard to chair the events sub-committee. They are well on the way to finalizing another varied and interesting programme for 2013. I am sorry to report that Martin Rule has stepped down from the committee and his position as Secretary. After many years playing an important part of our committee, Martin feels he has to concentrate on his full time work. He will however still be supporting the group in many ways, including his valuable role in running our bird surveys and by sharing his considerable knowledge. We are pleased that Jessica Hiron has joined the committee and is playing an active part, which is great. Having a young family, she brings a good balance and she has volunteered to co-ordinate our beach cleaning activities. Volunteers each take a location on the Helford to periodically pick up litter. Jess

is currently searching for volunteers to cover some of the sections not cleaned. Anyone who interested in helping out whilst walking a local beach is very welcome; the south shore is probably the least covered. We have litter picking equipment to help the job if needed. *Anyone interested in exploring a position on the committee would be most welcome. Just mention it to any of us and come along to a meeting to see if would suit.*

New roles: In the last newsletter we reported that Charlotte Marshall (HMCG Co-ordinator) would be taking maternity leave from early June. I forget the scheduled date but her baby arrived a couple of weeks early, just prior to the scheduled start of her leave. The arrival of her new little girl did not however stop her from producing a meeting agenda on 2nd June which we all thought was impressive dedication on her part. We were pleased to appoint Holly Latham as the maternity leave cover. Charli's early arrival meant a flying start for Holly, who comes with strong credentials having been working on a Recreational Boating Study for the Falmouth Harbour Commissioners. This study looks at all aspects of the impact of these activities and comes to a close in the next few months. Meanwhile Charli has decided to accept a full time position with Natural England starting next February and therefore advised us that she will not be returning from maternity leave. Whilst delighted for Charli we will be sorry to lose her. So double congratulations to Charli and welcome to Holly.

Another change in personnel to report is that Abby Crosby, who as you know has been running the highly successful 'Your Shore' project for CWT (Cornwall Wildlife Trust), has taken on a full time job as Marine Officer for CWT. She has been replaced by Matt Slater who previously worked for the Newquay Aquarium (for over 10 years I believe). 'Your Shore' has supported all the VMCA's and many thanks indeed to Abby whose infectious enthusiasm has made it a great success in increasing activity and involvement with schools and volunteers in particular. Matt has been building on this work and already held volunteers meetings for our Helford VMCA.

New website: Our new website went live just a few weeks ago. Please have a look at it if you have not already done so (helfordmarineconservation.co.uk). This has been made possible with the expert help of Jeff Meadows working with Charli over the last few months. We can't thank Jeff enough for doing this for us. One working improvement the new site offers is that we can now make amendments and updates ourselves. This is to be part of the function of the Co-ordinator in future and for the time being Charli has kindly offered to do this for us. We welcome your photos of the Helford to add to the gallery on the website. Additionally, our leaflets and events programme are available to view or download from the site. We are now on Facebook as well, thanks to Jessica. Although

I confess to not being a user myself, it is clear that this is an important means of communication. At a recent volunteer meeting several of the folks who turned up did so as a result of Facebook.

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs): The process for creating more protection for our marine environment continues and here is my understanding of the current position. The 127 areas recommended to become MCZs for England were submitted to Natural England (NE) and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) in September 2011 by the four regional projects (Finding Sanctuary in the Southwest). DEFRA briefed NE and JNCC to review the science and compliance of these sites with government recommendations. These findings (about 1500 pages) were submitted to DEFRA in July this year and concluded that the science was broadly in line with guidelines set out originally. One of these is that the network of MCZs makes up a related number of sites that can provide for the protection of ecosystems around the coast. I take this as meaning that they are regarded as a whole as well as individual locations. The balance between the ecology and socio economic interests has been largely met.

