

# Helford Notes

Newsletter of the Helford Voluntary Marine Conservation Area  
*Summer 2017 - Issue 51*



## Eco solution to No Anchor signs

**T**he 'No Anchor' Signs for the voluntary protection of the Eel Grass beds have had an Eco-friendly refurbish!

The No Anchor Zone between Durgan and Toll Point, there to protect a substantial part of the Eelgrass beds, was established in 2009 by HMCG and Natural England. Helford River Moorings took on the role of servicing and maintenance of the signs for much of this time. An expensive

job as it entails getting a crew with divers in to service the moorings for the signs annually.

Apart from protecting the Eelgrass, one of the best side effects of the zone is that the water off the beach becomes a much safer place for swimmers and snorkellers to enjoy. It also tells visitors to the area that they are in a very special place, the Helford is a conservation area and we care about it.

This year the Helford Marine Conservation Group and its partners had a rethink about how we sign the Voluntary No Anchor Zone. Up until now these had been attached to a traditional block and chain mooring and although they would not put as much drag on the seabed as a boat we really did not want our signs causing damage, particularly as the Eelgrass beds appear to be doing well in recent years and expanding around and beyond the signs. We asked the advice of Oliver Hill at Mylor Mooring Services and he came up with a design to hold the signs

*"The Eelgrass beds appear to be doing well in recent years"*

with least possible contact with the estuary bed.

This new design has a rope mooring with a relatively light block (roughly 1/2 ton) using 20-24mm nylon line spliced around a thimble either end. Nylon has a specific gravity of 1.4 meaning it will sink in sea water and 24mm has a tested minimum breaking load of 11.4 tons when new.

The rope will have a midway submerged buoy to keep the slack line off the seabed and will have an overall length of about 6ft in excess of the maximum depth of water to allow for swell and heavy current. The size of line will allow for regular lifting for inspection, cleaning and replacement when necessary.

Lastly about 5ft x 19mm chain directly underneath the buoy to act as a counter weight (larger than the current chain to account for the reduced weight of the mooring hanging from the buoy). We had to raise funds of about £2,500, most of this going on the new hardware and the remainder for updating our Eelgrass postcards. So far donations are a pretty evenly split between Seachangers, Natural England, Helford River Moorings, The Duchy of Cornwall and HMCG membership funds and we will continue to fundraise to cover servicing costs and any replacement parts as and when.



### What is Eelgrass?

Eelgrass is actually a flowering plant, not a Seaweed as some imagine. It reproduces in the UK by putting out rhizomes, spreading very slowly from the parent plant.

Left to flourish it forms meadows in shallow tidal areas, it is however rare in UK waters and rapidly declining here and worldwide, we have some of the very best of it down here in Cornwall (of course!) but even here it can be damaged by natural events such as a combination of extreme cold and low tides or man-made problems such as mooring, casual anchoring and pollution. Wherever the damage occurs it is very slow to recover and may never return if the damage is extensive.

### Why is Eelgrass so important?

The way the bed is formed with its network of rhizomes stabilises the shore, preventing sand and mud from being washed away. It sequesters CO2 in a similar way to rainforests but, according to studies, more efficiently. It provides a safe habitat for a wide range of marine life such as Seahorses, Anemones, Cuttlefish, Sea hares and many fish to breed, feed and grow. Because some of the fish species that we eat grow up there it can have great commercial value too.

A big thank you to Seachangers, Natural England, The Duchy of Cornwall, Helford River Moorings, Mylor Mooring Services and Helford Marine Conservation Group Advisory committee for supporting this project. ■

## HOW CAN WE HELP IT TO FLOURISH?

Firstly, everyone needs to try and abide by the no anchor zone, we have had mixed success over the years, this summer I have seen very little encroachment, there are always one or two that choose to ignore it but gradually they are becoming less.

Also, if you are living, working or holidaying in the Helford catchment please be very careful about what goes down the drain! It all reaches the Helford in some form or another!

