

# HELFORD

## Voluntary Marine Conservation Area

Newsletter No. 33 Autumn 2006

### "Community, Commerce and Conservation working together" Helford River Sailing Club

Helford River Sailing Club was formed in 1948, when it was perceived by four local youngsters that there was a need for such a club on the river to provide good sailing and an active social calendar. It transpired that this perception was accurate as by September 1948 there was an active dinghy racing fleet with as many as 30 boats in the fleet!

Since those days there has been a lot of water under the bridge. The original clubhouse was a room above a garage belonging to one of the founder members - a far cry from the clubhouse now in use. The clubhouse you see today was built in 1970 following an agreement with Harry Graham-Vivian of Bosahan and Kerrier Rural District Council which enabled the club to purchase the land freehold. Members, their guests and visiting yachtsmen ( the club is not open to the public) now enjoy full bar and restaurant facilities, and comfortable seating areas from which to appreciate the wonderful views of the river.



The dinghy racing which started all those years ago continues today unabated. In addition there is an active fleet of racing yachts, for whom the Wednesday evening series is the most popular. Further races are held on Mondays, Fridays and Sundays. The club's members also take part in offshore races organised by the Cornwall Offshore Group and HRSC won the series last year. The club is a member of the Port of Falmouth Sailing Association, who organise the series of regattas in August called Falmouth Week. There is an active cruising section, with members cruising in company to Scilly and Brittany, as well as up the coasts of Devon and Cornwall.

The year 1959 saw the first of the club's annual race to L'Aber Wrac'h in north Brittany - hence this year's race was the 47th run. Competitors from both England and France take part, and in the late 80's the race attracted up to 100 boats of which about 30 were French. Although numbers have dropped to an average of about 30 in recent years it remains a popular race and many strong friendships have been forged over the decades with our fellow Celts across the water.

There is also an active teaching section in the club, with adult tuition on Tuesday evenings and junior tuition on Friday evenings. Both are popular, relatively informal (safety is paramount) and informative. The club owns 18 sailing dinghies which members may use for these sessions.

The club maintains close ties with the HVMCA - the Commodore is a member of the Advisory Group, our Vice Chairman is also a trustee of the club, and I am both Treasurer of the Advisory Group and Secretary of HRSC.

So fifty-odd years on the club flourishes with around 1,300 members. Sailing is a popular sport nowadays and Helford River Sailing Club continues to give to all those that wish to take part an opportunity to do so - on the same principle as was set out at the inception of the club " to encourage sailing, racing, cruising and generally messing about in boats in a seamanlike manner".

**Robert Hewett**

*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: PE Tompsett, Awelon, Colborne Avenue, Illogan, Redruth, TR16 4EB. Tel: 01209 842316  
Chairman: David Muirhead Co-ordinator: Pamela Tompsett www.helfordmarineconservation.co.uk  
Design: Sheila McCann, Cornwall Wildlife Trust Illustration: Sarah McCartney, Cornwall Wildlife Trust

## Trigging and the Common cockle

In 2003 byelaws were passed in order to protect the common cockle *Cerastoderma edule* from over-exploitation in Cornish estuaries. It is important to maintain a healthy breeding population and it was decided that the recommendation of a minimum collection size of 20mm, about the size of a 20p piece, would assist in this aim together with a ban on harvesting by mechanical means such as suction dredgers.

Although suction dredgers are unlikely to be used in the HVMCA the practice of trigging or cockle collection by hand-raking on Good Fridays has continued and the Helford MC Group members have observed the triggers at work!



This information has been reviewed by Rhiannon Mather on behalf of the Group and she has summarised her findings as follows:

"Over the last 10 years the Helford Voluntary Marine Conservation Area Group has carried out a series of informal surveys on Good Friday at the main cockle beds of the Helford Estuary at Bar Beach, Treath and Gillan. These

surveys are aimed at providing some monitoring of the number of people trigging and the approximate number of cockles being removed from the beds as a result. The surveys have been spurred on by worries of the cockle populations of the Helford River being in decline, a view shared by many of the local triggers.

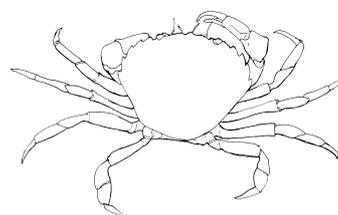


Surveys of 1996, 1999, 2003, 2004 and 2006 have been examined and combined with studies performed by the Environment Agency for the Helford area. Findings indicate the number of people trigging each year to have altered little over the last 10-year period, and the sources of triggers to have remained much the same.

