

Information Requests and Observations



Unusual records from Seasearch 2007 data

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Despite less than perfect diving weather, 2007 was the most productive year ever for Seasearch records with 1,332 records received. We also had the highest number of Survey Forms, 453, and, since these normally contain multiple habitat descriptions and species lists, it represents a huge volume of data from all over the UK, with some also from Ireland and the Channel Islands.

The data contains a number of interesting sightings of things either apparently new to our waters or new to the area where they were found. All of the sightings below are backed up by photographic records. Most are of mobile species and whether they represent one-off occurrences or shifts in distribution only time will tell.

All of the Seasearch data can be accessed through the National Biodiversity Network website, www.searchnbn.net There is also a downloadable Annual Report for 2007 and 15 area summaries on the Seasearch website www.seasearch.org.uk.

Periclimenes sagittifer, anemone prawn. Commonly found with snakelocks anemones in the Channel Islands and further south, the 2007 Seasearch record is the first on the NBN from the north side of the English Channel, astonishingly from Swanage Pier - (see p21)

Alpheus macrocheles, snapping prawn. Another southerly species with the few previous NBN records from well offshore. A cryptic species so the record from Lyme Bay may be more about knowing what to listen for and how to find it!

Palinurus elephas, crawfish. A recent

addition to the BAP species list and normally found on west coasts. The Seasearch record in 2007 from the Farne Islands is the first on the NBN from anywhere on the North Sea coast of England or southern Scotland.



Photo - Christine Norris

Parablennius ruber, red or Portuguese blenny. Recently recorded from a number of exposed westerly locations in Scotland, Ireland and Isles of Scilly. Two Seasearch records in 2007 from different sites in the Isles of Scilly.

Parablennius gattorugine, tompot blenny. A common species on southerly and westerly coasts, the record from North Norfolk is the first record for Eastern England south of Sunderland.

Parablennius rouxi, striped blenny. Previously recorded from the Mediterranean and Atlantic coast of Portugal, the Seasearch record from Bigbury Bay, Devon is the first for the UK.

In addition to these mobile species, Seasearch divers also recorded a number of nationally scarce and rare species in new places, including a new site for sunset cup-corals, *Leptopsammia pruvoti*, in the Isles of Scilly and new sites for the pink soft coral *Alcyonium hibernicum*, in Devon.

Large incursion of *Apolemia*, 'String Jelly'

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In the autumn of 2007 a phenomenal incursion of a species of *Apolemia* was recorded between the Isles of Scilly and Plymouth. It was probably *A.uvaria*, a Mediterranean species and if so it is yet another 'southern' species extending its range northwards and likely to be recorded more often in the future. Since the widespread publicity in the media, we now know that there have been scattered sightings of small numbers in recent years by fishermen and swimmers.



Photo - Neil Hope www.divingimages.co.uk

Apolemia uvaria was first described in 1815 by Lesuer. It is arguably the largest known invertebrate, forming strings (hence, the common name, 'String Jelly') several metres long, capped with a very small float. However, this far north, and often in rough water, most are inevitably broken into lengths well under a metre. In Norwegian seas, one of the species of *Apolemia* is known to have caused problems in a salmon farm. These were blue in colour and appropriately called 'Blue Fire'. The Cornish examples were all described as pink, although the colour may not be of specific significance. Another common name is 'Stinging Hydroid' which is very apt, because it can certainly sting, as many divers can testify. It is, indeed, a hydrozoan related to such siphonophores as the Portuguese Man-of-War (*Physalia physalia*).

Attention was first drawn to the presence of *Apolemia* by Rory Goodall, when

he saw the strange creatures in vast numbers between Penzance and the Isles of Scilly. He informed Joana Doyle, Marine Conservation Officer of Cornwall Wildlife Trust and Ray Dennis, who compiles the marine sightings database for Cornish and Scillonian waters. Ray subsequently arranged for Paul Gainey, a local expert, to see this phenomenon. Paul describes them as being present in tens of thousands, varying in length, but mostly about 25 cms long, and all releasing minute reproductive medusae. Each long chain is headed by one small bladder.

Apolemia would normally feed on quite small zooplanktonic creatures. The accompanying picture shows a hapless small fish that must have been too close to a strand. The problems in the Norwegian fish farm, mentioned above, were presumably due to sheer numbers. The small stinging jellyfish *Pelgia noctiluca* devastated a salmon farm in Northern Ireland by weight of numbers. There is indeed "strength in numbers".