There are some recommended changes to about 5% of the locations and further work is to be done to look at the recommended 'Reference Areas' (one of which is in the Carrick Roads and has caused controversy locally) so some uncertainty exists about these. But I believe that all the recommended MCZs will be going ahead to the final consultation stage that starts in December 2012, lasting 3 months. I hope this is correct as this is when the public get to have their say. The first MCZ sites will be designated by DEFRA next summer 2013. I do hope that the enormous amount of work and no doubt costs involved will prove to create an historic and beneficial protection for our seas. Some other countries appear to have achieved this and have healthy, sustainable fisheries as a result. We will keep you updated. *For further information on how to get involved see Abby Crosby's 'Are you a friend?' article.*

Once again many, many thanks to everyone for their support, CWT, sponsors, volunteers, committee members and all members. Oh yes; the medal count - 21 medals including 8 gold. They are coming in thick and fast.

Best wishes, David Thomson, Chairman Members

W. L. Collins (Leslie)

The Helford VMCA Group was very sad to inform it's members recently of the loss of W L Collins (Leslie). Leslie was a wonderful advocate for the Helford River and dedicated a great deal of time to the Helford VMCA Group, including 15 years as chairman.

It was not possible to do justice to Leslie's contribution within the confines of the Autumn newsletter therefore a full memorial article will be included as a separate supplement to this issue."

(Temporary!) Coordinator Introduction

I have taken over as maternity cover for Charli Marshall and started in post back in June. Many of you will have now met me through various meetings, events and emails, so I will endeavour to make this relatively short! Charli has been fantastic during the handover, despite her early new arrival, and has been continuing to work on updating the website behind the scenes.

I have come to this post from an academic marine biology background; I studied Marine Biology at Plymouth University and I have since been making my way west down the Southwest peninsula. I consider myself very lucky to have landed in such a lovely area of Cornwall! I am currently based between Falmouth and the northern shore of the Helford; evening walks around Rosemullion head and the mouth of the Helford have become a staple evening treat.

Since moving to the area I have been working on a partnership project to study the ecological impact of recreational boating infrastructure within the Fal and Helford estuaries. Through this I have been working alongside many stakeholders around the area and

have completed survey work in the Helford; a wonderful opportunity to have a guided tour of the waters with Nigel!

I am really pleased to have been offered the opportunity to work alongside the Helford VMCA Advisory and Member's groups; the groups have such a valuable knowledge of the area and so many friendly faces. The VMCA represents a showcase of successful stakeholder and community-led conservation in action. It is fantastic to see so many dedicated volunteers and proactive individuals pushing for a balance of community, conservation and commercial needs around the area. Long may it continue!

Please feel free to contact me with any enquiries, information or questions – even if I can't help directly I am sure to be able to find the person who can!

**Holly Latham, HMCGCoordinator
coordinator@helfordvmca.co.uk**



The early days of the Members' section

The 20th March 2002 was a significant day as recorded in the minutes – the start of the Helford Member's Section!

"HELFDOR MARINE CONSERVATION SOCIETY:

An inaugural meeting was held in the Helford River Gig Clubhouse at Gweek on 20th March 2002 attracting 38 people. Ruth Williams used some colourful slides to illustrate the fascinating underwater world and the work of the Helford VMCA Group. The new society would widen the circle of interested people within the local community who care about the Helford River and its very special marine wildlife. A new committee had been elected - Miss P Towner (Secretary), Mr & Mrs J Froggatt (joint Treasurers), Mr L Conway, Mr D Nightingale, Mrs J Oakes under the temporary chairmanship of Mr W L Collins and with backup from officers of the main Group. It was encouraging that 52 members had joined, keen to join in various events and/or spread the marine conservation message more widely."

At the following years (2003) AGM David Nightingale was elected Members' Committee Chairman with Keith Davie (Treasurer), Jenna Oakes (Minutes Secretary), Prue Towner (Membership Secretary), Joyce & John Froggatt (Venue Organisers), Martin Harris (Newsletter), Gia Shaw (Publicity) and Margaret Burford (Meetings Hospitality). Members of the Advisory Group, Leslie Collins, Pamela Tompsett and Rob Hewett provided backup as required.