It is estimated that an average of 17-gallons of cockles has been removed from Bar Beach each Good Friday. The surveys of 1996, 1999 and 2006 indicate a 20% decrease in the number of cockles being removed from Bar Beach in the last 10 years, although it is not yet established whether the cockle population has definitely declined. For this to be determined further survey work is required, measuring the cockle population of the area, and examining the age structure of the beds. New data would be particularly useful to investigate any effect that the 20 mm minimum size for collection has had on the cockle populations as Jones (2000) suggested that applying this minimum size limit might improve recruitment of some cockles by 60%."

I hope that one day we may find resources to repeat the detailed fieldwork in the earlier studies.

**Pamela E Tompsett**



### ***Good Friday is a Holy Day***

*But Goodie Friday is a holiday.  
Since its sacredness was first observed  
Boundaries of holiness have been blurred.  
The mournful day is a time to fast  
Eating fish not meat for repast.  
Mixing fasting and feasting  
With shell-fish eating,  
Cornish people sally forth  
Coast-wards, south and north  
Picking limpets on many a rocky shore,  
At Helford, raking cockles galore.  
These were family parties, out for the day:  
The walk from Camborne the valley way  
Was lined with stalls selling sweetmeats  
As well as drinks for Goodie day treats.  
The ancient custom persists on the Fal and Helford  
estuaries  
But we now travel by car, and collect cockles with ease.*

**Stella M Turk May 2005**

## Helford's past seen through its place-names

Places in the past were usually named in a straightforwardly descriptive way, often from the names of people who lived there. Sometimes these descriptions contain valuable clues to the botany, or occasionally the fauna, of the place when it was named. Through tracing the names in historical records we can gain an idea of how old a place-name may be, although we can never be sure how long before its first appearance a name was formed.

The Lizard district is particularly fortunate in having two charters from the Anglo Saxon period. When an Anglo Saxon king made a grant of land, the bounds of the land were often specified in detail; so we have the boundaries of six small estates in the Meneage, in charters dated 969 and 977. These estates were at Lesneage (SW7722), Penare (SW7924), Traboe (SW7421), Trevallack (SW7821), Grugwith (SW7520) and Trethewey (SW7323). The bounds of these estates can give us a glimpse of the landscape, as seen through the eyes of local people over a thousand years ago. In a few cases there are place-names of natural- historical interest.

One boundary-point appearing in the bounds both of Lesneage and Grugwith is Lenbruinn, 'pool of rushes' (Cornish lynn 'a pool' and broinn, later bronn, 'rushes'). The larger estate of Lesneage (a name which means 'the court of the Meneage district') actually reached to the south of Grugwith, onto Crousa Common, so this pool may have been the large one at SW767199, though the name has not survived. The rushes may have been valued and used, perhaps for thatching or for matting, or for wicks in candles. Another pool in the bounds of Trethewey is Lyncenin 'pool of ramsons (wild garlic)', on the stream which forms the parish between St Martin and St Mawgan parishes, probably at SW729233. I have seen ramsons in this area. A third such pool is Poll haescen 'pool of sedge', on the boundary of Traboe estate, probably at SW746227, an area where David Coombe noted great tussocks of sedge. One more watery name in these boundaries is Fonton Morgeonec 'anthill spring', in the bounds of Grugwith, evidently a spring distinctive for a very large anthill, or for a number of anthills, close by; this spring was probably somewhere on the stream running to the north of Grugwith. Up on Goonhilly Downs, probably near the Earth Station where five parishes meet, lay Cruc Draenoc 'thorn-brake barrow, a tumulus either overgrown with thorn trees (probably blackthorn rather than hawthorn, if so), or lying within a thorn-brake.

Although it does not incorporate a name, the boundary of Penare in 977 is notable because the boundary of the farm was exactly the same in 1840. This means that the hedge forming the boundary (starting at SW797242) is

presumably over a thousand years old, though it may have been rebuilt, perhaps many times, during its life, and in this windswept area it certainly does not show the great variety of plant species which we might have expected.

