

Seashore Newsletter



ISSUE NINE: JULY 2010

Welcome to “Seashore Newsletter” - Western Underwater Research Team’s official newsletter which is published every six months to keep supporters and interested parties up to date with project news. In this and further newsletter issues 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 (June 1993) marine environmental group consisting of voluntary supporters, who have an interest in an awareness of the marine environment and its preservation. WURT is a 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.

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 has 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 programme by contributing any interesting observations that you might have experienced whilst scuba diving, snorkeling or visiting the beach. 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. Now we have the almost impossible task to somehow take into account climate change - do you have any comments or ideas to help us on this subject?

News Update

Hi All - in this issue we take look the Research Team’s activities for the past six months and review their projects.

Marine Biosecurity / Biodiversity:

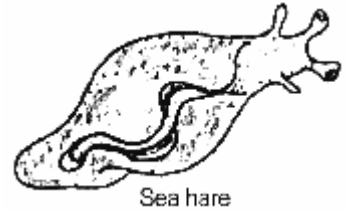
Some of you might remember how the Research Team’s ‘New Zealand Recreational Diver Survey’ (NZRDS) programme first started. Formally known as the ‘National Environmental Recreational Diver Survey’ or NERDS, the programme was originally supported by the NZUA. Both programmes are identical and share the same mission to set-up a national coastal underwater survey programme. The scheme was intended to help standardise a range of information collected so that a national database could eventually be created allowing easy comparison between (similar) sites throughout New Zealand.

Why do we need such a survey programme? There is a growing concern not only in New Zealand but world wide over the health of our marine environment with many reports of decline in abundance and variety of species or serious general damage to marine habitats such as coral reefs, sheltered in shore bays, harbours and estuaries. Frequently biological changes are associated with unnatural levels of silting or other forms pollution of what were once clear waters and, as a consequence, both unusual and common organisms are disappearing from many stretches of coastal waters.

There is an urgent need for the underwater environment to be studied and capable recreational divers can make a very valuable contribution by helping to identify any changes and / or their cause. This in turn, can help protect marine habitats.

Local and National Government authorities often refuse to act to change land management practices, shipping procedures or fishing regulations to rectify environmental decline because they say that there is no hard evidence to prove serious changes are occurring. Frequently they dismiss claims as only opinions or anecdotal observations. This can only be rectified by conducting well documented baseline surveys of a range of habitats and continuing to monitor those sites to identify any changes. The same authorities have also made little progress in baseline studies. The NZRDS programme is designed for recreational divers with basic scuba diver skills (Open Water Certification) and enables useful information to be collected on the first survey dive using the NZRDS survey sheet. In most

cases a tick or a tally mark in the appropriate box is all that is required. The skills learnt when training for Open Water Qualifications e.g. safety, buddy system, buoyancy control, navigation, and many more, can be used to their full potential. By being part of this national project you will be a recognised member of the community working towards a better understanding of our precious marine environment. The NZRDS programme provides solid foundation for other similar projects and an opportunity to become involved in the community. You would think that such a programme would be embraced, well you would be wrong and we are the losers of the knowledge that could have been collected. On the other hand, the Research Team can boast about their underwater survey that has been going for 17 years at the same site and we are better for the experience. Unfortunately New Zealand has been slow off the mark in recognising the value of such programmes and, as a consequence, I now communicate regularly with overseas parties who have setup similar programmes.



Sea hare

We have such a limited knowledge of the current status of our marine biodiversity it is almost embarrassing to mention. How assessments of conservation status are made from a very limited amount of data or at best very patchy data is beyond my understanding. If we don't know what's out there, let alone how species fit in to the environment, how can we clearly assess what we may have lost? If you ever wanted an example of the environmental effects of losing a single species then take a look at salmon. The loss of wild salmon to the environment would be devastating to the many creatures that depend on the salmon during its lifespan, especially when they go upstream to spawn. It has been estimated that 137 different species depend on the Pacific Salmon alone.

The biggest letdown to conserve New Zealand's marine biodiversity is the lack of marine protected areas. Again, every government of the day has failed to commit to achieving the 10% protection obligation by 2010.