Each volunteer brought their particular talents to the Helford Group; Jenna Oakes was instrumental



Members' Committee team secure grant for PC and camera. Keith Davie, Joyce Froggatt, Jenna Oakes and David Nightingale.

in obtaining grants for a laptop and digital camera and her educational background was put to good use when she became Schools Liaison Officer. Keith Davey was influential in increasing the membership to over 200 and he and Maureen Davie also organised excellent competitions for artists and photographers.

Over the years there were the inevitable changes to the Members' Committee, Martin Rule was welcomed as Secretary and Paul Garrard became a valuable events organiser. In due course one David was succeeded by another as Chairman, namely David Thomson. Ian Jakeways became Treasurer after the untimely loss of Keith Davie and other volunteers joined the group, Charles Richardson, Jessica Hirons and others.

An imaginative events programme was developed including shore activities, botanical walks, heron and egret nest counts, beach-cleans, indoor talks on relevant subjects and last but not least, the ever popular Annual Conservation Cruise which began in 1994. During the course of the last 10 years there was a change of name to Helford Marine Conservation Group with Advisory and Members' sections and by 2012 it is encouraging to record that there are some 255 in the public Members' section. With an exciting program planned for members in 2013 it is hoped that the Member's section will continue to go from strength to strength.

Pamela E Tompsett, HVMCA Scientific Advisor



The Helford Wetland Bird Surveys (WeBS) are now a well established volunteer survey.

Cllr Pam Lyne

Members were saddened to learn of the sudden death of Cllr Pam Lyne, a long-standing County, Kerrier District and Manaccan Councillor, on 28th June 2012. She was a founder member and strong supporter of the HVMCA Group, enlivening many meetings in her defence of local issues. Condolences are offered to her family.

Survey Teams take to the Shore!

If you went down to the shores of the Helford in July, you may have spotted a strange array of individuals with clipboards, quadrats and survey forms blowing in the wind! This set of individuals would have been the Natural England Southwest Marine Team, along with some local volunteers, to whom we are very grateful!

The reason for this expedition is that much of the Helford intertidal (the region of the shore covered by seawater at high tide, but exposed at low water) is a designated site, known as the Lower Fal and Helford Intertidal Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which is part of the Fal & Helford Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – a designation that recognises the importance of the habitats that the Helford possesses in a European context. To ensure that SSSIs are maintained in good condition, Natural England carry out a series of site visits every few years to assess the condition of the plants and animals which the site has been designated for.

This year, the survey teams visited four sites on the Helford focussing on the rocky shores. The sites included an area by Helford Jetty, Tremurlon, Grebe, and Men-aver Point (an area in the outer reaches of the Helford). Despite the weather, the surveys revealed a fantastic array of species, as we worked our way down the shores, including a stalked jellyfish. Although called a 'jellyfish', the stalked varieties are upside-down jellyfish with their tentacles on the top. Also spotted was the occasional invasive species, such as the orange tipped seasquirt (*Corella eumyota*). Numbers of these individuals weren't high, but it was of interest that they were found.



Natural England team and volunteers surveying on the Helford. Photo by Rhiannon Pipkin.

The Marine Science Project (see page 1) will help to inform these surveys in the future as we develop a better understanding of the distribution and spread of these non-native species. The results of the surveys are currently being finalised, but early indications are that the site is in good condition!

I would also like to extend our thanks to the Helford Marine Conservation Group and a number of landowners around the Helford for their help in the surveys, and their expertise.

Rhiannon Pipkin, Lead Marine Adviser, Natural England

Helford Bass Surveys

Members of the Marine School, students and staff, have been lending their hand to the Helford Bass Survey for a while now.

Climbing in and out of boats, wading around up to the chest in water and crawling over mud – all in the name of science and studies into fish populations locally. The experience of volunteering and working on the bass project with Derek Goodwin is a unique opportunity for both students and staff with the Marine School. Not only do we get to work in applied science implementing our skills for a purpose that contributes to the local community, but we also get to do it in a beautiful and diverse habitat that inspires the students and generates a real interest in conservation and habitat management.

