

Pink Seafans in Lyme Bay 28th-31st July 2006

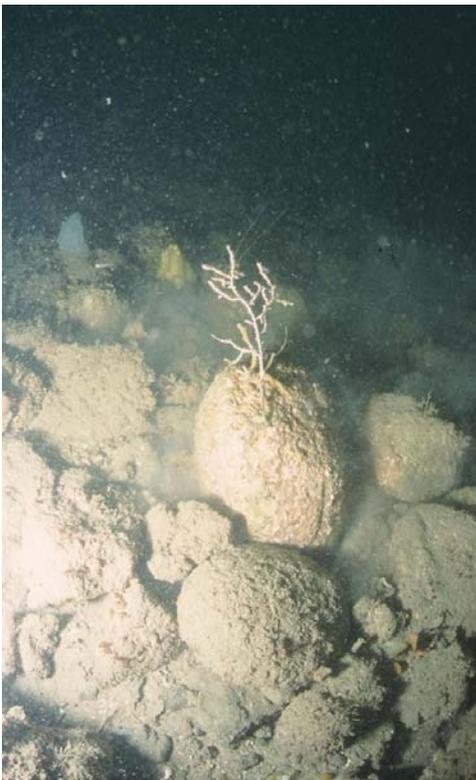
Four days of diving in Lyme Bay at the end of July were organised through the MCS Members Dives scheme and 15 members took part. The object of the survey was to collect as many new location records of pink seafans (*Eunicella verrucosa*) as possible in Lyme Bay.

This was to support English Nature's and Devon Wildlife Trust's call for a ban on scallop dredging in Lyme Bay. A "stop" order has been requested of Defra by EN with a crucial meeting to be held later this month (August 2006). In 2001 local fishermen had agreed to two small voluntary closed areas for scallop fishing in Lyme Bay which worked well until September 2005. Recently, increased demand for scallops and changes in EU fisheries legislation has attracted more scallop dredging boats to the area. There is now plenty of evidence for the devastating effect of this fishery on the marine life over a huge part of Lyme Bay. It is urgent that this destructive, short-term fishery is stopped before further damage takes place. It is already impacting upon other less destructive activities such as diving for scallops, setting pots for lobster and crab and also angling.

English Nature and Devon Wildlife Trust are currently collating information on seafans which are a protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act in support of their call for a ban. Six of the seven dives made during the four-day period recorded pink seafans in new locations within the Bay. Furthermore, it was confirmed that seafans thrive attached to boulders and cobbles surrounded by mixed silty, sandy seabed a habitat which occurs very widely in Lyme Bay. Previously it had been argued that seafans were confined to bedrock reef habitats which have a more limited distribution and are avoided by scallop dredgers.



Seafan attached to an overturned boulder. Photograph: Cathy Lewis



Seafan on a disturbed boulder.
Photograph: Steve Trehwella



Seafan attached to a boulder.
Photograph: Chris Lewis (from video)

Evidence of the devastation caused by the scallop dredging operations was caught dramatically on camera by members of the survey team. These pictures show piles of seafans, parchment worm tubes, sponges, bits of Ross coral and dead men's fingers in mud at the foot of the rocky West Tenants reef. This damage is reflected in the results of recent beach surveys along Chesil Beach near Portland where Steve Trehwella has found hundreds of stranded seafans and other marine life.



A pile of detached seafans.
Photograph: Mike Markey



More detached seafans.
Photograph: Steve Trehwella



Uprooted parchment worm tubes
Photograph: Mike Markey



Dead mens' fingers and ross coral fragments
Photograph: Nick Owen



Tumbled boulder
Photograph: Mike Markey

This cobble has clearly been tumbled by scallop dredging: the keel worms and pink encrusting bryozoans should be underneath with sea squirts and erect sponges on top as on the adjacent cobble.



Silted seabed Photo: Mike Markey
Here a layer of silt surrounds pink sponges and worm tubes.



Red fan worm in silt
Photograph: Mike Markey



What it should look like! Photograph: Mike Markey



Photograph: Tony Burt
This shows silted reef around a pink seafan and dead mens' fingers

Participating Divers: Chris Webb, Steve Trehwella, Nick Reed, Angela Read, Robin Plowman, Mike Markey, Jenny Mallinson, Chris Lewis, Cathy Lewis, Julie Hatcher, Keith Coombes, Ken Collins, Tony Burt, Kathy Brice, Lin Baldock. Text by Lin Baldock



Photograph: Steve Trehwella