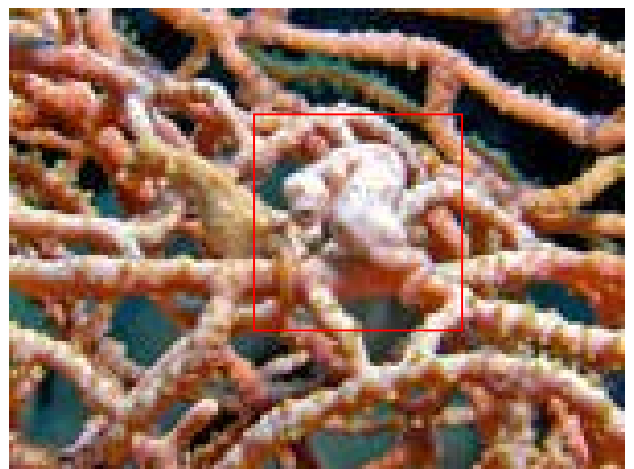
Recreational Diver Training: A distinctive 'Research Diver Specialty' is now available. For more information contact Richard Campbell - (09) 434 4264 or 0274 479 0241, PO Box 403046 Ngunguru - www.pkdive.co.nz

Books: For those interested in New Zealand's biodiversity, take a look at a recent book release (2009) - 'New Zealand Inventory of Biodiversity', Volume one, Kingdom Animalia, Edited by Dennis P. Gordon, Canterbury Press, ISBN 978-1-877257-72-8. Very good reference book that sets out to catalogue our entire known biodiversity - Radiata (sponges, sea anemones, corals, jellyfish and comb jellies. Lophotrochozoa (worms, mollusks, and their allies), and Deuterostomia (starfish, sea urchins and their relatives, and mammals, birds, fish, and their relatives. Later volumes will include plants, fungi, microorganisms and the remaining groups of animals, including the insects, crustaceans and their allies. It is New Zealand's part in the wider global 'Species 2000' endeavour, which aims to catalogue the biodiversity of the world - www.species2000.org. I typed in 'seahorse' from the 'Annual Checklist' tab and I got the works - it's worth a look.

Projects Update

Survey Seahorse 2000:

Firstly I would like to make a correction to a statement that was made in last Newsletter issue. It stated that Waikato MSc (tech) student Jennifer Nickel only did her research in the North Island. This was not the case as Jennifer conducted her DNA research in both North and South Islands. This research was conducted entirely by Jennifer. It is now time for the Research Team to celebrate ten years of working with 'Survey Seahorse 2000'. Looking back over the years I can't imagine how much work the Research Team has done in researching and supporting the conservation of seahorses both here in New Zealand and around the world. The research contributions from other people and research institutions all over the world have opened our eyes to help understand what makes these fascinating creatures tick. We mentioned in the last newsletter issue about Darwin's theory on the origin of species by means of natural selection and often wonder how all 35 known species of seahorse evolved to what they are today. Lee's picture of a pygmy seahorse is good



Picture of a pygmy seahorse taken by Lee Findlay diving East Borneo.

example of how a species has perfectly evolved to its habitat - gorgonian (could be *Subergoria mollis*). Until specimens of this seahorse species have been examined, we do not know whether they represent a new species. Remember, we still want pictures of the New Zealand seahorse for reference and to add to our web site picture gallery. www.seahorse2000.org.nz

Pacific Ocean Cleanup:

An amazing ocean journey of 29,000 plastic bathtub toys started in January 1992 when a storm washed several containers from a ship bound from Hong Kong to Tacoma USA. One container contained plastic ducks, turtles, frogs and beavers and ten months later some ended washing up near Sitka, Alaska. But the journey didn't end for a few and eleven years later a duck showed up in Maine USA and a frog in Scotland. How? - maybe some traveled North through the Bering Strait, then got carried by the pack ice across the North Pole into the North Atlantic. This is yet another story to prove that marine debris is not contained to a particular area and can move great distances to become someone else's problem. That's why the Research Team takes a strong viewpoint. Major industrial nations are responsible for spreading rubbish around our planet. Ironically, an individual could get a substantial fine for dropping litter and yet his or her country gets away scot-free for the mass pollution of our oceans. Any initiatives towards containing the problem have been frustratingly slow. In the meantime the junk keeps being released into our oceans at a rate of an estimated 8 million articles of solid garbage each day or 6 million tonnes of debris every year.