Other names which are not recorded so early are also of interest. North of the Helford River, in Constantine parish, is the farm of Bonallack (SW7126), 'broom-brake'. (The Cornish adjectival ending - ek, often found as - ack, was used to mean place where (a certain type of) plant grows'. Another example of the same name is Menallack, in Mahe parish (SW7431). Both Bonallack and Menallack must have had considerable growth of broom-plants to have gained their names from them. Bonallack is first known in about 1250, and Menallack in 1327, so the broom-brakes must have existed in about 1200 or 1300, at the latest. Both Halliggye in St Mawgan parish (SW7123) and Halligey in St Martin (SW7323) are similarly named from patches of willows (Cornish helyk 'willow trees'). Perhaps the most surprising name is Carplight, a now ruined farm in Manaccan parish. This name is found as Crupleid in 1199, hut the spelling Crucbleyth in 1327 gives the sense better: 'wolf's harrow' (Cornish cruk 'harrow' and bleth 'wolf'): the farm was presumably named from the earthwork above it (SW749237). At some time before 1199 (again we cannot know how long before) this earthwork must have been known to be frequented by wolves. Less dramatically, the farm of Carnbarges in St Martin parish (SW7424) was named from a rock or tor frequented by buzzards (Cornish bargus 'buzzard').

**Oliver Padel**  
**St Neot, March 2006**

### **Bibliography**

All the Anglo-Saxon charter-boundaries of Cornwall are discussed in detail by Della Hooke, *Pre-Conquest Charter-Bounds of Devon and Cornwall* (1994), and some of them also by Oliver Rackham, *The History of the Countryside* (1986).

Details of the Cornish words found in the place-names are given in O. J. Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements* (1985), and a broader introduction to Cornish place-names in Padel, *A Popular Dictionary of Cornish Place Names* (1988).



*Buzzard.*  
*Illustration*  
*by Sarah*  
*McCartney*

## Bahamas vs The Manacles

**Without hesitation most divers would choose to spend a few days in warm Caribbean seas than in cold British waters. No contest surely. Over-there, 30m visibility in azure blue seas teeming with life. Over-here? Well it's so variable. But even on a good day with our grey-green waters and limited visibility no match for the vibrant West Indies.**

In the 1970s I had dived in the Caribbean and been thrilled with the sight of shoals of French grunt and Striped porkfish around wrecks; the parrot fish, angels and Nassau groupers on the reefs. And the invertebrate life was equally colourful and packed: sponges, gorgonians and hard corals, like elkhorn.

Last year I returned to some of the same islands, but it was a Caribbean I hardly recognised. No shoals of French grunt or porkfish greeted me. And where was that icon of West Indian waters, the ubiquitous elkhorn coral? One little bit I spotted and it was bleached and dead.

On what was reckoned to be - by local dive guides - one of the best dives for marine life off south west New Providence Island there were a series of small coral heads, acting as miniature coral reefs with gorgonians, sponges, fire and brain corals. They were populated with just small numbers of reef fish, like blue tang, trumpet, blue chromis and small parrot fish.

The two wrecks we dived had very little marine growth although one was sunk 10 years ago. No fish shoals surrounded them.

This is quite different from Cornish waters where all wrecks appear to have their fish populations. In summer on the Manacle reefs off the Lizard it is possible to see shoals of mackerel and bass along with groups of mullet, cuttlefish, the wrasse family, plus all the invertebrates like jewel anemones, plumose, dead man's fingers, crabs and lobsters.

What we have, many believe, has diminished over the decades, but nothing like as much as in some parts of the Caribbean.

The national fish of the Bahamas is the Nassau grouper. It occupies a similar role in the Bahamas or West Indies as does cod here. It is one of the most important commercial fish in the West Indies and it is

now on the World Conservation Union's (IUCN) Red List of Endangered Species. Due to over-fishing it has already been eliminated from much of its historic range in the Caribbean.

Normally a solitary animal it aggregates in December, January and February to form huge spawning shoals at specific sites throughout the Caribbean. These balls or walls of grouper, numbering up to 100,000, have provided spectacular sights for divers and underwater photographers in the past. Unfortunately these aggregations have also provided a harvest bonanza for fishermen who have been so successful in netting these shoals that the Nassau grouper is now commercially extinct throughout much of the Caribbean. Fishing for Nassau grouper is now banned in many areas during the spawning period. Bermuda banned it 30 years ago, but the Nassau grouper has not returned.

The fear of losing more marine life is leading to the creation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) but there is strong resistance from the fishermen. There are proposals for MPAs covering the south western reefs of New Providence Island, Abaco, Walker's Cay and the Biminis.

Existing MPAs such as the Exumas Cays Land and Sea Park, Pelican Cays National Park at Abaco, and Lucayan National Park at Grand Bahama Island certainly have a lot more marine life and are regarded as having been successful.

