

# Thirty And Counting

Laura Smith looks back at 30 successful years of St Abbs Voluntary Marine Reserve, and reminds us that following the Code of Conduct is vital to the continuing success of the reserve ...

30 YEARS ago Scotland's first voluntary marine reserve was established with a fanfare and a splash (literally!) as Sir David Bellamy jubilantly leapt into St Abbs Harbour after declaring the VMR open. There are many stories and legends surrounding the setting up of the reserve, but essentially, it came from a desire to protect.

The amazing coastline of St Abbs, Coldingham and Eyemouth is home to an extraordinary combination of animals; from the deeplet sea anemone and wolf fish – more commonly found in deep, colder waters to the north; to the crayfish and Devonshire cup coral, more often associated with the warmer waters of Southern England! For centuries this rich and varied life has sustained our local communities and offered a source of income to generations of fishermen and since it was possible to do so, scuba divers have flocked to these waters, drawn by the bright and colourful life beneath the waves.

With so many people depending upon the coastline, for both work and recreation, it was essential to promote sensitive and sustainable behaviour. So, in 1984 a 'look but don't touch' policy was established and the VMR was born. From those early beginnings, the work of the VMR has grown and we now run events and education sessions for hundreds of

people every year and regularly survey and monitor the wildlife of the reserve. But 30 years on, our desire to protect the VMR remains as strong as ever and we continue to promote a 'look, don't touch' policy, through our Voluntary Code of Conduct.

We are immensely proud that the VMR has been going for so long and that it has been such a trailblazer for marine conservation both in Scotland and further afield. However the last 30 years have not all been plain sailing and it has taken a lot of dedication from its rangers and members of the VMR committee to keep it going. You may have seen on our Facebook page that we recently needed to recruit new office bearers to the committee as a matter of urgency and we were quite humbled by the response that we had – it is great to know that the VMR is so appreciated and we hope that with a newly strengthened committee, the VMR will continue for at least another 30 years!

Of course, such a landmark year must be celebrated and the VMR committee are in the process of planning how best to do this right now. If you have any suggestions, why not get in touch with us via our Facebook page or website? You can also use them to keep up to date with our celebratory plans.



#### Voluntary Code of Conduct

- Leave animals and plants where you find them and take care not to damage them.
- Do not tamper with lobster pots – it is illegal and dangerous.
- Divers control your buoyancy and do not use spear guns or hooks.
- Take your litter home with you and do not pollute the sea.
- Avoid losing fishing tackle by using gear suitable for the ground and an appropriate rig design.
- Keep your distance from seabirds, seals and dolphins to avoid disturbing them.
- Look out for your safety at all times, check the tides and keep back from the cliff edge.



[www.marine-reserve.co.uk](http://www.marine-reserve.co.uk)  
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