

# A Fine Life at Finnart

In this edition of **SCOTTISH DIVER** Calum hands over the reins to James Lynott who tells us more about a recent Seasearch trip to Loch Long that revealed sea cucumbers, shore urchins and lots more ...



*The large sea slug *Tritonia hombergii* crawls across the wreckage in search of soft corals to munch (All images courtesy of James Lynott)*



*A horseman's anemone (*Urticina eques*), the larger smooth-bodied cousin of the dahlia*



*Shore urchins (*Psammechinus miliaris*) wearing 'hats', perhaps for camouflage*



*The colourful sea cucumbers *Psolus phantapus* abound at this time of year at Finnart*

AS A keen diver with a great interest in marine life, Seasearch recording is something I have had a desire to do for some time so when I found out there was an Observer course running in Edinburgh on 10 May I quickly signed up. Organised by Maddy Smith at Edinburgh Divers BSAC-21 and delivered by Calum Duncan, the course was held at the MCS offices in Edinburgh.

On the day, the course provided us with a good foundation with the background and purpose of Seasearch followed by all of the information that we would need to successfully complete the observer forms. From the different seabed types to marine life cover, seabed profile sketching, and species recording we were given everything we needed which was then put into practice with a 'video dive' of Jeanie's Reef in the Firth

of Lorn (a site that I am now very keen to dive myself!).

Following the theory part of the course we were to put our new found recording skills into practice with a couple of dives the next day at Dunbar Harbour which would allow us to get our two tutor supervised forms completed. Unfortunately conditions were not suitable for diving here as the incoming swell was larger than forecast. We also tried to get in at St. Abbs but it was not to be.

'NOT FINNART again!' some might cry when shore diving accessible from the central belt is suggested. Understandably a popular training site, with plenty parking and relatively easy entrance and exit (although wouldn't it be great if purpose-built steps down to the beach could be built?), there can be relatively few central Scotland divers who haven't done some training there.

However, it might not be your first choice for scenic or marine life diving. As you may have read me repeatedly write over the years (if you get to the MCS Report pages of **SCOTTISH DIVER!**), Seasearch can help unlock the interest from any dive. On a rather dreich Sunday, six of us braved the Atlantic coast temperate rainforest magic (or, if you must, near incessant west coast drizzle), for a couple of Seasearch dips at this

popular training site to reveal there's more here than at first meets the eye.

Rather than you reading from me about it, thanks to course participant James Lynott, with excellent photographs, for responding to the offer to write for **SCOTTISH DIVER**. Over to you James ...

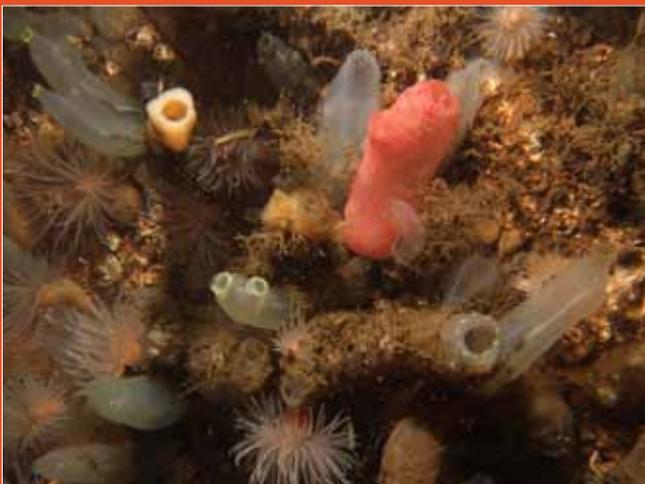
**Calum Duncan**  
MCS Scotland Programme Manager



*A white variant of that other, more feathery sea cucumber typical of sea lochs, Thyonidium drummondii*



*A great spider crab or sea toad (Hyas araneus) on the hunt*



*Yellow-ringed sea squirts (Ciona intestinalis), a pink sea squirt (Ascidia virginea), sea loch anemones (Protanthea simplex) and sponges on wreckage*



*A lemon sole (Microstomus kitt) keeps an eye out for predators*

The diving was soon rescheduled to the following week at Finnart (A-Frames) Loch Long. Despite being a very wet and miserable day the dive site was quite busy and the six of us that had made it along struggled to get parked! The A-Frames served particularly well for our purpose with a range of different seabed types and habitats, with rocky reefs, boulders, sand/gravel, mud, and of course wreckage which allowed us to

record two different seabed profiles on each of our dives.

