



Celebrating 20 years of the Helford Voluntary Marine Conservation Area

The Helford Marine Conservation Area was designated late in 1987 and formally launched in 1988 so next year will be a year of celebration to mark the achievements of the last 20 years. We look forward to a special programme of monthly events to be published soon - make sure you collect your leaflet giving all the details.

As you explore the beautiful Helford River during the coming months why not record the fascinating scenes and sights around you to enter into the **2008 Photographic Competition**? Perhaps you have some special pictures you took long ago?

Helford Photographic Competition 2008 "Celebrating 20 years of the Helford VMCA"

There are four classes:

1. **Physical features** - which may include cliffs, beaches, mud flats, creeks
2. **Biological features** - marine and shore plants, fish, shore life, birds, etc.
3. **Human activities** - either commercial or recreational such as fishing, sailing, rowing, holiday pursuits and also the damaging impact associated with pollution, over-use of an area, etc.
4. **Junior Section** - open to children under the age of twelve on 18th October 2008, their view/interpretation of the Helford River



Prizes will be awarded in each class. Juniors may also enter the adult classes. The judge's decision is final.

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

Jenna Oakes, Boskenwyn Chapel, Boskenwyn, nr Gweek, Helston TR12 7AB Tel. 01326 572995
or Prue Towner, 10 Doctors Hill, St Keverne, Helston TR12 6UX Tel. 01326 281230

Photographs to be submitted to Gweek Village Hall between 9.30am and 10.30am
Saturday 18th October 2008 for judging and display as part of the 20 year celebration.

Please include your contact details on the back of your work.
The best photographs will be added to the HVMCA website.

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

Cornish lobsters –new tagging study

Cornish shellfishermen are being asked to look out for tagged lobsters in their catches over the next couple of years, as part of a new study by Cornwall Sea Fisheries Committee. Up to 2000 lobsters, mainly undersized, will be tagged in an attempt to gather more information on their movements and growth rates. This work, which is being funded by the Fishmongers' Company, will help to build up a clearer picture of local lobster stocks.

The blue or orange plastic tags which are printed with a unique CSFC number, are inserted into the muscle tissues between the carapace and the tail, leaving two streamers visible outside the shell. Fishermen are being encouraged to record the position (Lat/Long), depth and date on which the lobster was caught, and the number and colour of the tag, before returning the lobster to the sea. If possible, they are also asked to measure the carapace size. Special recording forms and a limited number of plastic vernier callipers are available from the CSFC office for this purpose. All returned forms and any other records of the tagged lobsters will be entered into a draw with a prize of £50.

At this stage, lobsters are being tagged in Mounts Bay (blue tags) and from Port Isaac Bay to Bude (orange tags). In future years it is hoped to extend this programme to other areas but as lobsters are capable of moving many miles, it is still possible that some of the Mounts Bay lobsters may find their way into Falmouth Bay and up to the Helford.

Sam Davis, Senior Fishery Officer, who is carrying out the tagging, said that, "As a result of our recent shellfish stock survey and from talking to local fishermen, we identified a need for more detailed information on our lobster stocks. The skippers involved have been really positive about this work and we have already received two reports of tagged lobsters within a few days of the project starting".

Further information on this work can be found on the CSFC website (www.cornwall.gov.uk/seafisheries - Research and Environmental section) and recording forms can be obtained from the CSFC office or from fishery officers.



Fal & Helford Special Area of Conservation Environment Agency Review of Consents (sewage effluent, trade effluent and other matter)



ENVIRONMENT
AGENCY

**The Environment Agency
have been undergoing a**

review of all of the consents that they issue to ensure that there are no adverse effects on any site designated under the Habitats Directive. The Fal & Helford SAC was classified as being a Medium priority site.

The Environment Agency had 1440 licences within the catchment of the Fal & Helford SAC to review. After a long process, due to the number of licences involved and the need for further research, the Environment Agency have concluded that there are 10 licences that we cannot show are not having a significant effect on the Fal & Helford SAC either on their own or acting in-combination.