MPAs are also likely to be proposed here in the UK and are also likely to be fiercely opposed by the fishermen. Still, MPAs will not save elkhorn coral. It is dying because sea temperatures are rising.

Corals flourish in the narrow temperature range 25-29 deg C. When we were diving it was around 30 deg C and that was in October when surface waters would already have started to cool. Bleaching is said to occur when water temperatures reach 32 deg C.

So today it wouldn't be hard to argue that in good visibility in the summer there is more to see on a Cornish reef like the Manacles than in many parts of the Caribbean. The next question could be: "But for how long".

**Tony Sutton**

*Grouper Fish  
(left) and  
Parrot Fish.  
Photos ©  
Tony Sutton*

## The National Trust and The National Coastwatch Institution working together around the Lizard

### A Partnership born on the Lizard

The National Coastwatch Institution (NCI) is a voluntary organisation set up in 1994 to restore a visual watch along UK shores after many small Coastguard stations had to close down because of Government cuts. When two fishermen from Cadgwith lost their lives off the Cornish coast below the recently closed lookout, local people decided to restore the visual watch and the first station opened at Bass Point near Lizard village. NCI was born. Others quickly followed suit and by 2006, thirty-three operational stations will be keeping watch around the British Isles.

The National Trust is an independent charity, founded in 1895 for the preservation of places of historic interest or natural beauty. The National Trust is particularly active on the Lizard Peninsula, where they own and manage over 20 miles of spectacular coastline and over 40 buildings for the benefit of the nation. From the sheltered beauty of Frenchman's Creek on the Helford, to the wild open cliffs of Black Head and Predannack and the busy tourist attractions of Kynance Cove, Lizard Point and Mullion Harbour, all are managed by the Trust for the benefit of conservation and public access.

When the NCI approached the National Trust in 1994 with a view to using the disused Coastguard station at Bass Point as the first NCI station, the Trust were happy to oblige. Not only was this the birth of the NCI, but also the start of a long-term partnership between the two charities.

This year, the National Trust will be converting a further two buildings into Coastwatch Stations.

The small black hut overlooking Cadgwith was originally built as watch house by the coastguard service in about 1875.



Later the focus of coastguard activities shifted to the Lizard and this building was reused as a huer's hut, from where the pilchard lookouts ('huers') scanned the sea for shoals of fish. Using a system of semaphore, the huers would direct the small seine boats below in order

to encircle and catch the shoals. Today the NCI are reusing the hut for its original purpose, as a Coastwatch station. The station will be manned on regatta days and during other events, keeping a watchful eye over this busy little fishing cove.

At Nare Point, commanding panoramic views across the mouth of the Helford and Falmouth Bay is a disused Cold War MOD observation point. The building



was part of a torpedo testing range in Falmouth Bay between 1952 and 1993. Today it forms an important part of the landscape, a guide to navigation, and a link with an all too easily forgotten part of our recent past. It seems fitting that in peacetime, such a building is now being used for saving lives rather than warfare, thanks to the support of the National Trust's Enterprise Neptune Campaign, and funding from the MoD Veterans Challenge Fund and the Tanner Trust.

It was also at Nare Point that Ealing Film Studios were commissioned to create a replica decoy model of Falmouth station to distract enemy bombing raids during WW2. Little evidence remains today of the simulated railway system except for the original control building and a concrete shelter.



The National Coastwatch Institution is presently recruiting watchkeepers for their newest watch station at Nare Point. Anyone interested in becoming a watchkeeper, or wanting more information about the NCI, is invited to contact Tom Symons 01326 240126. Visual watch-keeping means someone is on scene watching and listening, aware of local conditions even before an incident takes place, providing an accurate picture of events and thus helping to speed rescue.

Most of the work of the station is routine surveillance. Watchkeepers must remain vigilant at all times, know how to deal with an emergency and report to HM Coastguard to co-ordinate the various search and rescue services.

They keep watch on potentially vulnerable craft and people; canoeists, sailors and fishermen can easily get into trouble in the unpredictable waters around the Lizard. Watchkeepers also monitor Channel 16, the distress channel, listening out for vessels in distress. Records are kept through logging of all passing vessels, aircraft, walkers etc, as well as giving information to HM customs, police, and harbour authorities.

