

The Seahorse Trust

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NATURE

Registered charity no.1086027



NEWSLETTER

Spring 2014

Welcome to the spring 2014 newsletter

Welcome to the spring 2014 newsletter, can it get any busier? We had hoped things would go a little quieter during the winter so we could catch up, but things have just got busier in a brilliant way. Below is just a small selection of some of the work and projects we have been involved in, there is so much more; too much to fit in this newsletter so please look at our website news page and our Facebook page (763 members now and growing rapidly) to keep updated.

We have now entered our 14th year of being a charitable trust (33 years working with seahorses in total) and it is an appropriate year in Chinese mythology; it is Chinese Year of the Horse, we have borrowed this year and renamed it Chinese Year of the Seahorse and using this amazing year we aim to highlight the problems of the Traditional Medicine Trade. (See Percy below)

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ's)

In early 2014, the second tranche of proposed Marine Conservation Zones were announced which finally included Studland Bay which is finally good news for this amazing but under pressure site. As has been shown by the work of the volunteer divers from The Seahorse Trust during their Studland Seahorse Project (SSP) the number of Spiny Seahorses (*Hippocampus guttulatus*) has crashed from 40 to 4 in 5 years, whereas on other sites close by the numbers have remained stable. We have identified the reasons and we hope the proposed MCZ will help us put into place with others, measures to preserve this site for the future. All of the proposed MCZ's need your help so please at every opportunity let the authorities know how you feel about them and let's make sure they get put into place this time.

British Seahorse Survey (BSS)

Lucky seahorse released back to the wild after being found in a country lane

Over this severe winter one very lucky seahorse was found in a country lane in Guernsey. The little female Short Snouted Seahorse had been washed up the lane from the sea (or dropped by a seagull) and luckily walker Claire found the hapless seahorse and she had the presence of mind to put her into water and take

her to the local aquarium where she is waiting for the weather to calm down before they release her back to the wild.

Over the years we have had several cases of this happening, sadly most die but in this case she is alive and well.

Thank you to Sue Daly for the inserted picture, Sue is well known for her amazing pictures and wildlife documentaries.

http://www.suedalyproductions.com/sark_diving.htm



**The lucky Short Snouted Seahorse
Picture by and copyright Sue Daly**

Seatorbay

Torbay is home to both species of European Seahorse, the Spiny (*Hippocampus guttulatus*) and the Short Snouted (*Hippocampus hippocampus*) and through the work of the trust funded by Sea Life Centres and so many others we have assisted in the advice to make large areas of Torbay a protected Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). We also have volunteer divers in the region monitoring what is happening to the seagrass meadows within the bay.

The Seahorse Trust sits on the Seatorbay group and we help with advice and work with others so that the MCZ's in Torbay can become effective in protecting not just the seahorses but other species for the future.

Studland Seahorse Project (SSP) at Studland Bay in Dorset

We have now renamed the research at Studland the Studland Seahorse Project (SSP) because we have changed our technique of identifying seahorses in the wild. This has come about because we no longer use floy tags (necklaces) to identify individual seahorses.

Right from the start of the project we have been refining our techniques and knowledge on how we identify seahorses in the wild (and captivity) and very slowly we have perfected the photo identification method, which means we no longer have to handle seahorses when studying them.

From our work we know that putting tags on the seahorses does not harm or have a detrimental effect on them at all but anything we could do to reduce interaction with the seahorses is a good thing, so we now identify seahorses by taking pictures (without a flash as it against the law, which the trust got put into place). We take pictures from either side of the head and full body length with a ruler in the background for size comparison and then when we get back into the office we compare the photos to others in our photo database. We are looking for clusters and patterns of spots found on the seahorse head which are very like finger prints in humans, once found we can match up known individuals. (See our 5 year report on the website) Through doing this we managed to identify a seahorse that had been seen 4 years before, confirming our theory that some seahorses return to Studland Bay.

The photo database is part of the National Seahorse Database, the largest of its kind in the world and is the longest running survey of its type in the world.

This project would not have been possible without the help of so many volunteers such as Eva, John, Paul, Kim and Chris and Emily from Weymouth Sea Life Centre and many, many others who have dived this site since 2008 (over 1,000 volunteer dive days) to tag and study individual seahorses and because of this we understand so much more about European seahorses now. The confirmation of this knowledge helps us to protect seahorses in the wild and to try and secure a long term future for them. Numbers have dramatically dropped at South Beach, Studland Bay in Dorset from 58 sightings (40 individuals) in 2008 down to 8 sightings (4 individuals in 2013), so urgent action is needed and this is why we are so pleased Studland Bay has been put forward (again) as a proposed Marine Conservation Zone

Compare and Contrast site gets added to the Seahorse survey work in Dorset

We added another site to our seahorse survey work in 2013, It is very important that we understand what is going on with the seahorses in the UK and a lot can be learnt from one site, such as South Beach in Studland Bay but species behave differently on different sites and so we have adopted another site in Dorset to act as a 'Compare and Contrast' site to Studland. This site which is to remain undisclosed for now, will allow us to understand what is going on in Dorset with its seahorses and divers have already found a number of seahorses on the site, including a very large 18cm bright yellow female. Seahorse numbers have remained stable on this site compared with the rapid decline in South Beach, Studland.

