

# Polzeath Marine Conservation Group



polzeath.marine.group



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polzeathmc@gmail.com



[www.polzeathmarineconservation.com](http://www.polzeathmarineconservation.com)

## Newsletter 2020

What a year we have had, with the corona virus hitting the UK at the beginning of the year, lockdown and finally social distancing. However the wonderful group of volunteers we have didn't let that stop them swinging into action, sorting out how on earth Zoom meetings work, getting out the tape measure to work out if we were going to be able to offer any events or even be able to open the marine centre within the ever changing guidelines and more importantly so the volunteers and the visitors would feel and be safe.

We put a big table in the centre for the volunteer to stay behind so that the aquarium could be seen by the visitors and divided the outside area into 3 pods so that families could be kept at a distance of more than 2m from each other to take part in our new activity of painting marine themed plaques.

Our events programme was changed completely with both talks having to be cancelled, but we devised a way that we could still take small groups down to the rockpools for an event we called rockpool bingo. This ensured that we abided by the government guidelines and that each volunteer would only be looking after one family/household group.

Absolutely none of this would have been possible without each and every one of the volunteers being so flexible and passionate about the work we do and being able to give the visitors some sort of activity to do during their holidays.

### Mural and rubbish sculptures

Laura Workman has once again spent many hours down in the marine centre in the freezing cold painting the most fantastic mural on the inside wall. It has amazed the visitors to the centre and the write ups on each creature are truly fascinating.

Dis Disbury has been letting his imagination run riot, sizing up all the marine litter collected from the beach to make into more sculptures. This year he has made a new crab and a star fish which have enthralled the children walking by and which look fantastic lit up for Christmas.





## Rockpool Bingo

As our volunteers' safety was at the top of our priorities we decided to restrict our rockpool rambles to only one household per volunteer throughout the summer even if the restrictions were eased. We compiled 5 double sided sheets with pictures of different creatures and where they are likely to be found. This allowed the visitors to ID their own finds with a volunteer standing by if necessary.

We spent more time looking at the creatures actually on the rocks as these were on the bingo sheets rather than in the pools and people were amazed at what they found. Masses of dog whelks with their eggs, breadcrumb sponges, star ascidian, green leaf worms and so much more.

One of the hermit crabs from the aquarium changed shells into an empty shell that we had marked, so we immediately took it down to the rockpools and put it in a pool that we would remember. On each bingo session we went on we checked and he was still there after 8 weeks but when we checked in October the shell was still there but he was gone, hopefully he has just got bigger and needed a bigger shell.

As the sessions were as popular as ever we managed to fit in 20 sessions over the 6 weeks and the consensus of opinion was that the volunteers preferred this way rather than taking groups of up to 50 people. We will see what happens with the corona virus next year but think that the days of taking 50 people are over, but 3 rambles a week is too much to expect the volunteers to help with so we will find some middle ground.



Green leaf worm



Dog whelk eggs



*Rostanga rubra*



*Edmundsella pedate*



Star ascidian



Marked shell for hermit crab



Brittle star



## Get crafty and plaque painting

Volunteer Kathy ran her usual Get Crafty sessions every Wednesday morning making all sorts of craft items from general rubbish. The stoned area outside the marine centre was divided into 3 socially distanced area pods to keep families safe with a painting station being set up each morning for a new activity of painting marine based pictures on pieces of wood. The plaques were then varnished each evening and then displayed on the fence outside the marine centre. Little did we know how popular this was going to be. We ended up round the back of Spar each evening taking all the small pieces of wood out of the builders skip, searching all our sheds and going round local builders to replenish the supply for the next day. By the end of the summer holidays we had more than 250 plaques running all the way from the trampolines to the crazy golf. They looked totally amazing. Some of these will be displayed again next year and some have been recycled to be used again. Many thanks to Rob Harris for allowing us to display the plaques on his fence.