# Sue's cookbook

## Catalan style fish stew as served at our AGM

Serves 8

6 tablespoons olive oil  
 1 large onion chopped fine  
 2 fennel bulbs sliced  
 1 teaspoon ground fennel seed  
 2 cloves garlic  
 ½ teaspoon smoked picante paprika  
 1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves  
 Big pinch of Saffron  
 1 tin plum tomatoes chopped  
 100ml light stock or water  
 150ml white wine  
 Salt and pepper  
 700g Hake fillet or other firm white fish  
 ½ kg baby new potatoes boiled and cut into bite-size pieces

Heat the oil and fry off the onion without browning, add the fennel and garlic and continue to cook for a couple of minutes. Add the paprika and fennel seed give it a stir and add the thyme, saffron, tomatoes, stock or water, white wine. Let it simmer gently until the fennel is cooked and the sauce has thickened a bit. Season to taste. Skin the fish if necessary and cut into chunks, add to the pan with the potatoes and cook gently until just cooked through.

### Veggie version

Add a can of chickpeas with the fennel. Finish with 100g of lightly toasted ground almonds. Leave out the fish!!

## The Helford River:

A dynamic ever-changing habitat, shaped by wind and tide

**T**he wild weather we are having now has prompted me to write something about the dynamic nature of an estuary and the effect of the wind. Estuaries can vary widely in character depending upon their aspect and exposure to prevailing winds. The Helford Stretches from East to West, it's wide open mouth leads out onto Falmouth Bay, exposed to winds from the East and to a lesser extent the West.

A big swell can develop and our lovely tranquil Helford can look positively wild! Now we see the power of the sea in our backwater, moving tonnes of sand and gravel

up onto Trebah beach – a few days of Westerlies can reverse this action, sweeping it off down to bedrock too, nothing stays the same for long! It is regularly a subject of discussion at our Helford Marine Conservation Group Advisory Meetings. We marvel at changes wrought by nature.

Under the water marine life has adapted to this violent change and is remarkably resilient. For the Rocky reefs, Eelgrass meadow, Maerl beds it is business as usual.

Further up the Estuary all is quiet and fine sediments can



deposit into mud banks creating a warm shallow environment for invertebrate life and rich pickings for the wading birds. This variety of habitat and life is what makes the Helford worthy of the status of Special Area of Conservation, it can be taken for granted by us all but don't, because it really is special. ■

*‘When the wind is in the east, ‘tis neither good for man nor beast’ is a well-known country saying and certainly no-one would want to be out on the Helford when a good easterly is blowing!’*

**Sue Scott**  
**HMCG Coordinator**

# Why HMCG Supports the Cornish plastic pollution coalition

**C**ornish Plastic Pollution Coalition (CPPC) represents more than 30 environmental organisations, beach cleaning groups and marine science experts, collectively representing tens of thousands of people in Cornwall. Led by Claire Wallerstein and Delia Webb the VMCA's and other marine groups are involved as you would expect, but also Truro Cathedral, Transition Truro, Transition Falmouth, Surfers Against Sewage, Cornwall Wildlife Trust, National Trust Cornwall and Cornwall Seal Sanctuary.

There is no space to list them all here. In no particular order this is what they have been working for in 2016/17.

## SUPPORTING SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE- MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE CAMPAIGN

An estimated 35.8 million plastic bottles are used and discarded in the UK each day, of which only a little over half are currently recycled.

Disposable plastic bottles, bottle parts and bottle tops are one of the commonest forms of litter found on the Cornish coast. A deposit return scheme could



dramatically reduce littering and the amount of plastic waste in the sea, which at current alarming trends is predicted to be more plentiful than fish by 2050.

## CAMPAIGNING TO STOP BALLOON AND CHINESE LANTERN RELEASES

It's not just a balloon during six months of collecting and recording balloon debris on Cornish Beaches 2,223 pieces were found in 39 locations, some seen to be having a direct impact on wildlife. (report by CPPC Just a Balloon – Balloon Debris on Cornish Beaches 2017).

## MICROBEADS IN COSMETICS AND CLEANING PRODUCTS

'Minuscule plastic granules of the kind found in many cosmetics have been shown to be readily

ingested by zooplankton, which are at the base of the entire marine food web (Cole et al, 2013, Plymouth Marine Laboratory.) Other research has shown similar behaviour in marine worms and other marine invertebrates.