Spare a thought to those who work to clear rubbish in toxic environments like Julio Camara (pictured) who makes a living clearing and repairing Mexico City's drainage system. At least 1000 tonnes of waste are cleared from the sewers every month. In a way I can relate to Julio, having dived on two ocean sewage outlets here in New Zealand. The experience was quite memorable. Sewage is a subject that is not frequently talked about, but we do however spend a lot of time cleaning the toilet bowl. What happens after that is out of sight out of mind.

How fortunate we are in New Zealand to have toilets and in terms of world standards we have a reasonable waste treatment system. 2.6 billion people throughout the world don't have such luxury and I mean absolutely nothing! No toilet or bucket. Instead they defecate where they can. It is estimated that in India alone, 900 million litres of urine and 135 million kilograms of faecal matter are produced per day. Sewerage facilities are available to no more than 30 per cent of India's population in urban areas and only 3 per cent of rural population has access to pour flush latrines. As many as 600 out of 900 million people defecate in the open. One can only imagine the health issues to India's community, let alone the effects on the environment. So it was very disappointing to read New Zealand did not support a recent UN resolution which affirms the right to sanitation and safe water to 2.6 billion people. The non-binding text 'declares the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of the right to life'.

New Zealand was among 41 nations that abstained on the resolution at the UN General Assembly, with the votes of 124 countries seeing it passed. It was also heartening to read recently of Fiji's investment in it's infrastructure to upgrade Suva's water and sanitation. The project started in late 2009 and will help deliver world class standard water to more than half a million people for a least the next 25 years.

Thanks to grant funding the Research Team has had a reprint done of the 'Pacific Ocean Cleanup' (POC) poster. The poster is available free of charge (contact details are at the rear of this newsletter). Also the POC poster has been submitted for review (abstract) for the 5th International Marine Debris Conference 20-25 March 2011 Honolulu, HI, USA (Waves of Change: Global lessons to inspire local action) www.5IMDC.org. If the poster is accepted the Research Team may get a chance to do a presentation of the POC project. This is also an exciting opportunity for the Research Team and other New Zealand stakeholder organisations to attend the conference and contribute to such an important event. We have already gained a working network of stakeholders from those who attended the Regional Marine Debris Forum 2009 held in Auckland.

Turning our backs on environmental problems is not going to help. We all have a reasonability to help restore damaged environments. Public apathy to recycling is



Julio Camara makes a living clearing and repairing Mexico City's drainage system.



frustrating. The same frustration also applies to meaningless Corporate Environmental Policy Statement spins that start off by saying something like 'We are committed to conducting business in an environmentally responsible manner blah, blah, blah'. Policy statements of this type must include a commitment to release measurable outcomes. We all know about measurable outcomes, ask ex CEO of BP Tony Hayward. Some of his comments during the first few weeks of the BP Gulf of Mexico oil spill were from someone completely out of touch with the consequences that the oil spill has done to the environment. The sad thing is Tony is not alone. I wonder



BP Group Chief Executive Tony Hayward discusses the operation with the US Coast Guard

how many CEOs of large companies are equally out of touch. It would be encouraging to all to see at least one come through with a positive attitude. Shell Oil - Nigeria's Niger Delta is one of the most oil-polluted places on the planet. I have to take New Zealand's Energy and Resources Minister Gerry Brownlee comments with a pinch of salt when he said recently that the Government "will do all it can to ensure there is adequate environmental protection before future deep-sea drilling".