There are no licences within the Helford that were found to be significant. All of the significant licences are discharges to water within the Fal estuary and its tributaries and come from large sewage treatment works or industrial discharges.

The Environment Agency have worked alongside Natural England (English Nature) to ensure that all of the decisions made are correct for the protection of this internationally important site.

The next stage is the amendment or revocation of the significant licences.

The Environment Agency takes into account the environmental constraints when issuing any licence. This review was instigated to pick up on licences that have been issued over the past 20 years or more when the impacts were not fully understood.

Any new licence issued is assessed to ensure there will be no negative environmental impact. All licences are subject to review if the Environment Agency is aware of environment impacts. This review was a much more detailed assessment including the effect in combination with other permissions and plans.

Robert Wood

Helford MCG Members' Section Chairman's report

Summer activities are now just a memory although recent weeks have seen better weather that should have been expected earlier. The unusual weather pattern has added brilliant colours to our woodlands this autumn.



The events of the past six months have been as good and varied as we have come to expect and were all well attended and enjoyed, apart from Saturday 16th June 'Strandline search at Durgan'. The only people who turned up in the face of a doubtful weather forecast were the leader and three of our committee members – very frustrating!

There was one other disappointing event, the HMC group's stall at Port Navas regatta. A beautiful sign was made and hung on the front of a gazebo in which we displayed events leaflets as well as the new very attractive and informative colour leaflets. We also had the centre page of the programme. The regatta started at 4pm in conjunction with heavy and persistent rain. Those manning the stall and the displayed literature finished the afternoon cold and very wet. However, we did get two new members!

I would like to draw your attention to the photographic competition we have organised for 2008 celebrating 20 years of the Helford VMCA. Entry forms and details are available from Jenna on 01326 572995 or Prue on 01326 281230. I do hope you will take the opportunity to enter, not only in the hope



'Lady Hamilton'. Photo: C. Bean

of winning one of our prizes, but to enhance our growing library of pictures of the Helford in all its guises. Please present photographs for judging at Gweek Village Hall between 9.30am and 10.30am, Saturday 18th October 2008.

You will, I suspect, all have seen the report of the sinking by collision of the Helford fishing boat 'Lady Hamilton' in Falmouth Bay some weeks ago. It was a very sad event, for the owner Chris Bean has fished from the river for many years. He and his family (his daughter is a crew member) had the boat built for them in Looe some 30 years ago and he has fished sustainably and successfully since. The boat sank in 30 metres of water but in early November was salvaged and towed to Gweek boatyard where Chris hopes the boat is economically repairable by the shipwrights there, one of a few yards that are able to undertake this work. We wish him every success to re-establish his boat and business.

Jenna Oakes, a HMCG committee member of many years has won 'Speaker of the year' for the Woodland Trust. We extend our congratulations to her.



The AGM of the HMCG will be held in Gweek Village Hall on Saturday 15th March 2008. We do hope you will be there, for it is to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the HVMCA Group (now called the HMC Group) and, sadly, the retirement of Dr Pamela Tompsett the co-ordinator of the group since its inception in 1988. She has been, not only the inspiration, but the driving force. Her passion for the organisation has been immense and her knowledge and net-working ability quite remarkable. We shall all miss her tenacity and persuasive manner. It has been part of her life for the past 20 years. Without her, how will the future of our organisation develop? My best advice is to attend the AGM on Saturday 15th March 2008.

David Nightingale

Maritime and marine emergency planning

There is a constant programme of European funded initiatives underway, many of which relate to the health of our marine and maritime environments. The initiatives are invariably partnerships between counties, regions or countries. The Cycleau project was a good example of this work which was carried out in Cornwall.