Natural England

After many years The Seahorse Trust and Natural England are now working very closely together to make a difference to seahorse protection. We have now got a Natural England liaison Officer who we are working closely with to rewrite their website and to write guidelines (advisory notes) to help conserve seahorses throughout the country.

The Seahorse Lady of NE has spent a great deal of time with us discussing seahorse issues and taking advice from the trust and we hope this is the start of a full working relationship between the two organisations which will lead to greater protection for the seahorses.

We are just about to confirm a MOU between the two organisations so the data from the National Seahorse Database can be used to support the inclusion of various sites into the MCZ process and to try and implement the legal protection of seahorses.

Leaflet to protect seagrass beds

The ongoing lobbying and bringing to public attention about the problems at Studland Bay has led to a Leaflet by Royal Yachting Association (RYA) on what to do about anchoring on seagrass meadows. We hope this leaflet will make a difference and change boat owner's actions when on sensitive sites like Studland and other seagrass beds in the UK. RYA have finally acknowledged that anchoring and mooring can and does harm seagrass beds and the education of boat owners is important to changing attitudes.

Their leaflet can be found on The Seahorse Trust page at

<http://www.theseahorsetrust.org/studland-tagging-project.aspx>

Volunteers make a huge difference

Any charity is only as good as its volunteers and here at the trust we are incredibly lucky to have an amazing team of volunteers from all over the world helping us in our work, fund raising, doing seahorse research, helping with surveys and spreading the word and we would like to publically thank everyone involved.

Sea Life Centres

For many years Sea Life Centres have been very supportive of the trust and its work and we would like to say a massive thank you to all the teams throughout Europe (and around the world) who have been raising much needed funds for our research work. All of the 26 European Sea Life centres and their amazing guests have contributed to our work through fund raising and education.

Sea Life staff and their guests have been helping to add to our knowledge about seahorses, by setting up their own surveys in their local area. Although it's early days they have been asking local fishermen about the seahorses in their areas, arranging dives with local divers and helping to build up a greater knowledge on seahorses and have plans to roll this out around the world.

If you have seen a seahorse, wherever in the world, there is an online reporting form on the Trust's website at www.theseahorsetrust.org/divers.aspx so that sightings can be sent through to us or just e-mail them to the Trust. Once we receive them we can add them to our database.

It might be cold wet and stormy here in the UK but Seahorse surveys are being carried in Sydney Harbour, Australia by Sea Life's Robbie and the team at Manly Aquarium. Robbie and the team have adopted an area



and are carrying out exploratory dives and have already had repeated sightings which is great news.

In January, trust director Neil went up to Manchester to attend Chinese New Year with Manchester's Sea Life Aquarium team and some

local school children and they

took along Percy, the Chinese dragon, Seahorse. The children went around China Town in Manchester congratulating the local community with Happy New Year in Chinese. It was a great day and highlighted the plight of Seahorses in the Traditional Medicine Trade where our colleagues at Save Our Seahorses in Ireland estimate that over 150 million seahorses a year are being used; a very unsustainable amount, which could lead to seahorses being functionally extinct in 20 to 30 years.

If you visit a Sea Life Centre please make a donation in the vortex collection bins and help us, with Sea Life and all our other partners in making a difference to seahorses and their protection around the world.

Just as we are going to press we have found out that China has banned the hunting and trading of 420 species in China including a seahorse species (check out our website for more information).

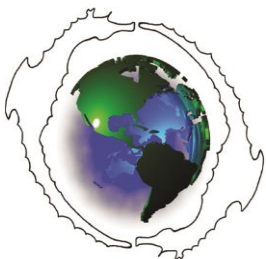


Seahorse project in Malta

We have now set up the project in Malta based on the British Seahorse Survey, it is important to work with local people so the project has set up partnerships on the island with local dive centres through the PDSA, individual divers, the university, the Nature Trust for Malta and many others.

We have been joined in Malta by volunteer coordinator Donna who runs Bubbles Dive Centre on Gozo and officially represents the trust and the PDSA on the islands and we also have Neville from Divewise in Malta also from the PDSA (Professional Diving Schools Association). This is an exciting project and as it develops we hope to learn so much more about the seahorses and the marine environment around this incredible archipelago.

Seahorse Alliance



Over the winter we have worked hard on the Seahorse Alliance and have been discussing projects between other partners in the alliance, especially in Europe to link up or share information.

