



## A new name and a new era for Cornwall's inshore waters

After over 120 years of managing Cornwall's fisheries, Cornwall Sea Fisheries Committee (CSFC) ceases to exist on 31 March 2011. From its humble beginnings on 28 March 1890 with one fishery officer on a bicycle, it has grown to 11 staff and 4 vessels, with a considerably larger carbon footprint! Its jurisdiction had expanded from the 3 mile to the 6 mile limit and fishing methods and vessels have evolved, in most cases, beyond all recognition.

Similarly, the global viewpoint on the value of our seas and oceans has changed dramatically, particularly in the last 30 years. Concerns over the loss of marine biodiversity and the impacts of human activities have resulted in many new conventions and laws to protect marine wildlife. The challenge of this new legislation is to balance the requirements of marine conservation with the need to harvest and enjoy our marine resources and to have access to our waters for all our activities.

In the UK, this challenge has been set out for England & Wales in the new Marine & Coastal Access Act (MaCAA) 2009. One of the main sections of the Act establishes the successors to the Sea Fisheries Committees – the new Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs). There will be 10 IFCAs across England, with Cornwall and Scilly retaining their separate identities. The membership of the existing CSFC with 26 members split between the fishing industry, local councillors and environmental bodies will change, with a new Cornwall IFCA Committee of 21 members, representing a broader range of sectors and with more representation from environment bodies.

Whilst the core of the Cornwall IFCA will be the existing SFC staff and assets, the CIFCA will be a very different organisation with a new remit and broader responsibilities. It will also be expected to perform to a national set of standards and targets. Whilst SFCs are funded through local authorities, Defra has allocated additional money to IFCAs for 4 years to enable us to carry out a wider range of work, especially within the estuaries which has expanded our District area by 10%.



So what will look different in practical terms? Of greatest relevance to the Helford River, this area will now be within our District, alongside all of Cornwall's estuaries. The Environment Agency will continue their patrol work to conserve salmon and sea trout but CIFCA officers will enforce sea fisheries and conservation legislation, often on joint patrols with the EA. Fishery Officers will become Enforcement Officers and will be sporting a new uniform to go with their new powers.

In line with the Marine Act, the focus of our work will be on environmental management, including fisheries, supported by surveys, monitoring programmes and enforcement. We will also enforce the new Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) when they are designated. Above all, we are charged with managing Cornwall's inshore waters in an environmentally sustainable and balanced way. Busy times ahead from 1 April 2011!

**Sam Davies, Senior Fishery Officer, Cornwall Sea Fisheries**



## Invasive species

**Invasive species, alien species, non native species; it all sounds rather nasty? A bit like HG Wells's apocalyptic novel detailing the Martians popping down for a bit of world domination. However, there are good and justified reasons why we should be concerned about the introduction of new and potentially damaging species to our native habitats. However, what I hope to illustrate is that it is all a question of balance and managing the rate of change.**

Take what we think of as our native habitats. Just how "natural" do you really suppose they are and what do we mean by the word natural? Around 20,000 years ago, at the end of the last ice age, the world around us would have looked very different. It is possible that many of the species we recognise today would not have been around and were in fact "aliens" themselves, moving into the warming seas, migrating from more southerly areas. This natural movement of species from one place to another happens all the time. Juvenile forms of what we commonly think of as sessile species, sponges, soft corals etc., are generally mobile and move as plankton through the world's oceans.

Indeed, this process is still happened today and marine biologists were delighted to find a very rare cup coral (*Leptopsammia pruvoti*) growing in a few isolated spots round the south west. Rare that is for south-western England as it is more commonly thought of as a Mediterranean species. However, a few planktonic larvae managed to hitch a ride on the ocean currents and settled here to add to our biodiversity.

However, not all new arrivals are thought of with such fondness. One invasive species that was viewed with trepidation when it was first spotted growing in our

coastal waters was *Sargassum muticum* or wire weed. This brown algae was first recorded near the Solent in the early 1970s. It is fast growing and forms dense canopies, its air filled bladders holding its fronds up in the water column. Since then it has spread round the coast of the UK and can now be found in most places where there are suitable holdfasts in shallow coastal waters and rock pools. The fear was that because it grows very quickly and forms large fronds that it would smother our more normal coastal algal species and even damage our seagrass beds. None of this has transpired and now *Sargassum*, here to stay, has established itself as part of our coastal biodiversity.

