

Norfolk Seasearch

Report Summary

Produced by Helen Nott- Dec 2004
Co coordinator: Norfolk Seasearch

Norfolk Seasearch originated as a joint project with the West Norfolk Marine Conservation Group and local BSAC dive club North Norfolk Divers based at Holt, North Norfolk.

In May 2003 a Seasearch Observation training course took place followed by several lectures on Marine Life at dive clubs in Holt and Kings Lynn with Marine Biologists Dr Hammond and Paul Naylor.

Subsequently a dive expedition organised with North Norfolk Divers and Paul Biggin from the Marine Conservation Society took place in August 2003. This involved a survey of the marine life at a wreck off Blakeney and the unique habitat to be found at the chalk gullies near Sheringham.



Dahlia anemone, HMS Umpire - photo Roy Brewer

In 2004 a further dive expedition took place returning to the chalk gullies and photographs of species and habitats taken for use in the projects roving display board. Since the start of the project 21 Seasearch Observation forms have been completed recording information on habitats and species at 9 different dive locations.



Dive Locations

Norfolk Seasearch has targeted the habitat known as the chalk gullies off Sheringham. This site is thought to be the only chalk habitat between Flamborough and Kent. In addition the following wreck sites have been surveyed:

- HMS Umpire – 12 miles off Blakeney
- The Bottle Wreck – 11 miles off Morston
- The Steamship – 8 miles off Salthouse
- The Rosalie - < 1 mile off Weybourne
- The Tiller Wreck – 10 miles off Sheringham
- Unnamed Wreck – 18 miles off Cromer
- The Baron Ailsa – 21 miles off Overstrand
- Unnamed Wreck – 23 miles off Overstrand

Survey Results

Information on habitat type, marine life species and abundance together with sketches of dive sites are recorded on the seasearch observation forms. Copies of these have been sent to Seasearch at the Marine Conservation Society where results are fed into Marine Recorder, the database of the JNCC (Joint Nature Conservancy Council). Seasearch data including survey forms, photographs and specimens are collated, stored and used in educational material by Norfolk Seasearch.



North Norfolk Dive Club launching the RIB "Norfolk Hero" from Weybourne beach.

The Chalk Gullies, Sheringham

The chalk gullies run half a mile offshore from Sheringham and comprise areas of chalk ridges ranging from half a metre, to over one metre in height. The chalk gullies running out from the shore are half to two metres plus in width, with a sand and gravel bottom, interspersed with boulders and flint nodules. The ridges are covered in red encrusting coralline algae and red seaweed. The sides and bottom of the gullies are covered in a variety of animal turf including sponges, dahlia and daisy anemone and hydroids. Segmented worms such as the peacock worm and the calcareous tube producing worm *Filograna implexa* are present. Numerous squat lobsters and some small common lobsters can be seen in the chalk crevices and a young conger eel has been observed in a deeper hole.



Plumose Anemone

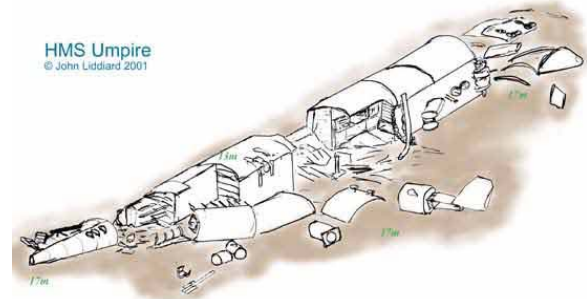
On the seaward side of the chalk gullies the seabed gives way to mainly sand and gravel with areas of boulders, cobble and pebbles.

This area supports a number of sponges including Mermaids Glove and Shredded Carrot Sponge together with areas of Bryozoans and mixed seaweeds

Other mobile fauna include common starfish, Bib, Pink (or Northern) Prawn, Painted Goby, Corkwing Wrasse and Long Spined Sea Scorpion. A number of Butterfish can commonly be found and Nudibranchs (including *Flabella spp.*) are present here and on many wreck sites.

Wrecks

There are hundreds of wrecks to be found off the Norfolk coast and HMS Umpire was the first of many wrecks to be surveyed from near shore to 25 miles offshore. They form artificial reefs that support a diverse range of wildlife.



HMS Umpire is a 2nd world war submarine located 12 miles off Blakeney lying at a depth of 20m. It lies upon a seabed of mainly sand and gravel with areas of shell (mainly mussel). The north side of the wreck is covered with a thick covering of Hornwrack, with dense covering of animal turf on the vertical wreck structures. Large numbers of Plumose anemone are found alongside Dahlia anemone, Burrowing anemone, Dead men's fingers, sponges and light bulb sea squirts.

Crustaceans found include velvet swimming crabs, edible crab, common lobster and the Painted Topshell.

At the base of the wreck edible sea urchin, common starfish, Bloody Henry and Sunstars can be found. Fish found include Long-spined scorpion fish, Poor cod, Ballan Wrasse and Bib.

Norfolk Seasearch continues into 2005 with further training courses and dives planned. Thanks to the volunteer divers that took part we look to build a more in depth knowledge and appreciation of the wildlife to be found off the Norfolk coast.

For more information contact Helen Nott on (01485) 572740 e mail h-nott@talk21.com

* Norfolk Seasearch is funded by English Nature and supported by North Norfolk Dive Club and the Marine Conservation Society