#### What do watchkeepers do ?

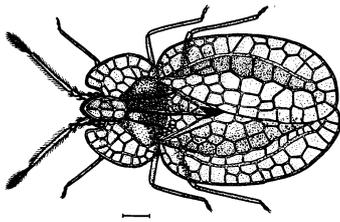
Watchkeepers must be ready for anything from contacting HM Coastguard in an emergency to informing a local farmer that a sheep is stuck on a ledge. Fishermen and yachtsmen frequently telephone the look-out for local weather conditions before setting out from the safety of the harbour. Walkers too may call in for advice before tackling hazardous coastal paths and dolphin, seal and basking shark sightings are reported to wildlife organisations.

## HELFDORD DIARY - Records of more rare, beautiful and interesting species of the HVMCA

During August 2006, I visited Gillan Creek in search of hemipteran bugs. The creek has extensive stands of sloe (blackthorn) and ivy overhanging the waters edge. The purity of the air and the high humidity in this, and other areas of the Lizard Peninsula, ensures that most of the sloe bushes are richly clad with many different lichens. Gentle beating of these bushes, especially those with *Usnea* species of lichen, and capturing the falling debris in a net, yielded several small (approx. 3mm) lacebugs.

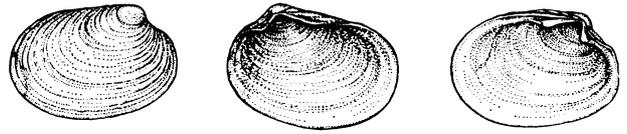
Examination of these bugs using a 10x-20x magnification binocular microscope reveals their true and amazing beauty. The intricate lace-like reticulations of the pronotum and forewings gives rise to their vernacular name of "lacebugs". The species here on sloe is *Physetocheila dumetorum*.

Further searching of the nearby ivy overhang, revealed another species, even rarer and more beautiful, the ivy lacebug *Derephysia foliacea*.



Ivy lacebug © Entwistle, Southwood & Weston

Earlier in August down on the muddy sand of the creek where the channel narrows, I had been searching for the obscure sipunculid worm *Golfingia vulgaris* when I noticed a minute (2mm) bivalve mollusc living in some of the worm tubes. This was *Mysella bidentata*, the two-toothed Montague shell which lives in a commensal (= "eating at the same table") relationship with *Golfingia*.



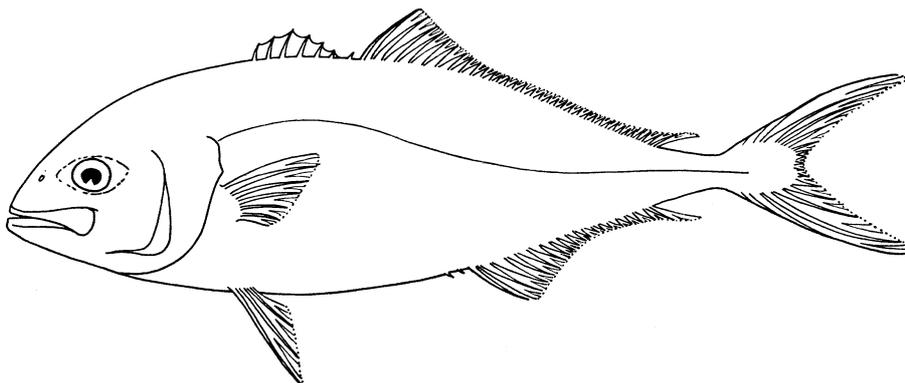
Small bivalve *Mysella bidentata* © Tebble

Further down the creek, towards the open sea and in cleanish sand, is a large population of the Potato sea urchin *Echinocardium cordatum*. When these are carefully excavated another slightly larger commensal mollusc (6-8mm) is often revealed *Tellimya ferruginosa* (= reddish-brown) attached to the underside spines.

Finally in mid-August Chris and Dillan Bean contacted me regarding an unusual fish caught in nets just off Nare Point. Unfortunately the 32cm fish was member of the Amberjack family. I say unfortunately because the four species of this family found off our coasts are very similar and difficult to identify. After numerous precise measurements were made the fish was identified as the Greater amberjack *Seriola dumerili*, only the third authenticated record for British waters.

As I write it has come to my notice that during the dying days of August vast numbers of young Black bream *Spondylissima cantharus* have been seen in the Helford River - as one harassed fisherman said, "in plague proportions". Again this highlights the importance of the HVMCA as a nursery for fish species many of which are of commercial importance. Incidentally the Black bream is known colloquially as the "Old Wife", does anyone know why?