If you have a desire to get muddy in the name of science why not enquire to volunteer on the Helford Bass surveys?! If instead you are just interested in the findings, all Helford Bass reports are published on the Helford VMCA website.

Luke Marsh, Falmouth Marine School



Bass netting. Photo by Derek Goodwin

Getting to know the Helford...

Having grown up in Falmouth the Helford estuary holds many magical memories for me; the Helford always seemed a long way away and was somewhere we would visit on Regatta day on my dad's Falmouth Working Boat. It was always hot and windy but the wind would always die on the way home and we would end up being towed back to harbour by someone in an oyster punt, accompanied by lots of singing! With most of the time at Helford being spent on the water, I never explored the natural environment of the Helford as much as I would have liked!

Your Shore Coordinator

Since joining the marine team at Cornwall Wildlife Trust I have got to know the estuary a little better and have been really impressed with the diversity and beauty of the area. On a rare sunny afternoon in May I was privileged to explore the lower shore at Prisk with some really good company on an ERCCIS Seaweed identification course.

As a keen algae enthusiast I was blown away at the huge diversity of seaweed species and, although we were meant to be focussed exclusively on algae, it was impossible not to get carried away by the huge diversity of creatures living there too! Beautiful nudibranches, sea squirts, brittlestars, crabs, squat lobsters, blennies, sea scorpions, suckerfish and pipefish... One unusual species we found that turned out to be a rare and obscure colonial hydroid called *Candelabrum cocksii* – named after a Falmouth Doctor (Dr William Pennington Cocks) who discovered it on Gyllyngvase beach in 1854! (thanks to Dr Paul Gainey for identifying it!)

Higher shore pools in this area are often home to giant gobies - when we were kids we used to catch them for fun with a small barbless hook and a piece of sand eel - we never appreciated how rare these giants amongst gobies are and how lucky we were to have the opportunity to see them! Giant gobies are at the most northern edge of their natural distribution in Cornwall so no one else in the UK gets to see them. Unfortunately, although a large one (15-27cm) is obviously a giant goby, when they are young they look very similar to rock



Helford VMCA Members exploring the shore at Bar Beach with Dr Tegwyn Harris. Photo by Holly Latham

gobies and therefore are often under reported, it is possible that they are far more common than we realise.

On the 31st of May a good number of volunteers showed up for a pre-meeting snorkel at Grebe beach. It was a cloudy and pretty windy night but all enjoyed a view beneath the surface and again I was impressed with the staggering variety of species seen. I have dived many times over the eel grass beds at Durgan and Grebe but this evening for the first time under a rocky ledge I saw another warm water visitor to our shores, a male black faced blenny *Tripterygion delaisi*, with its stunning orange body and contrasting triangular black face. Yet another first for me! Awesome!

In early June myself and many others were treated to a fantastic beach which are home to a stunning diversity of invertebrate life. Our leader Dr Tegwyn Harris was full of fascinating stories about even the most simple looking specimens that were unearthed.



Male black-faced blenny. Photo by Paul Naylor

The future of Your Shore

The VMCA has a great network of volunteers working to practically preserve and promote the area. This summer the work of our volunteer beach cleaners was recognised by the group and the beach cleaning network is set to be better than ever now, under the coordination of Jess Hiron ensuring our efforts are well spread and no corner is forgotten! In getting involved with the Helford group I have been really impressed with the people that I have met. One of the group's biggest assets is the calibre and dedication shown by its volunteers, committee members and Advisory group members. I'm sure the group has a great future ahead of it and although the support of the Your Shore project is set to end in March next year I feel confident that the group will continue to do great work to protect and promote this vital estuary. To achieve this we really need volunteers to step forward to lead events and take on the organisational work involved in delivering a full programme of activities.