That all important question. Where do we go from here? As there is no silver bullet solution, we all have to work with what we have. Limiting harmful waste from entering our environment, (A New Zealand database is required), increase waste recycling awareness, more investment and commitment in new technology and research into less harmful biodegradable materials. For example the use of polystyrene for packaging could be stopped relatively quickly with decisive legislation. The average Kiwi recycles approximately 100kg of packaging each year which is equivalent to filling 22,000 shipping containers per annum. The statistics show a vast improvement over other years, but still consumer products like plastic water bottles, wreak havoc on New Zealand's environment. The message to the community to give up buying bottled water has been slow - use filtered water from the tap instead. It's a lot cheaper and you will be doing the environment a great favour. As recreational scuba divers, the Research Team supports the 'Project AWARE Trust'. For more information about how you and your Dive Club or group can help visit <http://www.projectaware.org/content/index.php?pid=224>

Books: 'The Big Necessity' Adventures in the World of Human Waste. Rose George, ISBN 9781 84627 0697.

Events: 'National Cleanup Week' (17 - 24 September) <http://nationalcleanupweek.knzb.org.nz/> and '25th International Coastal Cleanup Day' (25 September) www.oceanconservancy.org

Hauraki Gulf Marine Park - 10th Anniversary:

Aucklanders are so lucky to have such a natural marine resource such as the Hauraki Gulf that offers so much and yet, in some cases, is taken for granted. We must dutifully thank the many volunteers and groups, the administration help from the Hauraki Gulf Forum, Iwi, Auckland Regional Council, Department of Conservation and the City Councils who, together, have put in many hours of administrative and hard physical work to make the park what it is today. So involved are the issues and values, Parliament had to pass special legislation for the management of the Gulf and the result was the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 (HGMPA). Implementing the HGMPA included recognising other legislation, including Marine Reserves Act 1971, Fisheries Act 1996, Marine Mammal Protection Act 1978, Conservation Act 1987, Walkways Act 1990, Wildlife Act 1953, Reserves Act 1977 and the Wild Animal Control Act 1977. For those who have been at the coal face working through the many



Home Bay Landing - Mototapu Island: Front - Right to Left - Nikki Kaye (MP for Auckland Central) and Kate Wilkinson (Minister of Conservation).

problems, one wonders if they still have any hair left. To keep the Gulf from crumbling into an uncontrolled administrative debacle one has to understand the many impacts on it, especially of the human kind. As part of the Hauraki Gulf celebrations, the New Zealand Herald ran a series of supplements. We still have spare copies to give away. A very enjoyable day was spent out at Mototapu Island (Home Bay) and while the dignitaries were giving their speeches my attention kept wandering by looking out across Home Bay at the wonderful view of the Inner Gulf. Another must attend function was the 'Hauraki Gulf Marine Park 10th Anniversary Symposium' at the Auckland Museum Auditorium. A full day of guest speakers giving a range of presentations. Sessions were entitled as follows: Session 1 'Pressure', 2 'State', 3 'Weaving the Strands' and finally session 4 'Where to From Here?'. Overall it was a very informative and well organised event.

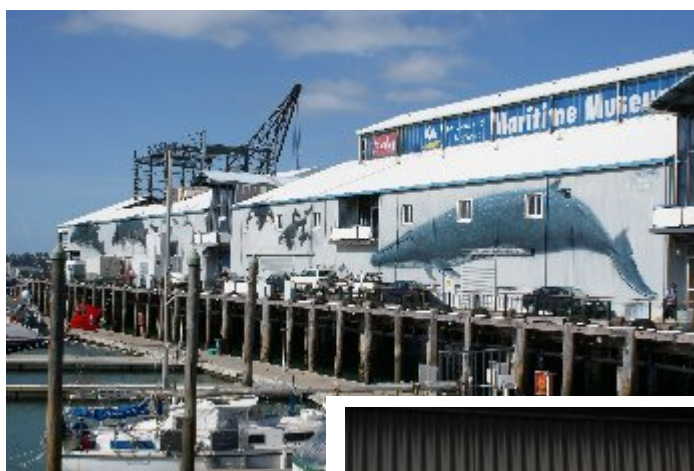


Mike Lee, Chairperson of Auckland Region Council - Opening Address (The making of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park).

