

Norfolk Seasearch

2007 News (June/July)

This year Norfolk Seasearch is taking part in the nationwide "Pipefish Survey". These fish are closely related to seahorses with long tube like bodies and the distinctive seahorse-like head. The native greater pipefish grows up to 50cm long and can be found hiding in seaweed or free swimming in a snake like motion over the seabed. Like seahorses it is the male that incubates the pipefish eggs in a pouch on the underside of its body.

As part of the study this year divers from the local North Norfolk Dive Club spotted a "new" pipefish not seen before on 23rd June. The first was seen swimming close to the wreck "Vera" at Cley. The next, seen on the same weekend diving was at 15m down the shot line leading to the wreck "Kylimore" a paddle steamer 10 miles off Cromer.

It is possible that the snake pipefish is changing its distribution?

In June and July Seasearch divers surveyed the wreck "Vera" to record the diverse range of marine life to be found.



Photo Helen Nott

Above is a Snake Pipefish photographed on a dive at Cley on 15th July this year.

Further reports of snake pipefish were phoned in to Norfolk Seasearch by walkers finding them occasionally washed up from Salthouse, Happisburgh and West Runcton.

Wreck Site "Vera", Cley-next-the-sea

The wreck of the Vera lies approximately 85m offshore to the east of the beach café at Cley-next-the sea. It is a First World War coal ship that was sunk by navy minesweepers and depending on the state of the tide, lies at a depth of 5 to 7m.

As it is a relatively shallow wreck, the surface is dominated by a range of red and green seaweeds. There is a thick cover of plumose anemone, dead men's fingers and various sponges including the mermaids glove (*Haliclona oculata*). The wreck houses a large number of crustaceans including velvet swimming crabs, edible crab, hermit crab and slender spider crab (*Macropodia spp.*). Amongst the seaweed, commonly found were the bright purple nudibranch (or sea slug) *Flabellina pedata*.

Both the snake and greater pipefish are recorded at this site.

Peacock worms were frequent, with their extended tentacles fanning out to capture passing food in the tide.

Starfish, bloody henry and sunstars are common, as are the colourful dahlia anemone. Around the wreck a passing shoal of mackerel, then later in July a shoal of fast moving bass made a fleeting visit much to the joy of the common seal seen on both dives.

A total list of marine life found was sent on to Seasearch UK, which collates all the data on a UK database. www.seasearch.org.uk

Further dives on the chalk gullies, local wrecks and the underwater village of Skipton are planned for the coming months.

In the pipeline: a website is under construction featuring dive sites and photos of marine life - www.norfolkseaquest.co.uk which should be available in September.

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