For the final year of the Your Shore project we have a full program of volunteer training, activities and events planned. By the end of this year, the 2013 program will be ready to go and it is hoped that many of the events previously ran by the Your Shore officer will be taken on by Helford volunteers. This is where we really need volunteers to step forward and lead. We are also training local teachers and providing equipment to ensure they can continue to use the

VMCA for school outings; this is another area where it would be great if volunteers could get involved. For the remainder of the Your Shore project I will be providing training, support and equipment, so if you think you would like to be involved in leading/organising events why not give it a go!

Matt Slater, Your Shore Officer, Cornwall Wildlife Trust



*Your Shore volunteers exploring the shore at Prisk Cove.
Photo by Holly Latham.*

Diving the Depths of the Helford

While many enjoy the spectacular above water landscape of the Helford, fewer venture below to see the diversity and richness of the habitats below. On a quiet summers evening in the low sun we waddle down Durgan beach; wrapped in drysuits, weighed down with SCUBA kit and laden with cameras. Cumbersome though we look to those barbequing and watching our antics, the weight will vanish as soon as we slip from the surface.

Disappearing down into the blue-green water we make our way across the pebbly bottom of the shore where little blennies dart, blending in perfectly with the patterned pebbles the moment they settle.

Deeper still, we reach sand and the edge of the seagrass; standing over a metre tall this rich habitat offers a refuge for many marine species. As we swim along we peer between the blades catching tantalising glimpses of the species within. Dragonets skim the sand surface, disappearing with the flick of a tail; peacock worms, their crown of tentacles out to feed, wave in the gentle currents and pipefish wind their way effortlessly between the green leaves... if we're lucky we might see a gliding thornback ray, an exquisitely camouflaged cuttlefish or delicate nudibranchs poised on the seagrass blades.

But this world is not exclusively the realm of the diver. Anyone willing to don a mask, snorkel and fins on a warm summers evening can see the same (and more) within an easy swim of Durgan or Grebe. Our marine environment is so secretive, yet so close at the same time; the next time you have an evening free why not go take a glimpse. And if you don't fancy going it alone, Cornwall Wildlife Trust run guided snorkels with a marine biologist to highlight all the best critters!

Holly Latham, VMCA Coordinator



The nudibranch Polycera quadrilineata on seagrass at Durgan. Photo by Holly Latham

Are you a 'Friend' yet?

This summer saw the launch of our new Wildlife Trust campaign, 'Friends of Marine Conservation Zones', to put pressure on the Government to designate the promised network of Marine Conservation Zones around the UK. And we need your help!

So little protection...

The beautiful Helford River is recognized for uniqueness and special wildlife through its designation as a Voluntary Marine Conservation Area (VMCA). In addition to this, it is also part of the larger Fal and Helford Special Area of Conservation or SAC. These two designations result in the area being protected and managed sustainably to ensure a healthy, diverse and rich marine environment for all to enjoy both now and in the future.

However, the Helford is lucky. Very little of our Cornish coastline is protected against the pressures that we put upon it. We need marine protected areas around our coast to offer a place of refuge where damaging activities are controlled and populations of plants and animals can recover from past decline.

Light on the horizon

When the Marine and Coastal Act was passed in 2009, it brought hope that finally the marine environment and the need for its protection was recognized, through the development of marine reserves called Marine Conservation Zones. Since the process to design and implement the MCZs started, the Wildlife Trusts and groups such as the HMCG have been campaigning all the way to make sure these zones are where they should be and for the right reasons.

How does the Helford VMCA fit into the bigger picture of MCZs?

As a result of many years of hard work, 127 MCZs have been submitted to government. Alongside the current designations of the SACs and VMCA, these MCZs form an ecological network of marine reserves which stretch around the whole of the UK.



Fisherman on the Cornish coast. Photo by Joana Doyle

The Helford VMCA forms an important link the MCZ chain. In addition to physically connecting the sites around the county, VMCA also deliver our vision of healthy seas by enriching people's lives and facilitating greater public involvement in the stewardship for our marine environment. That is what VMCA do so well, and without them the MCZ network would be a poorer initiative.



