

Seashore Newsletter



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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 take look the Research Teams activities for the past six months and review one new project campaign. We also celebrate a milestone of fifteen years of support of our marine environment.

Marine Biosecurity:

Keep your bottom clean - I’m taking about your boat bottom, what did you expect? If you are a boat owner and move around a bit, you have a responsibility not to spread unwanted marine pests. Most of us have heard of Didymo (an invasive freshwater microscopic alga) and the effects it has on a number of South Island rivers. It is so easy to be complacent, but unfortunately it is this complacency that has put New Zealand’s biosecurity at risk. Boats, trailers, fishing and dive gear are all potential carriers of unwanted marine and fresh water organisms and need to be cleaned properly after use. To help boaties understand and be more aware, Biosecurity New Zealand (BNZ) has recently released a new guide to marine biosecurity on slates. The slate sequence has been designed to be kept on board a boat and give guidelines to how you can actively help stop the spread of unwanted marine pests.

On a recent joint underwater cleanup and survey dive with the ‘Waitemata Harbour Cleanup Trust’ at Islington Bay, Rangitoto Island in Auckland’s Hauraki Gulf we came across *Styela clava* or the clubbed tunicate. Widespread throughout the Gulf and may have been in the area for up to 10 years prior to detection in 2005. It is a great threat



Picture of *Styela clava* taken by Steve Roberts

to New Zealand's aquaculture industry, with its ability to smother mussel lines and also poses a potential threat to native marine ecosystems. The second picture of interest appeared to be a tube polychaete of some kind that I haven't seen before. Unfortunately we were unable to identify the species - many thanks to Rissa Williams (MAF Biosecurity New Zealand Incursion Investigator (Marine)) for your help.



Picture of an unknown species of a tube polychaete taken by Steve Roberts.

Like the previous set of slates the new BNZ slates are free - just drop us a email with your name and postal address and we will send you a set. Everyone who uses our waterways, be it rivers, lakes, or the ocean has a responsibly to know what to do if they



New slates - 'A Boaties guide to marine biosecurity'.

find something out of the ordinary. The slates are an ideal guide giving comprehensive information about marine biosecurity and what to do if you find something suspicious as well as guidelines for cleaning your boat and / or gear.

Note: If you have seen *Stella clava* outside of the Hauraki Gulf or Lyttleton? Call MAF Biosecurity New Zealand free on 0800 80 99 66.

Projects Update

Survey Seahorse 2000:

We have been getting a steady increase over the years in the number of enquiries about 'Survey Seahorse 2000' especially from overseas and many thanks to those who sent us pictures of seahorses. It is very encouraging that the plight seahorses are gaining more worldwide support to find ways to protect all these species in the wild. It goes without saying that the success that has been achieved to protect seahorses has been attributed to the dedication of a few and all credit should be given to them. It would be a very sad place if the oceans lost the seahorses. Seahorses have recently been added to the list of protected species in the United Kingdom under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which prohibits damage to their habitat. We know, through our studies, how important a particular marine habitat like eelgrass meadows can be to a certain marine species such as the seahorse. Before the 'Survey Seahorse 2000' project was launched, the Research Team approached the then Minister of Conservation Nick Smith about protection for the seahorse around New Zealand coastal waters. This was a test case to see if a fish species such as a seahorse could be protected and we cited the Kermadec black spotted groper as an example, which is protected under the New Zealand Wildlife Act 1953. This Act was later amended to include some marine species. Obviously the Minister sort advice, and, came back with the answer that seahorses would be protected in a marine reserve. This unfortunately didn't take into account the specific habitat of the seahorse. The Research Team's data goes back fifteen years and we can therefore compare the very worrying situation of loss of many coastal and estuarine environments which would be the home of the seahorse and many other marine species as well as acting as a nursery for many juvenile fish species. Urban development pays very little attention to the protection of a habitat of single fish specie. Comments that seahorses are spread too thinly to

warrant protection are unfounded, as our survey data shows, pockets of higher than normal concentrations in the North and South Island make these areas extremely vulnerable. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has *Hippocampus abdominalis* classified vulnerable (vu), and it can be considered at high risk of extinction in the wild. Although we have collected data on seahorse distribution around New Zealand and learnt a considerable amount on the secret life of seahorses, in general we still have a long way to go to fully understand the species to help with their conservation.

We have often used the seahorse as a indicator species e.g. for pollution, so it was a happy surprise to read about the Short-snouted seahorse *Hippocampus hippocampus* being found in a recent surveys that assessed the health of the once heavily polluted River Thames in the England. The Government of the day declared the River Thames biologically dead in the 1950's. Very little is known about these seahorse populations that have been found in brackish tidal waters as far up as London.



Beijing fast food - sent in by V Prasad.



Picture taken in the airport at Kuala Lumpur about September 2006
Dried seahorses for sale - sent in by R Grace.