Another recent arrival to our waters is the slipper limpet *Crepidula fornicata*. Again, it is believed to have been first recorded in the Solent but, due to it being fast growing, a rapid reproducer and having no natural predators in our waters, it has spread round our southern coasts and is now only limited in its distribution by the colder water temperatures further north. Although, like *Leptopsammia* and *Sargassum*, *Crepidula* is here to stay, it is far more of a problem. Because it has no natural predators, *Crepidula* forms dense carpets of animals and has a particular liking for our native shellfish beds and in particular, oyster beds.

We have populations of the native European oyster, *Ostrea edulis* on both the Fal and Helford. Both fisheries have a major problem with *Crepidula* and whilst there have been various schemes proposed to remove them from the fishery, none of these projects has been successful. Given their abundance you might think that they would be an excellent fishery in their own right. However, not even chefs as talented as Rick Stein have managed to find a way of making them taste edible!



*Slipper limpet. Photo by Paul Naylor*





*Wakame. Photo by Lisa Rennocks*

Unfortunately, the influx does not end with there. A recent project has begun to make a record of marine invasive species here in Cornwall and hopefully slow the spread of this next round of unwanted plants and animals. The project, led by Cornwall Wildlife Trust, recently found and removed another invasive brown alga from a site in the Fal estuary. Wakame, *Undaria pinnatifida*, in common with our native kelps grows in the clear waters round the south west. It is also fast growing and could crowd out some of these native species.

Another potentially damaging species that has made it into English waters but has yet to be recorded in Cornwall is *Didemnum vexillum*. This species of sea squirt has caused damage to the infrastructure of ports, marinas and aquaculture farms. However, with the co-operation of our harbour authorities and marinas, we are maintaining a watch for this and it is hoped that when it does eventually arrive here, we will be able to take action quickly to stop it from becoming established.

So why is it that we celebrate the arrival of *Leptopsammia* and yet curse the likes of *Sargassum*, *Crepidula*, *Undaria* and *Didemnum*?

It is all about the rate of change and the impact, that these species have on our native species. As mentioned, *Leptopsammia* arrived “naturally”, is here in small numbers and adds to our wonderfully rich and diverse marine habitats. The other invasive species were introduced artificially; possibly hitching a ride on shellfish imported for aquaculture, spread rapidly in great numbers and detract from our biodiversity. Eventually, our habitats will change as a result of drivers like climate change and equilibrium will be re-established, but in the meantime we need to be far more careful in our introduction and management of these aliens.

**Kevan Cook, Lead marine advisor, Natural England**

#### **Investigating Invasives**

Both native marine life and marine based industries are under increasing pressure from the introduction of non-native invasive species. ERCCIS and Cornwall Wildlife Trust are collaborating with associated organisations, including the Marine Biological Association, to uncover which invasive species have already arrived and establish the ones that pose a significant threat should they arrive. For more information about the project and how you could help please see [www.ercis.co.uk/invasivespecies/Investigate\\_Invasives\\_Marine](http://www.ercis.co.uk/invasivespecies/Investigate_Invasives_Marine).





## Your Shore – Full Throttle in 2011

Many people think that the winter months are a quiet period for conservation officers – surely it is too cold to venture outside for events or monitoring work? It is true that outdoor sessions have to be kept to a minimum to avoid the bad weather and dark days, but you couldn't be further from the truth if you thought that we marine conservation officers have nothing better to do than twiddle our thumbs until Easter descends! Since the start of 2011, and I write this article at the end of January, the Your Shore project has delivered three volunteer meetings, five public events, and two volunteer training sessions not to mention the articles written for newsletters, newspapers and magazine for the VMCAs around the county. All in one month! This level of activity just shows how interested people are and how there is still a demand, even at this difficult time of year, for people to continue to get involved in local marine conservation work.

For those who may still be unsure of what the 'Your Shore' project is about, please do check out the website [www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/yourshore](http://www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/yourshore) for more information. On these pages you will also find our new and exciting 'Your Shore' films that were produced last year to showcase the project in a more accessible way. They are well worth a look if and when you have a chance and you may recognise some local faces!

