

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

With their sedentary lifestyle and filter feeding habits, clams have been silent witnesses to the change that humans have inflicted on their waters. These clams are silent no more, for scientists at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab have demonstrated that it is possible to identify and trace wastewater inputs to estuaries and coastal food webs by studying the organic matrix in the shell of the hard clam *Mercenaria mercenaria*, the Qahog clam. Using this technique will allow coastal researchers and managers to document increases in waste loadings to coastal waters over long periods of environmental change, and look into the past and trace human influences, in this case waste water pollution into coastal waters. It will give essential information for management and future research.



Massive swarms of stinging jellyfish and jellyfish-like animals are transforming many world-class fisheries and tourists destinations into veritable jellytoriums that are intermittently jammed with pulsating gelatinous creatures. Areas that are particularly hard hit by these squishy animals are Hawaii, the Gulf of Mexico, the east coast of the US, the Bering Sea, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the sea of Japan, Namibia, the North Sea and other European seas. These swarms can cover hundreds of square miles and have caused injuries and even occasional deaths to water enthusiasts, and have caused serious damage to fisheries, fish farms, desalination plants, ships and nuclear power plants. Since 1980 jellyfish swarms have cost the world's fishing and tourism industries alone, hundreds of millions of dollars and perhaps billions of dollars. From large swarms of the lethal pea-nut sized Box Jellyfish of Australia to swarms of hundreds of millions of refrigerator-sized jellyfish in the Sea of Japan, suspicion is growing that population explosions of jellyfish are being generated by human activities.

Three young seals were released back into the sea at Godrevy on December 17th, Rupert, aged one, Shawn and Chomp, both four months old, had been looked after by the Seal Sanctuary at Gweek after being found abandoned at a very young age on beaches around Cornwall. They were kept at the sanctuary until they had reached the correct weight for their age and the staff knew that they could look after themselves in the wild. Shawn and Chomp both swam off straight away, but Rupert who had been with the staff much longer, was a bit reluctant to leave at first. A gannet chick was born very late in the season, in fact the latest ever recorded, on an island off the East Loathian Coast, but it was abandoned by its parents. It was rescued from the sea on December 4th and taken to the Bass Rock Seabird Centre. A local resident has been looking after the chick for the past month and it has reached a weight of 4Kg and is well enough to be released back into the wild. However the seas are very cold off north Scotland and the weather too rough, so the bird is being given a lift by a naval helicopter which is coming to Culdrose to have a high-spec upgrade fitted, state-of-the-art infra red cameras to enhance its rescue capability. The bird will be taken to the Mousehole Wildlife Bird Sanctuary for a few days to recover from the helicopter flight and will then be taken out to sea by a local fisherman and released. It has been fitted with two red rings on its legs and it will not be known if it survives unless it is sighted and reported, so keep an eye out for this gannet and report back if you see it.



Bottlenose Dolphins were seen off St Ives on the 6th, 7th and 8th of December and again on the 11th and 18th. An adult dolphin with a juvenile were seen briefly close inshore at Gwennap Head on the 1st of the month and these were thought to be Bottlenose Dolphins. Harbour Porpoises were seen off Gwennap Head, The Minack and the Brisons on various days. A whale, thought to be a Minke Whale was seen off Gwennap Head on the 11th of the month. On returning from a service on 10th December the St Ives lifeboat was accompanied by a pod of about 20 Harbour Porpoises all the way from Start Point in south Devon to Lizard Point and they were travelling at about 20 knots. When the lifeboat arrived around Lands End and off Wicca Cliff they saw a pod of about 5 Bottlenose Dolphins.