A recent study by Uppsala University in Sweden has shown voracious consumption of micro plastics by juvenile perch – to such an extent that they choose plastic particles over food. The disturbing implications for all marine life as well as the fishing industry are clear and require urgent action.' (Extract from an open letter to government by CPPC). ■

If you are interested in finding out more about HMCG's involvement then please contact [Coordinator@helfordvmca.co.uk](mailto:Coordinator@helfordvmca.co.uk). If you are an organisation that would like to join CPPC then contact [deliawebb@btinternet.com](mailto:deliawebb@btinternet.com).

Meanwhile, thank you to many of the individuals and organisations that help keep the Helford clean. Please take your litter home with you and keep a bag handy for any litter you may find on the beach. Large items can be reported to the coordinator and we will arrange for pick up.



## Your Shore Beach Rangers

**T**hanks to an incredible £1-million funding from the Big Lottery Fund, the Cornwall Wildlife Trust is leading a fantastic new project set to better protect the Cornish coastline. 'Your Shore Beach Rangers' is a brand new partnership project between Cornwall Wildlife Trust and Cornwall College. It will develop the trusts existing Your Shore community work by supporting and expanding Cornwall's network of local Marine Conservation Groups as well as train and inspire 180 Beach Rangers (local people aged 16 - 24) to become active and long term members of Cornwall's Marine Conservation Group cluster.

The Your Shore Beach Rangers team is made up of Nat Gibb who will lead on the community engagement side of the project as well as continue to support existing local marine groups.

Jen Sandiford is the Youth Engagement Officer and he will be working with youth groups and schools to inspire young people aged 11 – 24 to become more involved with their local marine environment. There is also a project officer from Cornwall College who will be responsible

for developing the 'Beach Rangers Academy'. The training and development opportunities within this academy will be

offered to young people following their commitment to volunteering within marine conservation. ■

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### So, what will Your Shore Beach Rangers do for Cornwall?

#### **Create opportunities for Cornish young people**

The project will provide opportunities for 16 – 24 year olds to gain new skills relevant to finding jobs in the green economy. This could be anything from practical skills such as first aid, event organisation and marine wildlife ID to instructor's qualifications in snorkelling, kayaking and coasteering.

#### **Engage young people with their environment**

The beach ranger team will support and train beach rangers (16 – 24 year olds) to deliver practical conservation activities in the marine environment with secondary school children.

#### **Support, set up and inspire coastal community groups**

The success of existing local marine groups in Cornwall is the inspiration behind this project. We will continue to support the existing groups in Fowey, Helford, St Agnes, Polzeath, Rame, Newquay and Looe as well as establish new vibrant and sustainable groups in Bude, Penzance, Falmouth, St Austell and St Ives. Together they will form a fantastic, county wide, network of volunteers and community action.

#### **Achieve a positive change for our seas and beaches**

The Local Marine Conservation Groups and young beach rangers will help the trust deliver direct marine conservation activity such as beach cleans, innovative local projects, non-native species monitoring, community engagement and shore surveys which will all greatly improve our marine and coastal environment in Cornwall.

You can follow the work of the beach rangers on facebook by searching for @beachrangers, but if you would like to learn more then please get in touch with **Nat Gibb** on [nat.gibb@cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:nat.gibb@cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk) or call **07973728804**.

# HMCG Report 2016 for our AGM

Welcome to our 30th anniversary AGM, a huge thanks to all the volunteers and project officers who have, over the years made the HMCG a thriving, robust organisation, engaging and delivering education on Marine Life to thousands of people. Helping with the everyday practical management, sitting on committees, making our voice heard in government to guide policy where we can and working hard to keep all that use the river working towards a common purpose of a healthy river system.

2016 turned out to be quite a dramatic year down on the Helford when The Wright Brothers announced that they were not going to renew the lease on the Duchy Oyster Farm and shellfishery and would be leaving at the end of March 2017. A small group from the HMCG advisory met with the Land Agent for Duchy of Cornwall Estates. Our main concerns being:

- Future management of the Shellfishery, a vacuum would be created by the withdrawal of the Wright Brothers, would there be an increase in unregulated mooring? Who would police the picking of Shellfish from the shore?
- There is a massive clean up needed, not just the hardware associated with the farm but the stray Pacific Oysters that have spread rapidly in recent years.
- Would they lease the farm again and what safeguards would they have in place to prevent the environmental damage that can arise from an intensive operation?
- What would happen to the quay and building at Port Navas?