In the last newsletter I spoke about the new volunteer group that the Your Shore project was assisting the HMCG in setting up. Since that first enthusiastic meeting, the group has gone from strength to strength with further meetings on wetland bird surveys (see elsewhere in this newsletter) and monthly river litter cleans. With such encouragement, I put together a training programme for Helford VMCA volunteers for 2011 which includes rocky shore ecology for beginners and Helford River Fish Identification. In addition to these training sessions, the National Trust have kindly organised several activity days for volunteers to do some



*Ben Giles, Your Shore filmmaker.  
Photo by Abby Crosby*

terrestrial practical work around the river. If any readers are ready to take the plunge into volunteering, do get in contact.

In the autumn 2011 HMCG newsletter I shall update you fully on the other aspect of work that the Your Shore project is supporting the HMCG with – working with schools. This is perhaps the most fun part of my job as it involves playing on the beach, exploring the strandline, and rockpooling DURING work hours! I am taking bookings for 2011 school groups to join me on a seashore safari, so if you know of any teachers who may be interested to find out more please do put them in touch with me.

**Abby Crosby, Your Shore Project Officer,  
Cornwall Wildlife Trust**

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## Volunteer Profile – James Agnew

**My name is James Agnew and I have lived close to, and now in, Constantine since 1967. We have never been more than a good walk of fifteen minutes away from the Helford River. I took early retirement in June 2008, but was not ready to 'Hang up my boots' completely! I now carry out contract work for any business that may need a hand, and/or my expertise.**

My love for the river began back in the fifties when we, as a family, holidayed in Port Navas creek, on an old converted Newlyn lugger (Ripple) which has recently been restored to her former glory. Now with time to spare, I wanted to make sure that this beautiful area is left in an ecological balance for future generations. Much has changed on the Helford, and our surrounding coastline since 1967, and to have the privilege to help, in a small

way, to conserve the very essence of why many millions of people have lived or visited one of the most beautiful estuaries, certainly in Europe, if not the world, is extremely worthwhile. Those last few words are not mine alone; they are from countless international clients that I looked after when I ran my own bespoke travel business, here in Cornwall. Do you need any more persuasion to offer your time to the custodians of the Helford River? The Helford Marine Conservation Group are such custodians of our marine and wild life habitats, and deserve our support.



**James Agnew, Your Shore volunteer**





## Eelgrass- An update

Readers of this newsletter will know that the HMCG, CWT and Natural England have a depth of knowledge about eelgrass belonging to the *Zostera* species. Stella Turk, Pam Tompsett, Roger Covey, Tony Sutton and Kevan Cook have all written about its natural history and distribution within the Helford and other areas of Cornwall. For good basic information about eelgrass the best place to go is the HVMCA leaflet which can be collected in hard copy at one of the monthly events or downloaded on our website through the link <http://www.helfordmarineconservation.co.uk/publicat.htm>. In addition, Phil Lockleys film "Jaws of Helford" has some beautiful sequences showing the life amongst the grass.

The devastating affects of the *Labyrinthula* species of slim mould which greatly reduced *Zostera marina* within the Helford estuary and destroyed the inter-tidal beds of *Zostera noltei* and *Zostera angustifolia* in the past are well documented by Pamela and Tony in their 2000 Report. However there is increasing evidence that the meadows of *Zostera* are spreading once more and the establishment of the voluntary "No Anchoring Zone" off Grebe Beach in 2000 is felt to have played an important part. Kevan Cook's article in the Autumn edition 2008 of the HMCG newsletter painted an optimistic picture of the health of *Zostera* in the Helford and pointed to some evidence that the beds are re-establishing themselves.



*Anemonia on Zostera by Keith Hiscock*

In Kevan's presentation in Gweek in January of this year he explained that there is the possibility that the ever present slime mould will again ravage the beds as it has periodically since the major outbreak on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1930s. In addition eelgrass is vulnerable to the effects of runoff and physical disturbance. So, though there are good reasons to feel happy with progress, there is a need to educate people about the value of eelgrass



*Eelgrass on sand. Photo by Paul Kay*

and explain what can be done to preserve the beds and encourage their growth.

At the moment there is no systematic evidence for the current extent of the beds in the Helford but Tony Sutton is planning to undertake a survey of the transects he used in the 1990s with his students at University College Falmouth. This should establish a new baseline and is certainly a really exciting development.

