

Seashore Newsletter



ISSUE ONE: JULY 2006

Welcome to “Seashore Newsletter” - Western Underwater Research Team’s official newsletter which will be issued every six months to keep supporters and interested parties up to date with project news. In this first issue we explain our aims, objectives, and where we are at with the survey projects. Details at the back of this newsletter explain how you can help and where you can get more information.

The ‘Western Underwater Research Team’ (WURT) is an established marine environmental group (established June 1993) consisting of members of the Western Underwater Dive Club, who have an interest in an awareness of the marine environment and its preservation. WURT is a voluntary and non-profit making group with the members giving freely of their time, skills, and equipment. The personnel within the group are members of the community who are diverse in their interest, occupations, and ages.

Introduction

WURT is currently running two national programmes, the ‘New Zealand Recreational Diver Survey’ (NZRDS) and ‘Survey Seahorse 2000’. Both programmes rely heavily on funding and it is to the thanks of charitable trusts, sponsors and donations that we are able to continue with our projects and meet objectives.

A key objective of the Research Team is to document scuba diver observations of the marine biodiversity of coastal habitats around New Zealand especially harbour environments. Fortunately for the Research Team the Manukau Harbour (Waterfall Bay), Waitamata Harbour (Pollen Island) and Hauraki Gulf (Tiritiri Matangi Island) are close at hand as survey sites. To study New Zealand’s only specie of seahorse (*Hippocampus abdominalis*) we have a site at Kawau Island in the Hauraki Gulf.

Such is the diversity of marine life around New Zealand there is plenty to interest everyone. Utmost is the understanding of coastal dynamics and the effect that human influences have had on these environments. There has been minimal research on species interrelationship within changing habitats and we invite you to be a part of our programmes by contributing any interesting observation that you might have experienced whilst diving. We will also discuss how you can assist in the guardianship of our marine environment which, in some areas around New Zealand’s coast has fallen into an unacceptable state – one example is the discharge of sewage waste into our oceans. Whether a discharge is treated to a standard or not, still raises issues.

News Update

At the end of 2005, the Research Team was granted funding from the West Auckland’s ‘Portage Licensing Trust’ to purchase a ‘Neptune’ full face mask and surface underwater communication system for two scuba divers – see picture. For the first time the Research Team has a means of surface to diver and diver to diver communication, essential when surveying in poor underwater conditions. Thanks also for grant funding from the ‘Mazda Foundation Trust’ has enabled the Research Team to expand the underwater communication system to include two ‘Neptune’ receiver units for use with standard face mask scuba equipment – see picture on page two. Another aim of the Research Team is to focus on getting its own research dive boat. We have for the past thirteen years had to rely on the



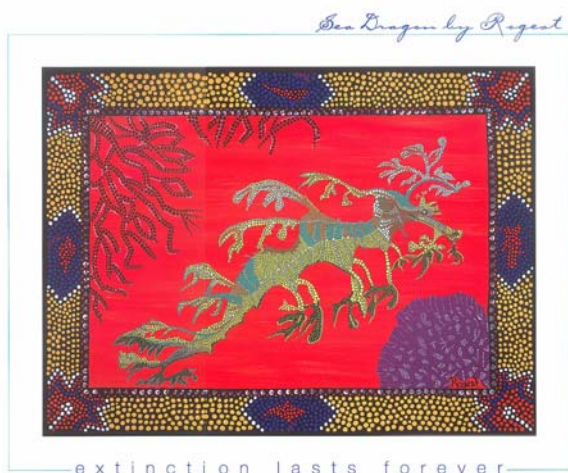
Neptune System – funded by the ‘Portage Licensing Trust’.

good generosity of individuals to supply boats to assist with open water surveying. With growing interest in the Research Team and to support mainstream research projects, it has now become a necessity for the Research Team to have its own survey boat, customized to our requirements. Acquiring such a boat will need substantial fundraising and sponsorship effort. If you can offer any assistance to achieve our goal please see contact details on the back page of this newsletter.