There is also an enormous variety of life within each of the habitats present, with the old pier wreckage covered in peacock worms (*Sabella pavonina*), sea loch anemones (*Protanthea simplex*), a variety of squirts and sponges, and the occasional nudibranch. On this particular day dotted around in the mud/shell slope between the wreckage were dozens

of sea cucumbers which was a pleasant surprise.

A great day's diving which really helped us to get to grips with the recording process. Thanks to Calum for delivering the course and organising the rescheduled dives. It was a great learning experience and it's always nice to meet and dive with new people. I'm looking forward to completing many more Seasearch forms in the future.

# Strong Support For MPAs

ALTHOUGH LOCH Long itself is not a proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA), Loch Goil and Loch Fyne are. Following the Autumn 2013 consultation on proposals for 33 new MPAs (see **SCOTTISH DIVER** March/April 2014), a report published early May confirmed that Scottish Government plans to create a network of MPAs received a huge thumbs up from Scotland.

The consultation attracted 14,703 responses, including 14,371 favourable campaign responses (2,510 from MCS). Of the remaining 332 more detailed responses from individuals and organisations (including MCS), an impressive 99.5% were also in favour, demonstrating overwhelming support for stronger protection of Scotland's sealife with a full MPA network.

We have been urging the Scottish Government to take heed of public opinion and secure a network that will help the seas recover from centuries of over-exploitation. The growing momentum of public support for MPAs is clear: you want a network of MPAs that do what they say on the tin, adequately protect areas of the marine environment, delivering richer seas that benefit all for generations to come. Now Scottish Ministers don't just have a legal duty to designate

new MPAs, they also have a democratic mandate to do so.

However, official advice to the Scottish Government indicates that plans may yet fall short of delivering the urgent recovery Scotland's seas need. We are concerned that the historical context of ecological decline is not being taken fully into account and that sites are being set up merely to protect remnant sealife that won't deliver the improvements in ecosystem health so desperately required. We argued that the objective for many of the possible MPAs must be upgraded to 'recover', so that species and habitats would be sufficiently protected from damaging activities to allow them to increase their extent.

Of the 33 possible MPAs, advice maintains that very small parts of only four of the sites will be managed to deliver recovery of marine life within the site's boundary: overlooking recovery for species such as the now critically endangered common skate (*Dipturus batis*), and the fan mussel (*Atrina fragilis*), which is now only known to exist in any great number in the Sound of Canna. Each of these species has been included in a new Scottish MPA, but unless more ambitious targets are set they will do nothing to actually help them recover from historic

declines. New MPAs should actively enhance the health and biodiversity of our seas, not just protect what's left over from centuries of exploitation.

We have come a long way in making the case for new MPAs and demonstrating public support for them, and should be heartened that new sites are imminent, but we need to keep the pressure up to ensure that they are not merely 'paper parks'. We have seen from the Firth of Lorn, as featured recently with David Ainsley on BBC's Landward and in **SCOTTISH DIVER**, that if you protect areas from damaging fishing gear, sea life can flourish. By pledging your support for MPAs, if you haven't already, we can keep you informed as to how you can help: [www.mcsuk.org/mpa/scotland](http://www.mcsuk.org/mpa/scotland). You can also keep up to date at [www.savescottishseas.org](http://www.savescottishseas.org).

The report analysing the public responses to the Scottish Government's consultation on proposals for a network of MPAs: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/04/4054/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/04/4054/0)

Responses to the Scottish Government consultation on proposals for a network of Marine Protected Areas are here [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/marine-consultation](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/marine-consultation)

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Owen is always looking for help with  
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For details of Seasearch activities -  
[www.seasearch.org.uk](http://www.seasearch.org.uk)

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