A project which is due to finish at the end of October is the EROCIPS project (Emergency Response to Oil, Chemical and Inert Pollution) which involved Devon and Dorset County Councils as well as Pembrokeshire CC, Northern Ireland, Brittany and so on. One of the investigative aspects of the project was to look at risks from shipping in the Western Approaches. This included research on the number, size and scale of shipping movements carrying hazardous cargo, together with aspects of the coastline which would be impacted in the event of an incident. Coastal types, access, fisheries, scientifically listed and protected areas etc were all studied.

At a late stage in the project the contractor asked if Cornwall could supply data to populate and properly finish the study. With great, and speedy, assistance from Cornwall Sea Fisheries, the Environment Agency and others, together with data we had already collated for our Beach Clean up guidelines, I was able to supply the required data by the almost impossibly short deadline. As this newsletter goes to press I am waiting for the final EROCIPS report to be published.

Separately I am reviewing the former Fal Emergencies plan which is designed to provide a co-ordinated response to maritime emergencies, other than oil pollution. A review meeting in July saw representatives from all of the 'blue light' agencies, Falmouth Port, Harbour Masters, Defra (Transec), Port Health Authority and CCC Emergency Planning staff working together to update the plan. One major outcome from this meeting was the inclusion of the Helford estuary fully into the new Fal Bay and Estuaries Maritime Emergency Plan. Scenarios which would be covered by this multi-agency response plan include collisions, groundings, sinking, fire, disease outbreak, major pollution of the watercourse and dangerous goods related incidents which are beyond the routine capabilities of the harbour authorities or public services. Individual agencies are submitting their own segments of the plan. I hope that the plan will be completed and in place before the end of the year.

Finally, many of you will remember John James, Emergency Planning Manager, from Cornwall County Council, who was instrumental in early support for the HVMCA. John has just retired. I am sure that you will join me in wishing John a long and happy retirement.

Martin Rawling
Emergency Planning
Officer
Cornwall County
Council



Cornwall Sea Fisheries Committee - Shellfish Stock Survey 2003-2006 by Samantha Davis

Between 2003 and 2006 at-sea monthly surveys of seven potting vessels carrying out their normal activities within the Cornwall Sea Fisheries Committee (CSFC) District provided baseline data on the increasingly valuable stocks of crustacean shellfish – edible (brown) crab, spider crab and lobster, within Cornwall's inshore waters. The wealth of knowledge and experience of these fishermen contributed greatly to the project also helping to identify research priorities.

Sample animals from each catch were recorded for species, carapace size, sex, incidence of eggs (berries), damage to claws, incidence of disease, moult state and any other observations of unusual features. 156 trips were completed and 76,739 animals measured from 18,844 pots, which represented 49% of the total pots hauled on those days.

Females dominated edible crab catches with between 30% and 50% being of sufficient size to be removed against only 7.5% and 22% of males. Larger female crabs dominated towards the east along the south coast but further west and north, there was more similarity and a shift to a smaller mean size. Such differences at local level could reflect either the nature of the grounds or a subtle variation between crab stocks.

Soft male crabs peaked in May and June at 45% whilst females followed from July to August. Berried (egg bearing) edible crabs were found mainly in November to February with some in March and a very few in May

and June. Crabs were observed showing signs of 'black spot' and 'pink' or 'bitter' crab disease, the latter seen predominantly on the south coast from Mount's Bay to the west and fatal to edible crabs.

This type of detailed information was also gathered for lobsters and spider crabs and comparisons made for all species as monthly Catch Per Unit Effort. Potting effort had shown an overall decrease from 2002-2005 with a fall in crab but an increase in lobster landings, as did spider crabs but since spider crabs are targeted by nets as well as pots, it is more difficult to make direct comparisons.

In terms of the potential for growth in catching crustacean shellfish, in many if not all areas, available space for additional static gear is very limited and frequently, any increase in potting effort will lead to displacement and possible gear conflict either within the static sector or with the towed or mobile sector. It is difficult to see within the CSFC District where there would be potential for any significant growth in overall potting effort without impacts on existing fishing activity. However, there may be potential for exploring value-added initiatives such as the accreditation of sustainable fisheries through appropriate schemes and the data gathered by this study will provide an important baseline for work of this nature in Cornwall.