Thanks to Dave Moran (Editor of Dive New Zealand) and Canadian artist Ron Steven who together are supporting a fundraiser for the research team NZRDS programme. Ron has donated 6 prints of his artwork to raise funds to go toward marine research in New Zealand. Promoted and managed by Dive New Zealand / Dive Pacific magazine each print is placed on 'Trademe' corresponding with each publication of the magazine throughout 2006 – June's print was of a fabulous Leafy sea dragon. Ron's work is well known around the world for his very distinctive Australian Aboriginal dot painting method. His art is highly sought after by those who have a passion for fine art and the marine environment. Each print is produced using the Giclee printing process which Ron prefers as the best process to produce his work.



Two M-101A receivers funded by the 'Mazda Foundation Trust'.



June's 'Trademe' print of a Leafy sea dragon.



Artist Ron Steven.

Believe me these prints are fabulous and once framed they look fantastic. If you are at any time near New Lynn (West Auckland) drop in at Dive HQ, 5 Portage Road, and have a quick look in Chris Lynch's office – he has two framed prints of a seahorse and an octopus. Take this opportunity to own an outstanding art piece while supporting a very worth while cause. The next print of a 'Trigger Fish' will be posted on 'Trademe' on August 1st.

Projects Update

The Research Team has for the good part of twelve years been actively supporting protection and research into the very rare Maui dolphin (*Cephalorhynchus hectori maui* – formally known as the North Island Hector's dolphin) mainly in the entrance area(s) of the Manukau Harbour. The Maui dolphin is classified as the smallest and rarest of the 32 dolphin species known, and endemic to New Zealand waters. Underwater acoustic data pods to record the very high frequency sounds of Maui dolphin have so far received a number of positive results in the entrance areas of the Manukau and Kaipara Harbours. It is essential that this non invasive research continues and consequently support protection management plans for the Maui dolphin of which numbers left are estimated to be as low as 110 individuals. It was interesting to note at the 'New Zealand Boat Show 2006' where the Western Underwater Dive Club and Research Team had a site, many of the public were not aware of the dolphin's existence let alone its chronic survival status. This is indictment on the nation's apathy to its endangered species – see summary report



on the 'New Zealand Boat Show 2006'.

The type of Maui dolphin research that the Research Team has assisted in is the positioning and retrieval of acoustic pods in the Manukau Harbour. These pods have equipment inside to record the distinctively high frequency sounds that the dolphins make and thereby the pods anchorage, their approximate position in the Harbour. Also recent recordings of Maui from pods positioned in the Kaipara Harbour confirm the dolphin's use of part of the harbour. The findings will contribute to a better understanding of the dolphin's range and use of the harbours along the North Island's west coast. The Research Team has also contributed \$500 to help in research, furthering its commitment to help save this wonderful animal.

Fisheries regulations now ban set netting within four nautical miles of the coast from Maunganui Bluff (north of Dargaville) to Pariokariwa Point (north of New Plymouth). Set nets are also prohibited in the Manukau Harbour entrance west of Puponga Point at Cornwallis, to a point 0.5 nautical miles north of Kauri Point (eastern end of Big Bay) and back to Kauri Point.

Researcher Mike Richen (on the right) preparing to anchor an acoustic pod in the Manukau Harbour.

For the past two years the Research Team has conducted a survey mainly around the Auckland Region into the usage of seahorses in the Chinese Traditional Medicine (CTM), tourism, aquarium and novelty markets. The survey included outlet names and contact details which were categorized according to type of product for sale and from what source. From the information gathered a list has been made for future reference. Talks with the Ministry of Fisheries (MOF) over the commercial fisheries bycatch of the Spiny seadragon (*Solegnathus spinosissimus*) have shown some concern with the increasing market in Auckland and no doubt exporting of this product. The survey has been hampered by a language barrier making it frustrating to understand the full market. New Zealand produced dietary supplements containing seahorse extract from seahorse farms (aquaculture) have also increased, again catering for the Asian market. Although the increases so far do not constitute a major concern, close monitoring of the market is required for any further increases. We are also thankful to 'TRAFFIC Australia' for their assistance in supplying CTM identification guides. 'Survey Seahorse 2000' is an ongoing programme to monitor seahorses and associated family syngnathidae (pronounced sing-nath-i-dee) around New Zealand's waters. The information collected will be helpful in awareness and supporting the management for their conservation. Anyone who is a scuba diver/snorkeller or visits the beach can get involved. For more information and to download a survey sheet check out our web site www.seahorse2000.org.nz



Imported Chinese Traditional Medicine – all contain seahorse extracts.