In addition there is a plan hatched by Abby Crosby to take the cause of *Zostera* preservation to a wider audience. It is planned to produce articles for the local and boating press to explain the well documented importance of eelgrass beds, to encourage good observation of the no anchor zone, and to alert boat owners to respect the eelgrass beds that exist elsewhere. We will be producing a poster that we hope to be able to display in marinas, sailing clubs, pubs etc which will give basic facts about the species and the no anchor zone. Finally a Power Point presentation will be produced that can be taken to clubs, schools and other interested groups. We want people to appreciate that they can do positive things to preserve eelgrass, wherever it is, and maintain a vital habitat for a rich variety of organisms.

**Mike Langshaw, HMCG member and CWT volunteer**







## HMCG Members Committee Chairman's report Spring 2011

Writing this in January I am conscious that this Newsletter will be available in time for our AGM in March. With this in mind it seems sensible to provide a summary of the year just past and a look forward to the year ahead. It is good to report too that the HMCG members section is in good health. This is with regard both to the level of activity and involvement from our members as well with the state of our finances.

The programme of events in 2010 was well supported and it is evident from the new 2011 Events Leaflet that we have another full and interesting programme to look forward to. In addition to this formal events programme our plans for increased levels of volunteer activities are moving along really well with encouraging numbers of people keen to get involved. Abby Crosby has organised and run several excellent volunteer meetings under the auspices of the Cornwall Wildlife Trust's 'Your Shore' project and the first activities are underway. It was amazing how many people attended an evening meeting in the Gweek Inn in December on the subject of beach cleaning for what turned out to be a most enjoyable evening. As a result we now have a plan for volunteers to do beach cleaning with individuals taking responsibility for designated stretches of shoreline as well as specific dates for teams to 'hit' particular areas. Volunteers include some boats owners who can take the rubbish away once collected from shore. With increasing pressure on our shores from all sorts of rubbish – washed up or just left behind – this will be an ongoing and valuable activity.

Following another meeting there is now a volunteer team to scientifically survey our Helford bird populations throughout the year, which you can read about in Ilya

Maclean and Martin Rules' report on pages 10 and 11 of this newsletter. This will link into national surveys of wetlands birds to provide important ongoing information.

In other articles in this newsletter we mention the 'No Anchor' buoys that help protect the Eel Grass beds off Durgan. Having agreed this to be a priority we used our Members' Funds to finance a second buoy and repair the one remaining buoy. We also reported that a third buoy would be commissioned when funds enabled us to do this. I can report that we have been able to do this, thanks to a generous donation from the late Fiona Beale who left us some money in her Will. Many of you will know that Fiona was a founding member of HMCG and keen participant. We believe she would approve of using her donation to provide protection for this environmentally important resource, standing guard as it will over the location.

Our finances stand in good health. We were successful in being awarded funding to finance our co-ordinator for 3 years from (June 2010). In addition our activities have enabled us to gain funding from AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). You help us with this funding by registering at our events as proof of the numbers of people getting involved. It was wonderful news also to receive a generous donation from Helford Passage Car Park at the end of 2010 which has been most welcome to help cover our website development work. Membership is steadily rising and corporate membership also healthy. Because our finances are looking good right now we are pleased to advise that no increase in membership subscriptions is proposed at this time. You are probably aware that the subs have remained unchanged since we started and must represent the best



*Volunteer surveyors in action bird watching. Photo by Abby Crosby*



value for money around. Hopefully this will encourage new people to join, to increase membership and therefore get more people involved in the protection of this unique and special place. If you have friends who are not members then you might like to bring them along to an event.

There is continuous development of the website and new information being added. This commitment and cost is ongoing and increasingly important. The numbers of people visiting the website and downloading information is increasing all the time. Close to 4000 leaflets were downloaded last year.

You will know that we appointed Abby Crosby as our co-ordinator last year. I am sorry to report that she has informed us that, reluctantly, she will be unable to continue this role beyond May. Her workload running the 'Your Shore' programme has increased significantly and demands all her time. We therefore are recruiting for her replacement, to take over in June (see the advert in this newsletter. Applications are welcome). Abby is doing a good job for us and we are sorry to lose her in this role. However, she will still be closely involved with us in the delivery of 'Your Shore', which involves all the VMCA's in Cornwall. She reports on this separately in this Newsletter and we can say that this programme is benefiting us and hopefully will continue to do so for years to come.

**Committee:** we have a keen and committed team who I would like to thank for all their work throughout the last year. I would add that it is a pleasure to work with them. Special thanks as ever to the events organising team with Paul Garrard for the excellent events programme that comes up with new subjects every year.