Swanpool recommended Reference Area. Photo by Natural England

The work is not over yet

There are still real concerns that there may be delays in designating the full network of Marine Conservation Zones. This is a problem, as without each and every MCZ being designated at the same time, the network will not be complete. The Wildlife Trusts are asking the public to continue to show their support and put pressure on the Government to designate the entire network of MCZs, and there is still time for you to get involved.

Sign our Petition Fish! Many readers will have already signed a Petition Fish scale over the past few years, to show support for marine nature reserves. As a result, the campaign has generated a tremendous amount of support for the network of MCZs recommended to protect critical sites around England. Cornwall Wildlife Trust has dozens of huge fish covered in scales individually signed by you, which will travel down to parliament later this year to remind the government that the British public cares about their marine wildlife.

If you haven't signed the Petition Fish yet there is still time! Check out wildlifetrusts.org/petitionfish for more information and the simple online form.

Become a Friend

Now we are taking things a step further.... In response to the continual delays in the designation of a network of 127 Marine Conservation Zones by the government, the Wildlife Trusts have decided to make our Petition Fish campaign more personal and are asking people to become a Friend of recommended MCZs (rMCZ) that are important to them.

MCZ sites have been chosen due to special features that are critical in the sustainability of our seas, but some of the 127 rMCZ sites are at risk of being forgotten. Whether you dive a rMCZ, go to a beach near a rMCZ or simply want to protect the marine wildlife that a particular rMCZ supports; that rMCZ needs you

to befriend it to ensure its future. Friends of MCZs will be asked to carry out small tasks specific to their rMCZ, such as writing to their local MP gaining public profile for their site as well as engaging in the public consultation expected December this year.

To find out more about MCZs local to you on the Helford through our interactive map or to befriend and MCZ visit www.wildlifetrusts.org/MCZfriends. For more information on Marine Conservation Zones and the work of Cornwall Wildlife Trust, visit www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/livingseas

Abby Crosby, Marine Conservation Officer, Cornwall Wildlife Trust



School with Petition Fish. Photo by Abby Crosby

Supporting Business Profile : Budock Vean

Budock Vean – “The Hotel on the River” – has been a kind supporter of the HVMCA for many years through both financial donations and the use of their grounds for wildlife walks. With a glorious setting of 65 acres along the north bank of the Helford River it is not surprising that Budock Vean has a reputation for being the finest country hotel in Cornwall. It is a family run business, owned by the Barlow family for more than 25 years, with an excellent range of leisure facilities including a testing 9 hole golf course and an indoor swimming pool.

Budock Vean is particularly special because of its 32 acres of organically-managed sub-tropical gardens which descend to the foreshore in Porthnavas Creek. In May this year the renowned botanist Keith Spurgin

led a large group of our members on a fascinating and informative walk through the gardens on, fortunately, a sunny day. Ecologically sound practice has ensured that the rich diversity of wild flora and fauna has increased in recent years.

For further information from Budock Vean please telephone 01326 252100 or visit their website www.budockvean.co.uk



Sub-tropical gardens. Photo by Holly Latham

The Helford Conservation Cruise



The Enterprise II in the Helford. Photo by Pamela Tompsett

A dry day with just a few grey clouds and a brisk westerly wind greeted the 100 passengers gathered at Helford Passage for a very well established, annual Helford event – the Conservation Cruise. It was a good start to an afternoon of relaxation, incomparable views and authoritative commentaries on the wildlife and other marine issues relating to the marine conservation area.

The first 'stop' was in Port Navas creek outside the Duchy Oyster Farm where the current trade is primarily in the slipper-shaped Pacific oyster (*Crassostrea gigas*) which grows quicker than the native flat oyster, traditionally fattened, then dredged from the river bed in the clean, rich waters of the Helford River. The Pacific oysters are fattened in protective flexible cages/bags which are regularly turned and cleared of weed and potential predators such as crabs. An ex-mussel farm raft anchored off Calamansack was noted as a base for trials of a new technique; whereby imported, juvenile (1-2 mm diameter) Pacific oyster spat hang to grow and develop protected by a hanging 1mm mesh curtain. A surrounding outer ring of ropes provides anchorage for mussel spat intended as a deterrent to settlement on the curtain. Natural spread of the Pacific oyster is minimised by using triploid stock.