We have been assured by the Duchy of Cornwall that they would only like to see a low key traditional Oyster farm operation, farming, subject to environmental conditions, the Native Flat Oyster. The Duchy have released this statement for our website.

*“ The withdrawal of the Wright Brothers oyster farm business from the Helford and Port Navas quay continues and it is expected that it will be complete by the end of March. All of the oyster cages have now been removed from the river and are being taken away and all the other production and processing equipment will be removed. Members of the Village Hall Committee have agreed a scheme of works with the representative of the Duchy, that will see the surface of the access road and the quay restored, walls rebuilt, the quay ladder replaced and parts of the quay surface turfed.*

*This work is due to start in early April and should be finished for Easter but during the period of the works, the quay will need to be closed for safety reasons. There will be no effect on access to other properties.*

*Plans for developing a smaller scale native oyster farm are still being developed but are likely to take some time to come to fruition and we will update you as these progress.”*

In addition, The Wright Bros. gave up the management of the Ferryboat, now being refurbished ready to open by Easter, all being well.

2016 was a bumper year for Mackerel, large shoals gathered and those lucky enough to be walking out towards the mouth

of the river at the right time were treated to the sight of Common Dolphin Feeding and spectacular Gannet dives.

The byelaw to ban most types of netting in Cornwall's rivers and estuaries went through public consultation and has now been referred to DEFRA, there if approved it will be signed off by the minister and come into force. This byelaw will protect breeding and young stocks of fish that come into the estuaries to breed, feed and take shelter from predation. The prohibition on all but landing nets, ebb nets and for Sand-eel seine nets (Sand-eels will be by permit only) will take away the old ambiguities and should make it easier to protect fish stocks. **See [www.cornwall-ifca.gov.uk/](http://www.cornwall-ifca.gov.uk/)** for details.

**Water Quality** - The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group FWAG have been successful in applying to DEFRA for their facilitation fund to help farmers in the Helford River Catchment improve the way they farm to retain soil and prevent water runoff. There will be a series of workshops and talks over the next five years to the farmer group and we hope to see the benefits in improved water quality. In addition Becky from FWAG has obtained grant funding from the Environment Agency to give tailored individual advice to farms and a 50% grant for improvements such as fencing off water courses, covering yards and putting in efficient slurry and drainage systems.

In October we undertook the practical part of the Helford River Survey revisiting the transects set up 30 years ago, thanks to the help of dedicated Helford group volunteers we now have the data to continue with the ongoing

report first started in 1987 and repeated every five years since! It is a huge achievement to have kept a data set going this long and it has seen many changes. Events last year were really well attended and it was interesting to try some new ways of appreciating the Helford with Painting the Great Outdoors with Andrew Tozer and A Weekend in the Woods with the National Trust and Kestle Barton. The art proved hugely popular and Trebah a beautiful and inspiring setting. The old favourites, the Conservation Cruise (have you bought your tickets for 2017 yet?) and the Snorkel Safari and Barbecue were fully attended and the weather stayed fair. All together we reached just shy of 500 people, a testament to the dedication of our events committee to produce quality events and of course our beautiful surroundings in which to hold them. In 2017 we have another full program of exciting things, please book early, some events have to be restricted in numbers and we don't want our members to miss out.

The Eelgrass Voluntary No Anchor Zone buoys have had to be upgraded this year, shackle and chains were worn and we were very keen to investigate using a mooring system for the signs that would not risk damage to the Eelgrass underneath. In the last few weeks our signs have been upgraded by Mylor Mooring Services costing just over £2,000.

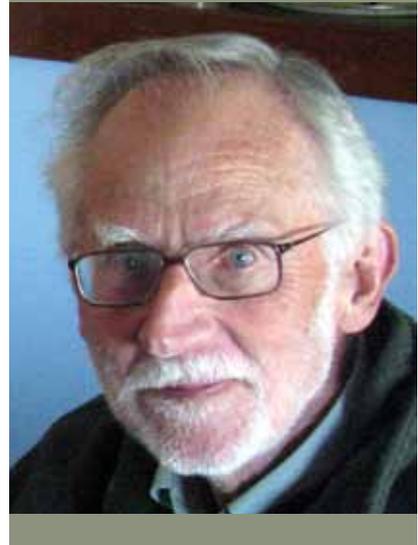
They also need an annual service and this usually costs around £75 per sign plus and spares parts and replacements although we should not need any for a while. These voluntary no anchor signs signal to any one sailing in Helford waters that they are in a conservation area and need to take care. I know on a hot sunny day they can be ignored but on the whole they work well,



with the added benefit of the users of Grebe beach having a much safer area to snorkel and swim without having to dodge masses of boats. The protection of this Eelgrass bed is a major achievement for this group and we need to continue to fund raise for it's management. We have had a generous £530 from the Seachangers fund, I will be reporting back to them in the next few weeks on our progress.

