

Penzance B.S.A.C Conservation Officer's Report March 2009

A very rare Ribbonfish, also known as Oarfish, *Regalecus glesne*, was found washed up on the coast near Hauxley in Northumberland in February. They can grow up to 10 metres long and weigh more than a quarter of a tonne and are usually more at home in deeper sub-tropical seas. It is a very rare fish in UK waters, only 3 or 4 have been caught or washed up in the last 50 years. The Ribbonfish propels itself with a long undulating dorsal fin and is the longest bony fish in the sea, and this mode of swimming may suggest a sea serpent and it is believed that it was feared by mariners for many centuries as a mythical sea serpent or monster.

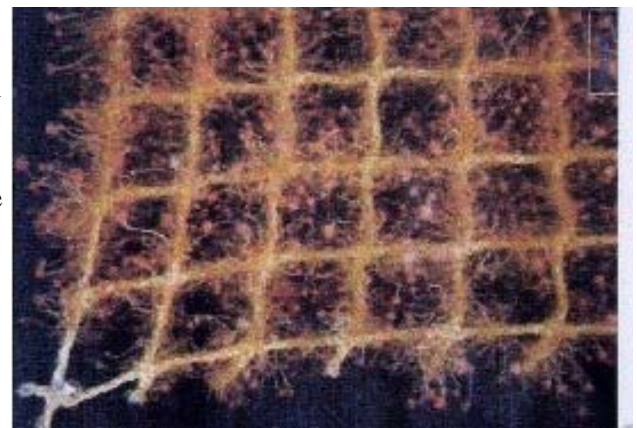
**Ribbonfish
Or Oarfish
*Regalecus glesne***



The Moray Eel is quite a scary looking fish with its large pulsing mouth and vacant stare, but there is more, for behind the large fish's toothy mouth looms a second set of jaws, which launch from the throat, grab prey from the front teeth, then retreat into the dark tunnel of the eels oesophagus. It's the stuff of science fiction, but it is a brilliant feeding mechanism for such an elongated creature. Unlike most bony fish, morays don't seem to generate enough suction to help in swallowing, instead it has this novel dual-jaw arrangement, which allows the animal to both restrain and transport big prey –the most efficient nourishment for big animals-down the long throat. This is the only vertebrate known to have such a feeding mechanism, but on a different branch of the evolutionary tree, some snakes have a related system, a set of ratcheting jaws that grip and manoeuvre food into the gullet. This is a wonderful example of convergence, when distant organisms facing the same problem develop similar solutions



Fish farmers off the coast of Norway are being plagued by a tiny but very costly sea creature that is fouling the nets which surround the farmed salmon. The tiny hydroids, *Ectopleura larynx*, settle on the mesh of the nets looking like a forest of thin white threads that appear to end in a pink pinhead. These tiny creatures have shown that if the nets are not cleaned often enough they can cause serious problems, in the course of just a few weeks they can form carpets that almost choke the meshes and thus lower the water quality for the farmed fish. Scientists studying the recent increase in net fouling are considering various possible explanations, such as composition of the fish feed, or the type of coating used on the nets or even net colour.



There were 9 reported sightings of Bottlenose Dolphins during March, 8 of the north coast pod between Trenow Cove near Marazion and St Ives, and one of the south coast pod in the Carrick Roads, Falmouth. Four of five reports of Harbour Porpoises were off Porthgwarra and the other report was of 4 animals off Trewavas Head. A pair of unidentified dolphins were seen off Logan Rock on the 30th and off Porthgwarra on the 31st. 2 Grey Seals were seen ½ mile off Kenidjack Castle on the 15th and also that day, an Octopus was seen by divers on the wreck of the Juan Ferrar, off Boscawen Point.