Throughout Europe there are a number of seahorse projects that are doing similar things and it is vital that they and others around the world communicate and work with each other, so the Seahorse Alliance was formed to do this.

To date there are partners in the UK, Malta, Spain, France, Italy, Cambodia, Malaysia, Australia and Ireland, amongst others.

Save Our Seahorses Ireland

Our sister organisation at SOS (Ireland) have been really busy promoting seahorse conservation through a series of documentaries and children's TV programmes. They have also been continuing their research

into the cultivation of Seahorses in the hope of achieving 'conservation through cultivation'. To help this along they recently employed two new staff members; Raffaele an Italian Marine biologist with years of experience in Aquaculture and an Irish marine biologist that studied Fisheries Management and Ornamentals in Sparsholt in England, both have a passion for conservation and have greatly added to Save Our Seahorses. Kealan the CEO of SOS gave a talk for the Zoological department of Trinity College, Dublin about his work in hopes to encourage future generations and is currently in talks to form a partnership with the Zoological department to help in all our research.



MCC Cambodia



Things are very busy in Cambodia, Paul and the team from MCC and the volunteers from Projects Abroad have set up the second site in the east of the country in Kep province, so there will be a choice of two sites to study seahorses and marine life now.

Ben and the team from Exeter University hope to go back again this year to continue their terrestrial surveys and all of us have been invited to write reports for a Cambodian biology journal which is great news.

Marine Conservation Cambodia

www.marineconservationcambodia.org/

Projects Abroad

www.projects-abroad.co.uk/volunteer-projects/conservation-and-environment/

[environment/](http://www.projects-abroad.co.uk/volunteer-projects/conservation-and-environment/)

News in Brief

- We have now uploaded wild seahorse videos onto You tube, the links can be found on our website
- We have uploaded a 5 Year report on the work at Studland onto the website
- Lila and her amazing team sent us a fantastic Christmas card with a seahorse that they designed
- GAC for the second year running kindly made a Christmas donation to us, thank you so much to them all for their support
- Thank you to Sealife and their guests for their amazing support again this year, without them we could not so much to protect and understand about seahorses.
- We would also like to thank the National Marine Aquarium in Plymouth, OS Aquatics in Dorset and Kaleidoscope Aquatics in Paignton, Devon and so many others for their amazing support of our work

Facebook

Facebook is spreading the word about Seahorses, the natural world and the work of the trust which is very important. Our Facebook page now has 756 members, a rise of almost 150 from 3 months ago and rapidly growing, keeps people informed about our work and links seahorse fans around the world

Thanks goes to Beccy the marine warden on Lundy who kindly administers this site for us as well as holding down a full time very busy job. If you want to join just look us up on Facebook and do a friend request.

E-bay

Following on from our successful partnership with E-bay to get the sale of seahorses banned, they have now added Australia to the list of countries they have banned the sale of seahorses from and to, to bring them in line with International conservation laws. This means that the EU, US and Australia are all now restricted in selling seahorses through E-bay



Adoption and membership schemes (UK only)

The Trust has an adoption and membership scheme so why not support the work of the Trust and get your friends to adopt one of our British seahorses, for as little as £4 per month, or they could become a member of the Trust for a minimum donation of £25 per year. The money we raise from the adoptions and memberships goes directly to the work of the Trust. Your adoption will help to secure a future for seahorses here in the UK and in other countries through our research and partnership work.

You can pay a one off donation for the year, so why not make it a gift for a friend or member of your family, this year we have had people adopting seahorses in people's memory when they have sadly passed away, as gifts for birthdays and Christmas and as wedding gifts.

Website

The Trust website is still undergoing changes and we would like to say a special thank you to Gavin who often does work for us for free and without his input we would not have such a great website. Here at the Trust we highly recommend him and he can be found on his website at <http://www.gslsolutions.co.uk/> Gavin and his team are just about to put a shop on the site for us, so that we will have seahorse memorabilia to sell.

Fund raising

The life blood of any charity is the funds and resources to be able to do its work and even though we have a multitude of amazing volunteers here at the trust we still need to raise money to keep everything going. Ideally we need 4 to 5 full time staff to look after our existing projects, all the endless admin and to develop many more projects; every year we turn down so many projects due to a lack of resources, so this is where we need your help. Calling all voluntary fund raisers and event organisers we need your help please. To keep the trust driving forward, develop all of our projects and meet the demands of all the work we undertake and need to undertake we need to constantly fund raise. If there are any voluntary fund raisers out there or people prepared to do events to raise funds for us; we need you (please).

Don't forget to **Gift Aid** any donation you make; we can claim 25p for every pound you donate from the Inland Revenue as long as you are a UK tax payer, and the great news is it does not cost you a penny more. Contact us for more information on Gift Aiding or fund raising.

**We are a registered charitable trust with the Charity Commissioners of England and Wales,
our charity number is 1086027.**

Thank you to all and have a great spring and summer

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