Many thanks to our volunteers who go out and pick up litter on a regular basis, please do remember when you are out on shore that just two minutes picking up plastic off the strandline makes a difference. You may find something interesting washed up too! We must also mention the British Trust for Ornithology Wetland Bird Counters who go out all year round and count the numbers of different species of birds, a longstanding and effective monitoring program. Annual reports can be seen at: [www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys](http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys) and new recruits welcome! ■

It is with sadness that we remember long standing group member and volunteer Martin Harris, who sadly died at the beginning of the year. We pass on our condolences to his wife, Jeanette.



# Obituary for Helford Marine Conservation Group



## “STAR OF THE SEA” STELLA MARIS TURK MBE NÉE TREHARNE PHILLIPS

Stella was born on 27 March 1925 at St Mary’s on the Isles of Scilly where her father was a clergyman.

A lover of wildlife from an early age, in her teens she became more seriously interested in natural history studies and met

zoologist Dr Frank Turk, an Extra-mural tutor for the University of Exeter.

Frank & Stella were founder members of Camborne-Redruth Natural History Society in 1956 and founder members of the Cornwall Naturalists’ Trust now Cornwall Wildlife Trust in 1962. Stella developed a life-long interest in conchology, the study of molluscs, and later served as the British Isles National Recorder for marine molluscs 1967-74, President 1981-83 of the Conchological Society of Great Britain & Ireland.

In 1971 the Institute of Cornish Studies was formed and in 1972 Dr Frank Turk became one of its Research Fellows. Stella joined Frank as a joint tutor of a small but devoted group of recorders,

generating a databank of 4,000 species indexing some 21,000 records and this project became the Cornish Biological Records Unit. In the late 1980s Stella and fellow marine recorder Dr Norman Holme, joined forces to halt the perceived deterioration of the marine wildlife of the Helford River area and in 1986 the Helford Marine Conservation Area was created. Stella wrote numerous articles and papers and was the author of a popular book *Seashore Life in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly* published in 1971.

Many people will have memories of Stella, on the sea shore in all weathers, peering into rock pools, or sat at her desk surrounded by her vast collection of shells, mounted fish, other marine memorabilia and library. ■

**Pamela E Tompsett**



## PAUL GARRARD JAN 1938 – APRIL 2017

Paul was born in Lowestoft, went to Lowestoft Grammar School and from there to Imperial College London where he met Shelagh and they became engaged. On graduating he accepted a job in what was then Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia. He and Shelagh were married in Tanganyika (now Tanzania). They had 5 years with Paul working as

a field geologist in the bush and in Lusaka. Paul then joined Anglo American Corporation as a mining geologist in Chingola.

Paul was at this time studying for an external PhD through Imperial College which proved increasingly difficult while holding down a demanding job and coping with two small boys, Ian and Michael. After five years he returned to UK to complete his Doctorate and was offered a job as a Lecturer with special responsibility for field work which he continued for the next 30 years. He was much loved and appreciated by his students for his meticulous attention to grammar and his endless patience. His students have set up a ‘Garrard Appreciation’ Facebook page and a number of anecdotes and memories have been circulated since his death was announced.

Paul retired to Cornwall with Shelagh and became involved with several societies mainly the Helford Marine Conservation Group, The Arts Society Falmouth (where he was Treasurer for 8 years) and the West Cornwall Woodturners.

Paul gave his support over many years, contributing to the conservation of the Helford and devoting a great deal of his time to the Helford Marine Conservation Group. Paul took on the job of writing the Constitution when the rest of us lost the will to live over the detailed ‘small print’. For many years he reliably produced a high quality events programme and turned up, first aid kit on his back and pipe in mouth to the vast majority of fixtures. Whether on bird surveys or providing commentary on the boat cruises we could rely on Paul to help. ■