Marine Conservation - Spreading Awareness through Art:

There are many renowned artists throughout the world that have used their art to make a point of view and some, like Ron Steven, (Rogest) underwater diver and pointillist, have supported many groups like the Research Team by donating his work to raise awareness and funding. We also have to admire their genius and one artist that comes to mind is New Zealand born artist Raymond Ching. His watercolours of birds are incredibly detailed.

Another artist I can relate to is Robert Wyland (Wyland). His 'Whaling Walls' are world famous. So when I read in Dive New Zealand Magazine that the Auckland Marine Museum had 'commissioned' the painting over 'Wyland's 84th Whaling Wall' I was absolutely stunned. It's no use doing an autopsy. It's done. Painted over in black and all we have left is Sir Peter Blake's signature and a few photographs to remind us of what was there. My feelings towards those responsible are unprintable and I risk answering a defamation case if I print them. I have fought long and hard for over 45 years on many fronts on marine issues, but this is the last straw. I have one last campaign to fulfill by helping Dave Moran (Editor of Dive New Zealand Magazine) get Wyland back to New Zealand to paint another 'Whaling Wall' mural. It is going to be hard to compete with the previous Americas Cup resources and that's where you come in, to help us raise awareness and funding. The Western Underwater Dive Club (West Auckland) has kindly made their premises available for the campaign. In the meantime many thanks to people like Jane Jackson who first raised her concerns to the media over the paint over. Thanks also go out to the 'Central Leader' and the 'Auckland' newspapers for their support. In the meantime we have to find a very large WALL for Wyland to paint on - any suggestions? We will keep everyone up to date through this Newsletter and Dive New Zealand Magazine. If you want to pledge your support, please email Dave Moran davem@divenewzealand.co.nz. If you have received this Newsletter by email, please forward it to anyone who might be interested - Mike Percy



Right to Left - Dave Moran and Mike Percy pondering their next move.

Reviews:

Ecoday 2010:

The Research Team continues to support local events such as Waitakere City Council's 'Ecoday 2010' held every year at Olympic Park New Lynn and just ten minutes walk from the Western Underwater Dive Club - what could be better? It's always a joy to attend such events - a real community feeling and time to catch up with other groups and talk about each other's work. It's a credit to New Zealand that we have such dedicated people around in our community that work so hard for no reward. I must admit we did very well at getting the message across, all thanks to supporting resources from the Project AWARE Trust, Ministry of Fisheries, Department of Conservation, Dive HQ (West Auckland), Auckland Regional Council and Antics Marketing.

The 'Ecoday 2010' seahorse colouring competition was won by Hazel Creevey with Himanshu, Jessica Webb, Mackenzie Roskruge, Piene Bechet and Momin Asim Mian as runners up.



Right to Left - Anne Shepherd (WURT Secretary), Phil Goff (Leader of the Opposition) and WURT supporter Albie Shepherd.

Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show 2010:

This year was the first time the Research Team shared the same site with the Western Underwater Dive Club. Thanks to Dave Gibbs, (Premiere Exhibitions Manager) we were given a great site in Hall 6. Everything ran smoothly, even surviving a heavy downpour. We can be proud of putting on such a good display. Another highlight was raising over \$600 for the Westpac Helicopter Appeal - great work.

The 'Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show 2010' seahorse colouring competition was won by James Tremeer with Kelsey Boyd, Josh Hogan, Jayden Stallard and Vincent Lee as runners up. Congratulations to all winners and a big thank you to Dive HQ (West Auckland) and Performance Diver, for providing the prizes. Thanks also to the Project AWARE Trust, Ministry of Fisheries, Department of Conservation, Dive HQ (West Auckland), Auckland Regional Council and Antics Marketing for their continued support.



Some of the many people who visited our site.

Upcoming Events:

National Cleanup Week

17 - 24 September 2010






International Coastal Cleanup Day

25 September 2010

Conservation Week

12 - 19 September 2010

Western Underwater Research Team - contact details:

-  PO Box 20 296 Glen Eden, Waitakere 0641.
-  (09) 827 7008.
-  (09) 836 7426.
-  email - seahorse2000@xtra.co.nz
-  web - www.seahorse2000.org.nz