Dr Paul A Gainey



Amberjack © Alwyne Wheeler

## Membersí Section Chairman's Report

Another summer of outside events is nearly over and all were well attended and enjoyable. Indoor meeting topics ranged from climate change in the marine environment to the specialities of the HVMCA and attracted audiences of between 45 and 75. The shore events drew between 15 and 72 with the Annual Conservation Cruise maintaining a full 100 complement. Next year's events programme has, as usual, been imaginatively drafted by Pamela Tompsett and includes a wide variety of activities and talks.

There are about a dozen schools in the Helford catchment area to which Jenna Oakes, our schools liaison officer, sends HVMCA information. Jenna has also been talking with Alison Forward, education officer for Cornwall Wildlife Trust and they have agreed that there will be a mutual liaison in order to promote interest and awareness of our river in these schools.

You may recall that over the past three years we have organised competitions (photographic, painting and poetry) to generate interest in the Helford. This year we have a drawing competition, both freehand and computer generated pictures, with the river as the theme. Details are shown in the current events leaflet. We hope that it will be as successful as previous competitions, but at present the take-up is very disappointing. **If you are able to promote it, we would be very grateful.**

Our membership remains much the same at about 200 with an income of some £1100, a significant and important addition to the grants, donations and sponsorship which enable the Helford Marine Conservation Group to function.

**David Nightingale, Chairman HMCG, Members section.**

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### *ëExplore the shoreí at Helford Passage*

**The event was very well attended. The regulars obviously look forward to this kind of beach activity. The majority were in family groups and the intention was to have a fun day at the beach with some of their natural curiosity satisfied about sea-shore animals and activity.**

The experts were bombarded with questions. There was a great variety of objects to observe and name. Among them were cockles, mussels, winkles, whelks and other molluscs, worms, sea-weeds, coral, sponges and pebbles. The very young just enjoyed collecting what they called sea snails (winkles) and the older children were avid collectors of several types of crab and some fish. They also enjoyed making 'homes' for their finds in the containers before rehoming them sensibly on the shore.

Whether or not they remember the names of the sea mini beasts and plants another year will have to be seen but understanding some of the life cycle systems of the shore took a leap forward and that can only be good for the future.



That day, looking after youngsters was the role many adults played but they also found time to try to identify seriously some of the weird and wonderful life forms of the Helford River.

It seemed to be a very satisfactory way to spend some time on the beach and from the look on the faces of young and older very enjoyable as well.

#### **I did an analysis of those attending**

There were more than 50 attending. The responses to the question 'How did you find out about this event?' were as follows:-

Web-site	3
Cornwall Wildlife Trust	4
Friend	5
Regular participants	2
HVMCA member	4
School	1

Responses were on behalf of 2 or more in a group 2 groups did not say and some participants did not sign in.

**Jenna Oakes**

***The cod conjuring trick - largely absent from the sea and largely present in the super-markets!***

*Cod has been so battered that stocks are set to fail*

*Yet the shops have a preponderance of battered cod for sale!*

**SMT 15-11-2005**

# Helford River Drawing Competition 2006

Do you enjoy creating pictures with pens, pencils or computers?

If so, enter our drawing competition using the Helford River as your inspiration.

Further details can be obtained from

Margaret Burford, Chyvandour, St Martin-in-Meneage  
Helston TR12 6DF Tel: 01326 221 632 or  
[www.helfordmarineconservation.co.uk](http://www.helfordmarineconservation.co.uk)  
Please send stamped addressed envelope for entry form



A) Monochrome drawing in conventional media  
(pens, pencils, etc)

or

B) Digital art

Categories for A & B:

- 1) Children age - as at 1st Sept. 2006  
8 years and under  
16 years and under
- 2) Adults



Entries should be sent to the above address by 31st Dec 2006.

Results will be announced at the 2007 Annual General Meeting to be held in Gweek Village Hall, March 2007.



## Helford Marine Conservation Group

Helford marine conservation, by any name, is a significant part of the life of the River and particularly so following the designation of the Helford Voluntary Marine Conservation Area in 1987. People with a wide range of interests in this working and recreational environment have come together to highlight the significance of the local marine wildlife and safeguard it for current and future generations.

**"Community, Commerce and Conservation working together"**

Earlier this year it was decided to simplify the title representing the people concerned to **Helford Marine Conservation Group** which would encompass an **Advisory Section** and a **Members' Section** without in any way changing the long-standing designation of Helford Voluntary Marine Conservation Area in respect of the place. I hope this clarifies the change!

**Pamela E Tompsett**