Just across the river 'Enterprise II' ventured into Frenchman's Creek, the peaceful, shallow inlet set deep amongst National Trust woodland. The holiday cottage at the entrance 'Powders', was once the home

of 1930s sailor and artist Powders Thurburn and is now available for those seeking solitude and a wonderful view. Dense woodlands which clothe the sides and sweep down to the water's edge consist primarily of ancient coppiced oak. This has resulted in a uniformity of dwarfed trees. Coppicing by The National Trust continues on a limited scale but inevitably the dense forest is evolving with more beech and other species moving in.

Birdwatchers were delighted to see two pairs of the strikingly patterned black, white and chestnut shelduck each with greyish, downy ducklings on the shoreline. At low water these become very active feeding along the mudbanks on minute snails and crustaceans. Also awaiting the fall of the tide in the upper creeks were three grey herons and three groups of little egrets. In the 15th century these small white herons appeared on British dinner tables but had gone from Britain by the mid-16th century. The demand for plumes from European birds grew as the fashion for hat decoration increased and concern at the decline of the species resulted in the formation of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in 1889. It was 15 years ago that the first little egrets nested successfully at the Polwheveral heronry and numbers seem to have stabilised with 30 adults counted earlier in 2012 and estimated at 4+ nests alongside the 14 nesting pairs of grey heron. The grey heron nests earlier in the year than the egrets when the trees are bare, making their nest counting easier. Wading redshank and sandpipers crept along

the high water line. The wetland bird survey (WeBS) team undertakes monthly counts of our waterbirds and the results can be seen on the HVMCA website (www.helfordmarineconservation.co.uk). Large numbers of swifts were hawking for insects above the woodland, presumably coming in from their nesting sites in Helston and Constantine but they were too quick for the sparrowhawk which swooped low across the oak woods.

Approaching Gweek the impressive Sea-Core Fugro drilling platforms towered over the cruise boat as the Enterprise captain neatly turned with a minimum of disturbed mud in the very narrow deep water channel! Returning downstream with the wind at our backs we passed the National Seal Sanctuary and extensive beds of Spartina grass off Bonallack where the shallow warm waters offer good feeding grounds for small bass and other young fry.

Passengers were reminded that the HVMCA is a bass nursery area where offshore larvae (2-3cm in length) move in each year to take advantage of the rich, warm, waters. They feed and grow for about 4 years before reaching maturity when they return to the open sea. Derek Goodwin and a large team of volunteers had been monitoring the Helford and the Fal bass under special licence since 1994 and there was an opportunity to see some 2011 bass in aerated tanks on the lower deck. National Trust volunteers had kindly provided tanks with the more familiar shore crabs and other rock pool favourites which delighted the children on board. Returning through the main mooring area, boats of the Helford fishing fleet were identified. Aspects of international fisheries politics, large European vessels

and the disastrous effects of overfishing were described. Beyond the mouth of the Helford River the gentle swell of the sea was enjoyed by even the most confirmed 'landlubber'.

The whole Helford River complex is a 'ria' or drowned river valley, a sheltered arm of the sea, following a band of sandstone and slate between granite to the north and the Lizard Plateau to the south with a complex geological history. Nare Point could be seen in the distance. This was used in World War 2 as a Starfish decoy for Falmouth. Elaborate lighting was installed in the hope of deceiving the German bombers. After the war the MOD observation post became part of a torpedo test range. In July 2007 the post was taken over by the National Coastwatch Institution, a voluntary organisation formed to maintain a watch over our coastal waters.