**Constitution:** the existing constitution was identified as needing some minor modification, primarily for reasons of clarification but also because it helps to support grant funding applications. The updated version will be circulated to all members prior to the AGM to enable us to hold a vote on it at the meeting.

Once again, may I thank everyone for the considerable time and effort spent on behalf of HMCG and also all our members for their support. Many people provide us with help.

We look forward to seeing as many people as possible at our events, please bring friends.

**David Thomson**  
**Chairman Helford MCG Members' section**

## Vacancy Co-ordinator HMCG

**The Helford Marine Conservation Group is an independent organisation promoting the harmonious use of the Helford River, bringing together conservation, commerce and community interests**

Applications are invited for the part-time position of Co-ordinator as from 1 June 2011

Responsibilities centred on the Helford VMCA will include

- acting as key point of contact on HVMCA issues
- organisation, delivery and reporting of quarterly meetings (Advisory Group) and one annual general meeting
- liaising with partner organisations
- storing, updating and providing relevant information on request
- co-ordinating website development
- organising volunteer activities
- initiating applications for funding
- providing information for website and other publicity
- supporting Members' Section as required, particularly with events organisation and promotion

Hours 7hrs per week. This could increase if funding can be found for special projects. Some evenings or weekend work are involved. Salary £9/hr. Location Flexible

Applicants should have

- an interest in the marine environment preferably to include suitable experience and/or qualifications
- good networking, communication and organisational skills (also tact and a sense of humour)
- useful to have experience of working in or with partner organizations
- some experience of constructing grant applications would be an advantage
- good IT skills
- availability outside of normal office hours as required
- clean driving licence

Please send CV and covering letter to Martin Rule, email: [martinrule@talktalk.net](mailto:martinrule@talktalk.net),  
Address: 2 Trussall Row, Wendron, Helston, TR13 0NT. Deadline for applications Monday 11th April 2011





## Tales of a Wildlife Photographer with David Chapman 11 Dec 2010

Is that a pin-tailed duck? No, it's a long-tailed duck. Isn't that a gannet? No, it's a black-tailed godwit. We were trying to identify birds on David Chapman's jumper, knitted by his mother who had produced separate jerseys for different talks. His outdoor gear depended on conditions, one photograph showing military-style camouflaged top and trousers, plus a back-pack to carry a tripod, camera and lenses and a chest-pack containing a portable hide. When erected, the last looked like a camouflaged igloo, just large enough to accommodate David and Adrian Langdon for several hours bird watching at the Walmsley Reserve. His account of that outing was returned by Adrian with the comment that the phrase "the mud came nearly to the top of our wellies" had a typographical error in the final sentence!

A couple of photographs followed, pin-sharp, beautifully composed, with no background clutter. One showed a house sparrow with a spray of pampas grass in its beak, the other was of a goldfinch clinging to the stem of a dandelion clock. One could sense that the audience was beginning to despair. How many years does it take to produce photographs like that? And is David blessed with an inordinate amount of luck? Then we learned of the preparation. Because the sparrows had kept darting from one clump of pampas grass to another, David had cut off all the sprays (with permission from his wife Sarah) and inserted one in a frame on a table, on which the camera was focussed.

For the second photograph, the dandelion clock was fixed to a length of wire stuck in a block of turf resting on the table. Niger seeds had been scattered on the turf for a week to attract goldfinches. Incidentally, as the camera and tripod were inside the house, the kitchen window had to be removed for these shots.

Hides are important. Once he erected a hide on his garage roof to photograph a pied wagtail on the neighbour's garage. Birds are not perturbed by motor cars and so these are good hides, as long as the occupants remain inside. For off-road locations, inaccessible to cars, David has experimented with a 3-wheeled, pedal-powered buggy with the tripod attached to the frame, all enclosed by a black mesh curtain. Another version, which folded up for carrying, had the drawback of a low seat which was unpleasant when the tide rose.