Pollen Island – moto manawa (Waitamata Harbour) has been the Research Team's nominated area for volunteer beach clean-ups for over eight years. Situated by the North West Motorway between Waterview and Te Atatu was recently through a land transfer with Ports of Auckland to the Department of Conservation given a scientific reserve status further complimenting the surrounding Pollen Island marine reserve. Working together with the 'Pollen Island Care Group' and the 'Waitamata Harbour Cleanup Trust' the Research Team has taken over the past twelve years an estimated 1000 rubbish bags off the island and surrounding area. The island is home to rare coastal plants, insects and birds such as the North Island fernbird. Unfortunately Pollen Island has had its bureaucratic problems with local authorities, but better communication in recent years has seen us all working together towards a common goal. It is hopeful that the general management plan includes Traherne Island which has equally important environmental values.

Sealab has developed a marine environmental education centre that aims to deliver experimental learning about our marine environment. Their overall objective is to demonstrate and teach about the connectivity of marine ecosystems, with a focus on less traditional, and

often ignored, examples of marine life (e.g. marine phytoplankton).

They are promoting a seawater quality monitoring programme which the Research Team's NZRDS programme will trial. During underwater surveys, water samples will be collected at the surface and at seafloor depth and sent to Sealab for testing. Testing is carried out for various physical and chemical seawater characteristics. By using dataloggers, and probes, sealab will test the seawater samples for salinity, pH, dissolved oxygen, ammonia, nitrates, nitrites, phosphates and turbidity (suspended sediments). Thanks to Dan and Tash for the 'Seawater Quality Monitoring' presentation at the Dive Clubrooms – for further information check out their website www.sealab.co.nz

Another exciting project to involve the NZRDS programme could be the ongoing underwater survey monitoring of the 30-year-old decommissioned, 113 metre long Leander class frigate HMNZS Canterbury if sunk as an artificial reef off Omaha Bay – fingers crossed that the New Zealand Navy choose Omaha Bay – for further information check out www.divecanterbury.co.nz



Thanks to Dave Gibbs (Event Manager), the Research Team and Dive Club shared a site at the ASB Showgrounds, for the 'Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show 2006'. Spread over five days including the Queen's Birthday Weekend, the Research Team and Dive Club effectively had

three days to organise a layout and roster a site program. Blessed with very good display equipment funded by the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board and the Lion Foundation had no problems filling the generous space. The center piece was a full size model of a Hector / Maui dolphin loaned by the Department of Conservation (DoC), which we named 'Karl' after Karl McLeod (DoC Ranger involved with Maui dolphin research). Thanks also to DoC and the Ministry of Fisheries (MoF) for providing brochures and posters. Included in the free handouts was a 'Survey Seahorse 2000' colouring sheet to be coloured and sent back to be featured on our display board.



Two little sisters stand for a picture in front of 'Karl'.

It was without exception a great opportunity to promote awareness of the plight of the New Zealand Maui dolphin and the seahorse worldwide. We had numerous enquires for information on both. Another popular display was the feature on Pollen Island – 'in Black and White' and not forgetting a fine collection of framed underwater photographs from the 'Dive Club Photography Group'. Promoting the 30th Anniversary Reunion of the Western Underwater Dive Club with a registration form also created a lot of interest – enquires to Jill Ranby Mob. 021 264 5228 or Deanne Oxtan 827 7008.



Who's the green guy on the left?

Hope you have found our 'Seashore Newsletter' informative. Special thanks to the Western Underwater Dive Club, Dive HQ (West Auckland), Portage Licensing Trust, Pub Charity Inc, Lion Foundation, New Zealand Lottery Grants Board, Mazda Foundation, New Zealand Community Post, Dive New Zealand Magazine.

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