The cruise continued into the picturesque Gillan inlet; sheltered from the north by Dennis Head with its Civil War fortifications, this shallow, sandy-mud bay supported a rich assemblage of seaweeds, worms, sea-anemones and shellfish. The expert aerial display of a peregrine falcon over the Dennis Head was a very special moment! Cormorants and the large great black backed gull were spotted at the mouth of the river on the return journey adding to a satisfactory total for this quiet time for birds. This, the 19th year of the HVMCA cruise starting from the Helford Passage jetty was much enjoyed by all.

Andrew & Pamela Tompsett, Helford VMCA

Photography Competition 2012

A quick reminder that the 2012 Helford VMCA Photography Competition is approaching soon, so don't forget to be on the lookout for stunning scenes to capture in and around the Helford!

Photo submissions 9.30-10.30am Saturday 24 November 2012. Entry forms and further details available from Rhiannon Pipkin (4 St. Michael's Road, Ponsanooth, Truro, TR3 7EA, 07710 956734 or Rhiannon.pipkin@yahoo.com).



Photo by Holly Latham

On a sunny afternoon...

June was a very wet affair with very little opportunity to get outside without donning a full set of waterproofs. It was a lovely surprise one afternoon to feel warm rays of sunshine hitting my cheek, an almost unfamiliar sensation. I quickly called some friends and within minutes it was arranged to meet at Tremayne Quay for a fire and some supper. Half expecting the weather to disappoint us I put the children in welly boots and packed coats along with a large picnic fit for an army platoon.

I love the walk to 'The Quay' and today was even more beautiful than usual, the relentless rain had made the woodlands' various shades of green almost luminous, throwing colour out like an oil painting. It was a real treat to see various wild flowers blooming with colour, some still with rain drops glistening in the sun as it beamed through the canopy. On arrival a fire was prepared and after a cool dip in the sparkling still waters of 'The River' we all tucked into a tasty fire cooked meal. As we sat quietly devouring the food we watched others making the most of the sunny spell, kayakers and other watercraft pootled up and down the river, leaving a trail of ripples which lapped onto the beaches as it reached the shores.

You are probably wondering why I am writing an article of such an ordinary affair which many of us are

lucky enough to regularly participate along various locations of the river or coast. My answer is that due to the weather preventing this from occurring as frequently as usual I felt overwhelmed at how fortunate we are. I often take The Helford River for granted but not only do we have such wonderful places to spend our free time, we are also lucky to have people who care enough to look after it. So thank you to all the volunteers and members of the HMCG and also other organisations who contribute, making our river one of the most beautiful places in Cornwall.

Jessica Hirons, HVMCA Volunteer and Member's



Pathway down to the creek. Photo by Jessica Hirons.

Upcoming Events

14th October 2012, 1.50pm – Helford Wetland Bird Survey. Monthly survey recording of the birdlife on the estuary. To get involved contact Martin Rule on 07854 123877.

21st October 2012 – Fungus Foray. Exploring the fascinating fungi in Scott's wood. Booking required. Contact Martin 07854 123877

27th October 2012 – Helford River walk. Organised walk around Maenporth, Rosemullion and the mouth of the Helford. Contact Ian at Ian@ianjakeways.com

18th November 2012, 11.50am – Helford Wetland Bird Survey. Details as above.

Photo Competition 2012: Submissions by 9.30–10.30am Saturday 24 November 2012.

24th November 2012, 7.30pm – Recording Nature: the work of the Environmental Records Centre. Sue Scott talks about working in the ERCCIS team and some of the unusual sightings over the years. Gweek Village Hall.

8th December 2012, 7.30pm – Cornish Estuarine Sediments: Human impact versus natural processes. Duncan Pirrie explores issues in estuarine sediment habitats linked to Cornwall's mining past. Gweek Village Hall.

19th January 2012, 7.30pm – Cultural Heritage of the Helford Estuary and Beyond- 10,000 years of change. James Gossip traces the cultural heritage of the Helford and Lizard through archaeological evidence. Gweek Village Hall.



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: Holly Latham Tel: 07870 389782 Email: coordinator@helfordvmca.co.uk

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