Depressing images of a dead common dolphin on Gunwalloe beach brought home the dangers faced by these animals. A close-up showed monofilament strands in its mouth, suggesting that it was a victim of fishing. Pair trawling for sea bass gives rise to one dolphin death per two trawls, on average, as dolphins follow the fish into the net, but in one horrifying incident 150 common dolphins died. The next image was of a grey seal pup, about a day old and with a cream-coloured coat. It would not be able to enter the water for two weeks, until its coat had become



*Grey seal pup. Photo by David Chapman*





waterproof. Abandoned pups that have been rescued and cared for by the Seal Sanctuary are released at Godrevy and elsewhere when they have reached a weight of 50-55kg., although after weeks of being provided with daily fish some are reluctant to leave. A picture of a dormouse triggered "Aaghs" from the audience. They are not the easiest of subjects because they have a limited range, around the fringes of Bodmin Moor, with none west of Truro, and are a protected species. A licence is required to handle them and it is forbidden to look in a nest box if they may be present. During the long hibernation period from October to May (when their food starts to appear) their metabolic and heart rates become very slow, to the point that it takes the animal about two minutes to become mobile when disturbed. Another creature with wide appeal, the puffin, was photographed at Sanday in the Orkneys. David noticed that it stayed in one position in the water and, wading to it, found that its legs had been caught by fishing net. While he was freeing it, Sarah dutifully waded out carrying a camera and wide-angle lens, with a film in her mouth.

Some excursions give little return for a lot of effort, for example a rough 15 mile trudge on Westray in the Orkneys to a site where black guillemots should have been --- but were not. Similarly, a £10 boat trip from St Ives to Seal Rock was fruitless, until the boat returned to Smeaton's Pier where holidaymakers were enjoying the sight of a seal in the harbour.

A food lure can sometimes be an effective way of bringing a bird to the right place for a photograph. It was worth trying for the ravens nesting at Prussia Cove and so a dead rabbit was placed at a strategic point and David sat in his hide waiting. After 4 hours, with no sign of birds, he packed up and walked off. Glancing back he saw the ravens attacking the rabbit with gusto. The same thing happened the next day – a 4 hour wait and the ravens only appeared when he left. On the third day, working on the theory that birds cannot



*Little Egret. Photo by David Chapman*

count, Sarah accompanied him into the hide and then walked away. The ravens were not fooled!

One of David's long-held ambitions has been to take pictures of a buzzard swooping on prey and tearing it open. His early efforts involved a camera with wide-angle lens positioned on the ground close to a dead rabbit and triggered using a long cable release from a nearby bush hide. However, the framing was unpredictable and the slide film took days to process and come back. Subsequently, changing to a digital SLR, the results were immediately available, but in each case the bird's wings were part-open on the verge of taking off. It had taken fright at the sound of the camera's mirror flipping up a millisecond before the shutter opened. In the current arrangement the camera is partnered with a CCTV camera, both linked by long wires to David's sitting room where he can view the action on a monitor screen and take pictures between sips of coffee!

The HMCG would like to thank David very much for an enthralling and stimulating evening.

**Paul Garrard, HMCG Events Coordinator**

## **Could you be the next David Chapman? Helford Photo Competition 2011**

**Photograph the marvellous communities, wildlife and activities of the Helford!**

Entry forms and details of adults and children's classes available from:

Rhiannon Pipkin, 4 St. Michaels Road, Ponsanooth, Truro, TR3 7EA

Tel: 07710 956734

Email: [Rhiannon.Pipkin@yahoo.com](mailto:Rhiannon.Pipkin@yahoo.com)

Photographs to be submitted to Gweek Village Hall  
between 9.30am and 10.30 am Saturday 22nd October 2011  
for judging and display at the evenings event.

The best photographs can be added to the HMCG website and displays in the Great Atlantic Galleries, Falmouth!



In the last newsletter I mentioned that there were plans to publish surveys and scientific reports, which had previously only been available as hard copies, as an electronic resource for visitors. The long process of scanning and publishing reports has now started and I am pleased to report that the following six reports are now available to download.

- ⦿ Helford River Survey Report 1987
- ⦿ Triggling: a summary of the knowledge
- ⦿ The Helford River Oysterage
- ⦿ Pisces (Fish) of the Helford River
- ⦿ Marine Algae of the Helford VMCA: checklist with records from the 19th Century
- ⦿ Helford River Survey; a review of triggling (cockle collection) 1996-2006

The reports have only been available since mid November but have been downloaded nearly three hundred times. There are plans for more reports to be added in the future, we hope visitors will find them of interest.