We are always looking out for pictures of seahorses especially taken around New Zealand. If you have any pictures of seahorses to contribute please contact us - email seahorse2000@xtra.co.nz

Of all the stories about making a quick buck and, at the same time, saving the world's seahorses from extinction, none can compare with the rise and fall of 'Seahorse Ireland'. Its founder, marine biologist Kealan Doyle may have had all the best intentions to make 'Seahorse Ireland' the first company to commercially breed seahorse, but to me his venture had all the trappings of a disaster. Like most ventures of this type, it promised to deliver millions and sucked in big backers (Udaras na Gaeltachta), the odd Bank, and even the odd marine conservation group. The company flourished in the early days and even went on to pick up a 'Young Business Start Up Award' until it financially collapsed in February 2008. Why do these ventures fail? The reason could be as simple as knowing your customer's culture. Better to spend ten years on knowing what the customer wants and the market environment than ten years on pointless aquaculture research - Mike Percy

Pacific Ocean Cleanup:

June of this year saw the Research Team release a media statement raising awareness of their "Pacific Ocean Cleanup" campaign: News of a huge, every increasing floating mass of garbage totaling millions of tonnes in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, that some say is twice the size of Texas has been around for many years. Western Underwater Research is no stranger when it comes to beach and underwater cleanups, assisting the community for over fifteen years cleaning up Auckland's West Coast and the Hauraki Gulf. Now they want Pacific Nations to get together and do something about this environmental tragedy. "We are so fixated on climate change that issues like this get put aside - garbage in the oceans are responsible for killing marine life and releasing resilient poisons such as DDT - the problem is huge and serious" said Mike Percy the group's Chairperson. The group want this issue to be on the agenda at the next meeting of the Pacific Island Forum and the Asian Pacific Forum, and will network with other marine environmental organisations for a solution. To help understand the situation more clearly the Research Team will encourage scuba divers who visit remote regions of the Pacific Ocean to submit data in the form of pictures of garbage. "What are we doing to our planet - we can't sit around any longer and do nothing - before we know it our once beautiful Pacific Ocean will be become amass of floating trash - we put a lot of faith in the system and when fails it is up to us to help put it right" said Mike Percy. For pictures and information on marine pollution in the Pacific Ocean - email seahorse2000@xtra.co.nz

Displays / Promotions:

The Research Team has focused on promoting awareness of New Zealand's unique marine biodiversity through presentations and events both locally and nationwide - 'Ecoday 2008' (Olympic Park New Lynn) and the 'Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show 2008' (Auckland ASB Showgrounds). Our display resources have stood the test of time all thanks to the Lion Foundation and Lottery Grants.

Special thanks to Dave Gibbs (Premiere Exhibitions Ltd), David Williams (Antics Marketing), Dave Moran (Dive New Zealand), Paul & Dianne Oxtan (Dive HQ West Auckland), Dave Allen (Ministry of Fisheries), Karl McLeod (Department of Conservation) and Christine Rose (Auckland Regional Council) and Joanne Marsden (Project AWARE Trust).

A Day out with 'Waitemata Harbour Cleanup Trust':

Formed in 2002, the 'Waitemata Harbour Clean-Up Trust' is a charitable organisation that oversees the removal of litter from Auckland's Waitemata Harbour and inner gulf islands, and promotes the concept of clean, clear rubbish-free waterways. The Trust has been very supportive in helping take rubbish off places such as Pollen Island. A chance to combine resources for a joint underwater cleanup / survey happened on May 10th. Three Research Team divers (Allen Roche, Steve Roberts and Mike Percy) conducted a cleanup / survey dive just outside of Islington Bay (Rangitoto Island). Thanks to the Trust's coordinator Hayden Smith and Ben Harris skipper of the Trust's boat 'The Phil Warren'. A small amount of rubbish was found underwater that included two encrusted beer bottles, one small plastic container, and a small piece of asbestos roofing. It was soon found that the 'MV Phil Warren' was a great boat to dive from with a handy ledge at the stern and plenty of deck space for four divers and equipment plus a roomy cabin. An underwater survey of the area was also included - see page one on Marine Biosecurity. The dive cleanup was also in support of the 'Project AWARE Trust' cleanup campaign and each participant received a certificate.


Thanks guys for a great trip and we are looking forward to working with again.


Maui's dolphin soft toys for sale:

The cost for one Hector / Maui's dolphin soft toy is \$18 (price includes postage anywhere in New Zealand). When ordering, please make cheques payable to the 'Western Underwater Research Team' and send it with your name and postal address to PO Box 20 296, Glen Eden, Waitakere 0641. To get a price when ordering more than one dolphin, please email your purchase enquiry to seahorse2000@xtra.co.nz - thanks for your support.

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'Ecoday 2008' Prime Minister Helen Clarke presented with a Research Team Maui's dolphin next to Lynne Pillav MP for Waitakere.



The Waitemata Harbour Cleanup Trust boat 'MV Phil Warren'.