Editor – the full fascinating report can be found on the Research page at www.cornwall.gov.uk/seafisheries

The Fowey Estuary Voluntary Marine Conservation Area

The Fowey Estuary VMCA was conceived in 1997 by the Fowey Estuary Partnership, and includes many of the important habitats in the upper reaches of the estuary. The areas of saltmarsh at Shirehall moor, Lostwithiel are a haven for birds, small mammals and specialist salt-tolerant plants. The mudflats and sandbanks of the creeks provide a valuable source of food for wading birds, and the rocky shores and subtidal eelgrass beds of the lower harbour are home to a wide variety of species.

Like the Helford River, the Fowey Estuary is a beautiful and unspoilt area with a diverse landscape and wildlife, and an intriguing local heritage. These features along with the working port give Fowey its special character and fascination for locals and visitors alike.

Located in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the estuary's varied habitats have a high ecological value, this is recognised by the Fowey Harbour Commissioners and every effort is made to safeguard these assets whilst maintaining a commercially viable port.



Fowey Harbour caters for large numbers of commercial ships which export about 1 million tonnes of china clay from the port each year; there are also other commercial activities such as shellfish farming. There are approximately 1500 resident moorings and over 7000 craft visit the harbour each year. The estuary management process seeks to balance these demands to achieve sustainable use.

The Fowey Estuary Management Plan is a non-statutory document formulated by the Estuary Partnership with the aim to 'stimulate an appropriate balance between competing demands placed on the Fowey Estuary, through shared information, co-operation and action'. The plan can be viewed in full on the Estuary Partnership's website at www.foweyestuary.org.uk

The Fowey Harbour Commissioners are the lead body of the Estuary Partnership which brings together an advisory group representing a number of regulatory bodies, non-governmental organisations and interested parties and offers a basis for voluntary co-operation. The Harbour Commissioners support the group through the provision of my time as project officer.



The Fowey Harbour Commissioner's involvement in other environmental initiatives recognises their commitment to the environmental management of the harbour.

This includes involvement in the EU-funded Cycleau project which ended in December 2006; the main focus of the project in the Fowey Estuary was to study the movement of sediment. This information is of interest to the Harbour Commissioners when planning their dredging regime to ensure this activity is carried out as efficiently and effectively as possible to minimise environmental impacts.

The Port of Fowey has also achieved the internationally recognised Blue Flag Award for 2007, this being the fifth year running. This year there are only 5 marinas in England and N. Ireland to achieve the award, and Fowey is the only commercially working port.



Further information about these and other projects can be found through the Fowey Harbour Commissioner's website at www.foweyharbour.co.uk

Come up and discover the delights of the Fowey Estuary, if you want to get involved in some local events the 'Friends of the Fowey Estuary' organise a full events programme from walks to talks, river trips to fish and chips! For further information, view their website at www.friendsofthefoweyestuary.org.uk

We look forward to seeing you in the future.

Claire Hoddinott
Environment Officer
Fowey Harbour Commissioners
www.foweyharbour.co.uk

Facing up to change on the coast

Phil Dyke outlines what he sees as his main areas of work in his new role as The National Trust's Coast and Marine Adviser.

At the beginning of December I will take up the position of National Coast and Marine Adviser - a new appointment within the Trust. The coast is where I have spent the past twenty-five years working for the Trust, initially on the Isle of Wight and for the past two decades in Cornwall.

During this time I have played a practical part in the evolution of our approach to coastal and marine conservation and access work. The Neptune Coastline Campaign - the acquisition and management of coastal land for conservation and public benefit - has remained at the core of our work. Increasingly however we have worked beyond Trust boundaries with a myriad of partner organisations and coastal communities - helping to promote and deliver more joined-up thinking in coastal and marine management.