Jayne Herbert (Web Design and Internet services) <http://www.jayne-herbert.co.uk>

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## Monitoring water birds on the Helford River

In recent weeks, volunteers from the Helford Voluntary Marine Conservation Area have developed a plan to count waterbirds on the Helford as part of the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Ilya Maclean, WeBS co-ordinator for Cornwall and local resident Martin Rule, explain why counting waterbirds is important, which waterbirds are found on the Helford and how participating in WeBS helps to conserve these species.

Areas of intertidal mudflats in the UK, such as those along the shores of the Helford River, are of outstanding international importance for many species of waterbird. Lying on some of the major flyways for Arctic-nesting

species, large numbers of waterbirds are attracted, especially during winter, by the relatively mild climate and extensive areas of mudflats they provide them with their food. The conservation of the mudflats on which these birds depend is vital in a global context, if healthy populations of these species are to be sustained.

Monitoring waterbirds is an important part of conservation. Without knowing how numbers are changing through time, it is impossible to know which species and areas are most threatened by our changing environment, or indeed which aspects of our changing environment have the biggest impact. Estuaries and



*Photo by Jill Pakenham*







*Photo by Jill Pakenham*

other wetlands have experienced many changes in recent years. Developments threaten feeding habitats, water quality has altered, the climate has warmed and fish stocks have been depleted. How does this threaten our birds? Where does this threaten our birds? Without monitoring, we wouldn't know. Moreover, often there isn't enough money to conserve everything, or conservation might come at the expense of other things we enjoy, such as boating. Monitoring is an essential means of establishing where our priorities should lie.

This is where the Wetland Bird Survey (or WeBS as it is often abbreviated to) comes in. WeBS is the monitoring scheme for non-breeding waterbirds in the UK and provides the principal data for the conservation of their populations and habitat. It is a partnership initiative between the British Trust for Ornithology, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. Continuing a tradition begun in 1947, around 3,000 volunteer counters throughout the UK, participate in synchronised monthly counts at wetlands of all habitat types, mainly during the winter period. The data collected as part of the Wetland Bird Survey are used to assess the size of waterbird populations, determine trends in numbers and distribution, and assess the importance of individual sites for waterbirds, in line with the requirements of international Conventions and Directives designed to protect waterbirds. For example, WeBS data have underpinned the designation of over 100 protected areas and have helped to investigate the key drivers of waterbird population change, which include climate change, loss of habitat, disturbance and introduced non-native species.

On 16th January 2011, volunteers from the HMCG started what is hoped to become a long-term involvement in WeBS. Previous attempts at covering the Helford have been difficult, given the low number of viewpoints and the time taken to move between them. It is therefore fantastic to be able to report that seven local recorders were able to divide the site up into sectors so that nearly the whole estuary was counted before inclement weather arrived at 10am. While it is always dangerous to start commenting on a small dataset – one survey – it is also impossible not to make some interesting observations. For example, only 4 Grey Herons were recorded and 8 Little Egrets. Perhaps

others were ranging farther afield in the farmland and wetlands in the hinterland? Conversely, 39 Shelduck, 129 Mallard and 215 Curlew give us quite high figures for these species against which to compare the future surveys. A full list of the findings can be seen on our website.

The Helford is one of the mildest areas of wetland habitat in the UK. As a consequence it hosts good numbers of several species that are more commonly found further south in Europe and reach the northern extremities of their range in the UK. Being one of the warmest wintering sites for waterbirds in the UK, means that events that occur here are often a harbinger of things to come elsewhere in the UK. Despite the recent adverse weather, the climate in this part of Cornwall, in common with elsewhere in the UK, has actually warmed by two degrees C since the 1970s.

Those of you living near the Helford may be aware of the numbers of a species that was able to colonise the UK as a result of these warmer temperatures: the Little Egret. Although sporadic records occurred before this time, this elegant white bird in the Heron family first colonized the UK in significant numbers in the mid-1980s. By 1993, numbers peaked at 185, with more than half the records from estuaries in Cornwall. Since that time it has expanded rapidly. By 2003 more than 4,000 were counted by volunteers participating in the Wetland Bird Survey and numbers in 2010 were probably in excess of 10,000. From its origins in warm estuaries in the south-west, it has expanded through much of the UK and now even occurs occasionally in Scotland. Other species associated with warmer climes, such as Greenshank, have also increased rapidly in the UK, although warm sites such as the Helford remain its stronghold. Conversely, some species have fared less well in the south-west. Birds such as the Redshank and Curlew, once more common in Cornwall, have foregone the benefits of mild temperatures in favour of more productive feeding grounds on the east coast. It will be interesting to see whether this species declines on the Helford if temperatures continue to increase. However, climate change is by no means the only factor likely to be affecting waterbirds on the Helford. Monitoring how numbers are changing will allow us to understand what these are.