## Aquarium

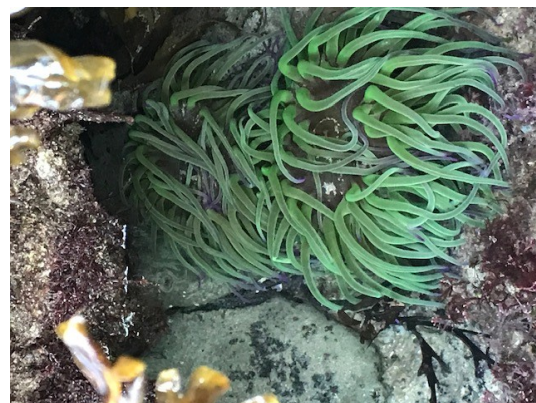
The aquarium was kept going over the winter as we felt that our large hermit crab Traore was too big to be put back in the rockpools. All the creatures kept Vickie and Hugh and visitors to their house enthralled with their antics. There were scraps between the Snakelocks and Strawberry anemones with the Strawberry exposing its stinging polyps on many occasions. All the creatures continued to thrive with the hermit crabs moulting every couple of months. Traore moulted on April 27th but in his usual over confident way did not hunker down for a few days to recover from moulting and he was grabbed by the Snakelocks and eaten. I can't begin to tell you how this not only upset us but changed the dynamics of the tank. Our other hermit crab Dave, now king of the tank, moulted twice very quickly doubling in size and the Snakelocks increased in size so much that its tentacles got sucked into the filter system. It was then put back in the rockpools where it has continued to grow and has now cloned. Dave continued to grow until one of the rocklings that were put in the tank in the summer attacked him mid moult and killed him. This just reinforces the information that we impart at the beginning of our rockpool rambles about how delicate all crabs are during and after moulting. The tiny Gem and 3 tiny Daisy anemones that were put in the tank after the shore search survey 2019 grew considerably over the winter. When the Daisies were put back into the rockpools at the end of the summer one of them reproduced in the bucket we were carrying then in.



Strawberry showing stinging polyps



Traore in a 6cm shell



Snakelocks after cloning



Daisy Anemone reproducing



Gem anemone



Dave's body, 8cm long

## St Piran's Hermit crab

We continued to monitor the site where we found the first known St Pirans in Polzeath for more than 50 years last year. There continues to be a small community but only in that one specific pool.

We had a visit from a professor at Warwick University who was really interested in this story, so last summers beach ranger Sammy is going to write an article for the Biological Sciences Review magazine. This is not only a fantastic opportunity for her to have an article published but also for us to share our passion of marine conservation to a wider audience.



## Ranger

We were so lucky this year that Laura Thornton the student who had applied to be the summer beach ranger could still join us as soon as lockdown was lifted. What a fantastic decision it was to take Laura on board. She worked tirelessly 4 days a week, taking families down to the rockpools, organising the plaque painting in Covid secure areas, helping to look after the creatures in the aquarium, litter picking and helping with social media. The whole group was lifted by her enthusiasm for not only for everything marine biological but also for life, and we are delighted that she is going to continue to volunteer with us. Laura was also awarded the Marsh Christian Young Volunteer Award for Marine Conservation. A massive congratulations Laura.



## Mega Beach Cleans March and September and general beach cleaning.

This year we were blessed with 2 beautiful days for our mega beach cleans. The March one was held just before lockdown 1, with the second one being held while England was in tier 1. We extended the time for the litter pick and met on the beach to allow for social distancing and then distributed delicious cakes and pasties donated by Barnecutts afterwards as people returned with their hauls. As ever people were shocked at how much plastic was on the beach when looking underneath the seaweed. Due to the social distancing regulations it was decided that we would not use the trommel this year to remove micro plastics from the beach but hopefully will be able to in 2021. All of the beach cleans had to be cancelled during lockdown, but locals used their permitted exercise time to continue with the never ending task of removing the marine litter washed up on the beach.

## Crisp packets

Kathy Alford looked into ways of recycling crisp packets and found a scheme run by Walkers and tetracycle. A wheelie bin was placed outside the marine centre and in the last year 13kg of empty packets have been posted in, packed up by Kathy and sent for recycling-that is a whole load of empty packets

## 2020 Donors and supporters

This year more than ever we would like to thank our supporters who have donated massive amounts of time to the group. In addition to staffing the centre and helping with events Jane Marsh, Corrine Tourney, Kathy Alford and Vickie Toland have been knitting jellyfish, making masks, bags and other craft items to help with our funding. Janet Deane, Jules and Dis Disbury, Tina Robinson, Kathy Alford, Pippa Baldrey, Hugh and Vickie Toland have been staffing the centre and helping out with events, and Dis Disbury and Hugh Toland continually spending time on general maintenance and devising new activities to keep our visitors entertained.

Thank you so much to the following for helping us with funding to enable us to continue our work. Your Shore Beach Rangers, Keep Britain Tidy, Spar Polzeath, and to all our visitors for supporting us in our events and with donations.