More recently the Trust has taken a leading role in helping to foster a better understanding of the realities of climate change. On the coast this means facing up to the changes that are associated with Sea Level Rise (SLR) and in particular the associated increase in coastal erosion and flooding. In April 2005 the Trust published 'Shifting Shores' - a policy document that sets out the Trust's position on working with a changing coast.

The key message in Shifting Shores is that it is unrealistic to think that we can continue, as we have for the past 150 years, to build our way out of trouble on the coast. In fact with sea level set to rise at between 1m and 4m over the next 100yrs we have arguably been building our way into trouble on the coast. The Trust is no exception and our entire coastline, not just the soft low-lying parts, will see change. In the Trust we are seeking to understand how we can work with natural coastal processes to ensure that new eroding material (sediment) is not lost offshore but retained at the shoreline to provide natural sea defence in the form of dunes and salt marsh. Sediment loss currently often occurs as an unintended side-affect of coastal engineering protection works. In the future there may be a place for appropriate sea-defences but these will be structures to enable us to buy time to develop long-term and sustainable approaches to manage our future coast

To deal effectively with a changing coast society will need to begin to think and act for the long-term. Thinking in twenty, fifty and one hundred year time frames needs to become the norm, to replace

our current practice of thinking in short five year planning and political cycles. Society will also need to consider how it can help vulnerable communities and individuals to adapt to a changing coast in a cost-effective and equitable manner. In partnership with communities and government the Trust can play a part in developing innovative and sustainable solutions to coastal change.

Since 2005 colleagues at the Trust's coastal properties have been putting this thinking into practice by completing preliminary assessments of the impacts that SLR will have on the conservation features and infrastructure in our care. My main role as Coast and Marine Adviser will be to work in support of property and regional staff to build on this initial information and develop site specific Coastal Adaptation Strategies. Through these strategies we will seek to utilise the best available science to inform our understanding of coastal change and communicate our findings across the Trust and wider society. Some of the decisions we face will be difficult and on occasion controversial. My belief is that by combining sound science and good communication we stand the best chance of making the right decisions about the future management of our coast. I will also work outside the Trust with government at local and national levels, utilising the Trust's wealth of experience to try and secure sustainable approaches to coastal and marine management - through for example input into the Shoreline Management Planning process and the promised Marine Bill.

Erosion and sea level rise make our coastal properties among the most dynamic in our care and to my mind they are also the most beautiful and inspiring - factors that I believe combine to make my role as Coast and Marine Adviser absolutely fascinating.



Large Helford Sea-hares - *Aplysia depilans*

On Tuesday 16th October 2007 Tony Sutton was diving on the eelgrass bed at 5.7m depth in the Helford VMCA when he came across some exceptionally large greenish brown sea-hares (35cm) which attracted his attention. When he returned a few days later with his camera he was able to take some excellent pictures which indicated the species *Aplysia depilans*. Confirmation of this identification was established by Dr Paul Gainey when one of the animals was taken briefly from the water.



The commonest species of sea-hare in our shallow water is *Aplysia punctata* which can reach some 20cm extended length but is more usually below 10cm. They are typically found on the sea-bed grazing on algae, often amongst eelgrass where they leave their yellowish pink egg strings during the autumn-spring breeding season.

More impressive are the other, much less common, species *Aplysia depilans* and *Aplysia fasciata* the former is known to reach 30cm and the latter can be even larger at around 40cm. Both are associated with the warmer seas of the Channel Islands, Atlantic France and the Mediterranean as well as Madeira and West Africa where *A. fasciata* in particular can be observed swimming more freely than our *A. punctata*. Two large parapodial lobes and the broad "slug-like" body pulsate rhythmically carrying the animal through the water with a flapping motion.

Tony was fortunate to find some animals with egg masses. Could this be linked to the significantly warmer sea temperatures of recent years? In 1976, the Opisthobranch expert, T E Thompson, remarked that it is not known whether *Aplysia depilans* ever breeds in British waters.