**Ilya Maclean and Martin Rule**



*Little egret. Photo by Andy Musgrove*



## Supporting Business Profile : The Great Atlantic Gallery

The Great Atlantic Gallery in Falmouth is very pleased to support the HVMCA and its members section, the Helford Marine Conservation Group. Conservation and wild life are central to my personal interests as well as to much of the art on sale at The Great Atlantic Galleries in Falmouth and St Just. We are fortunate to live in this most beautiful part of Great Britain and I feel we all have a responsibility to respect and conserve the natural environment.

There is a strong connection between The Great Atlantic Gallery in Falmouth and The Helford River. Our art gallery in Falmouth – 48 Arwenack Street – is a former home of the Fox family who perhaps more than any other contributed to the unique nature and fame of The Helford River. It was the Fox family who designed and built the very special gardens of Glendurgan, Trebah

and Penjerrick along the northern side of the river. [Falmouth and The Helford River are more than just neighbours, they are closely linked through people and history.]

I am also delighted to be able to assist with this year's HMCG Photography Competition and in particular look forward to exhibiting the winners in The Great Atlantic Gallery after the judging on 22nd October.

Michael Jay  
The Great Atlantic Gallery  
48 Arwenack Street  
Falmouth  
TR11 3JH  
[www.greatatlantic.co.uk](http://www.greatatlantic.co.uk)

## Upcoming Events

### Saturday 19th March

#### The work of British Divers Marine Life Rescue & AGM

An illustrated insight with a local focus into Britain's leading marine animal rescue charity and the dedicated volunteers who run it, presented by Director and Cornwall Area Coordinator, Dave Jarvis. Discover what it takes to save a seal pup and to refloat a stranded dolphin, plus some other unusual cases!

**Cost:** £2. Group members & children free.

**Time:** 7.30 p.m.

**Venue:** Gweek Village Hall, beside the National Seal Sanctuary, TR12 6UG

**OS Ref:** SW 709 266

**Contact:** Ruth 07967 251278 or Ian 01872 863171

### Sunday 17th April

#### Heron and Egret Survey

Following last year's successful event, accompany local bird watcher Martin Rule to survey the wonderful Heron and Egret populations of the Helford

River. Binoculars, weatherproof clothing, and robust footwear advised. Booking required. Max 30.

**Cost:** Free

**Time:** 09.30 – 12.00 a.m.

**Meet:** Entrance to the road to Calamansack, between Port Navas and Constantine.

**OS Ref:** SW 746 281

**Contact:** Martin 01326 561952 or 07854 123 877

### Monday 18th April

#### Seashore Safari

Join CWT's Marine Conservation Officer Ruth Williams in a sea search at the edge of the Helford river as the tide falls and find crabs, sea-anemones, seaquirts and other mysterious creatures. Wear non-slip rock-scrambling shoes that you are prepared to get wet! Bring small nets and plastic buckets if you wish.

**Cost:** Free

**Time:** 11.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m.

**Meet:** In front of the Ferryboat Inn, Helford Passage, TR11 5LB

**OS Ref:** SW 764 269

**Contact:** Ruth 07967 251278 or Rhiannon 07710 956734

### Sunday 15th May

#### Helford Conservation Cruise

Enjoy the Helford wildlife scene on a boat trip upriver from the mouth of the estuary with local experts, displays, children's activities and live tanks. Bring weatherproof clothing. Binoculars could be useful.

**Cost:** Adults £8 and Under-18s £4

**Time:** 3.00 – 5.30 p.m.

**Depart:** The Ferryboat Inn jetty, Helford Passage on the NORTH shore, TR11 5LB

**OS Ref:** SW 764 269

**Contact:** Paul 01326 341030 or David 01326 340686

**Advance booking essential** – include SAE for tickets. Please make cheques payable to "Helford Marine Conservation Group" and send to Paul Garrard, 4 Valley View, Constantine, Falmouth TR11 5AP, marking envelope 'Cruise'.



**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: Abby Crosby Tel: 07917 765581 Email: [abby@helfordvmca.co.uk](mailto:abby@helfordvmca.co.uk)

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