Recent reports of large sea hares from other sites include Poole Harbour - one weighing 1.5kg *Aplysia fasciata* still swimming happily, grazing on sea lettuce



Ulva lactuca at the National Marine Aquarium and producing egg masses. Four more, probably of the same species, were caught and released in Poole by local fishermen. The Blue Reef Aquarium, Newquay has also received one. Other reports, some of which could have been of either of the larger species, have been received from Mevagissey, Falmouth, Beesands, Tor Cross, Nos Mayo, Devon and St Helier, Jersey.

How can you tell the difference between the two larger species by the shore - not easily and dissection seems inappropriate. Try looking, especially underwater, at the two large parapodial lobes mentioned above which are free all the way to the end of the body in *Aplysia fasciata* but in *Aplysia depilans* they are joined rather high posteriorly - see Tony's photos. The oral tentacles at the front are more frilled in *A. fasciata*. Try to take photos that show these characteristics! These are not easy to see if you find something looking like a large lump of gelatinous liver on the shore but could be seen if a freshly stranded animal was placed in a bucket of sea water.

All sightings of these larger species would be of great interest and Dr Paul Gainey would try to visit any find within range or as far as practicable Tel: 01326 372 840.

Dr Pamela E Tompsett



Photos: Tony Sutton

TIME TO WATCH OUT - STRING JELLY'S ABOUT

As yet the nearest sighting of these 'strings of jelly' to the Helford River has been a record in Falmouth Bay, but it is a species that is likely to make itself felt (literally) more often in the future. Yes, it's probably another 'southern' species extending its range northwards. It is arguably the largest known invertebrate and hitherto there had been no recorded instances in Cornish seas.

So what is this mysterious creature, the common names of which are 'String Jelly' or 'Stinging Hydroid'? Both are descriptive, for it looks like a long piece of unravelling string, and they can sting, as many divers will testify. They are members of the genus *Apolemia*, the systematics of which are unclear and are thought to be *A. uvaria*, which was first described in 1815 by Lesuer. They are colonial animals (*Siphonophores*) related to the Portuguese Man-of-War (*Physalia physalia*) and the By-the-wind-sailor (*Velella velella*). In Norwegian seas one of the species is blue in colour and known as 'Blue Fire' and is known to have caused the death of fish in a salmon farm. The Cornish examples were all pink, although the colour may not be of significance.

Attention was first drawn to the 'String Jelly' by Rory Goodall, when he saw the strange creatures between Penzance and the Scillies. He informed Joana Doyle, Marine Officer of Cornwall Wildlife Trust, and Ray Dennis, who maintains the marine sightings database for Cornwall. Ray subsequently arranged

for Dr Paul Gainey, a local marine expert, to see this phenomenon. He describes them as being present in tens of thousands, varying in length but mostly about 25cms long, but some extended specimens up to 2m in length. Some were seen releasing minute reproductive jellyfish (*medusae*). String jellies are known to form chains up to 20m or more in length. Each long chain is headed by a small buoyancy bladder (the equivalent bladder in Portuguese Man-of-War is shaped like a Cornish pasty), but the long string is very fragile and is soon broken up into shorter lengths, all of which are reproductively viable.

These short lengths have been described as like ragworms, and I now realise that some stinging strands previously reported to me were probably this species, but never has it been seen in such numbers as in 2007!

Stella Turk



www.divingimages.co.uk (c) Neil Hope



Natural England News

Natural England have moved. The new address is Pydar House, Pydar Street, Truro, TR1 1XU. (Telephone 01872 245045 Fax 01872 245046).

There has been some reassignment of staff responsibilities and we will let you know the lead contact for the Helford VMCA just as soon as new staff are in post.

New arrival

Sangeeta McNair, Natural England marine officer, recently gave birth to a baby daughter Elodie. Members of the Helford MC Group send their very best wishes to all the family.

