

Marine Recorder's Report 2014

2013 was an exceptional year for British marine mollusca, with multiple new species recorded for the British and Irish fauna and even new species described from British waters, and so was always going to be a difficult year to follow in terms of highlights.

2014 began promisingly though, with the exceptional winter storms blowing some unusual vagrant species onto southwest coasts, attached to flotsam items. Steve Trehwella reported the Caribbean epibyssate bivalve species *Isognomon bicolor* (Adams, 1845) and *Pinctada imbricata* Röding, 1798, both from a plastic drum stranded on Chesil Beach. A coconut found by Tracey Williams washed ashore near Newquay, Cornwall, had several small bivalves attached which were confirmed by Anna Holmes of the National Museum of Wales as *Martesia fragilis* Verrill & Bush, 1898 (Holmes A. et al., 2015 in press), the first record of the species being stranded in Britain. *Martesia* is a genus of wood-boring piddocks with three species known in the Atlantic. *M. striata* (L., 1758) is the species usually (albeit still very rarely) stranded in Britain and Ireland, though they can be difficult to identify to species level and subsequent examination of specimens in the National Museum of Wales collection has revealed two specimens from Galway which are actually *M. fragilis* and pre-date the Newquay records.

Later in the year Steve Trehwella made another interesting vagrant find on Chesil. This time the flotsam item was a bait jar, a north American brand with very fine slits in the lid, containing a number of north American species which had evidently survived a long journey washing across the Atlantic and, given that the specimens were much bigger than the slits, had almost certainly grown inside it from planktonic larvae. This exotic fauna contained two scallops, identified as *Euvola ziczac* (L. 1758) and *Aequipecten heliacus* (Dall, 1925) both known from the Gulf of Mexico.

The common sea hare species *Aplysia punctata* (Cuvier, 1803) will be familiar to many, particularly anybody who has witnessed one of its occasional mass spawnings. The two other species of *Aplysia* known from British waters are much rarer here, albeit notorious for growing to a considerable size. The reason for their rarity is that they are primarily species of more southern waters with southern Britain at the extreme limits of their range, hence a flurry of records during 2014 inevitably prompts speculation as to possible causes.

The flurry commenced in May when Paula Lightfoot was fortunate enough to spot a specimen of *A. depilans* Gmelin, 1791 while diving in the Helford estuary in Cornwall. Many references imply that the larger *Aplysia* species are only likely to be encountered sublittorally but later in the year a fresh dead specimen of *A. depilans* was found washed up in Havelet Bay, Guernsey. Then, in November, a live specimen, with egg masses, was found by Peter Mark Crowther on rocks at low tide at St. Brelade, Jersey. Peter photographed this specimen extensively and took some measurements; it was over 30cm long and weighed over 2lb. Despite the numerous photographs it was rather difficult to determine whether this was *A. depilans* or the third species, *A. fasciata* Poiret, 1789; there are numerous features which can aid field identification, the most useful perhaps being that in *A. fasciata* the parapodial lobes are fused only at the extreme posterior of the animal (which apparently enables the animals to swim very effectively which must be a most impressive sight) whereas in *A. depilans* they are fused much higher up the back. With expert help from João Pedro Silva and Gonçalo Calado of Portugal, this Jersey specimen was confidently identified as *A. fasciata* based on the shape of the posterior part of the foot.

Rounding off this relative glut of records of the rarer *Aplysia*, the prolific Cornish worker David Fenwick got an unexpected Christmas present when he discovered two *A. depilans* in a low tidal pool at Marazion on Christmas Eve. They were still there when he returned after Christmas and were seen by a number of others too, so became minor local celebrities. At the time of writing the winter

has so far been relatively mild with no mid-range forecast of it worsening, so if this is reflected in the seawater temperatures then the increase in sightings of these species may continue through 2015. If you are in the southwest or the Channel Islands then look on slabby rock shores at low water.

Staying on the theme of large but rarely recorded species, there were interesting 2014 records for *Ranella olearium* (L., 1758) and *Acanthochitona fascicularis* (L., 1767). David McKay received an email from one of his fishing boat contacts in the summer saying they had hauled up something which they recognised as unusual, from the Porcupine Bight off SW Ireland. It was alive when found so they had frozen it to keep for David and sent some photographs which suggested it was indeed *R. olearium*. This was confirmed when he was eventually united with the specimen, although it had passed through the hands of a crew member who had “cleaned” it, disposing of the dead animal with the operculum and removing the periostracum.

Despite being the largest of the British and Irish chitons, specimens of *A. fascicularis* are rarely reported. Admittedly it is a southern species and so the available range for records is limited; perhaps it is also particularly well camouflaged and hides well in crevices, or populations do not often extend up into the littoral zone. Specimens can be found though, as Alasdair Shaw’s find on a stone under the pier at Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight demonstrated. This highlights one of the joys of coastal recording (or biodiversity recording in general) in that one never knows what is going to turn up next, even in what might be considered the most unlikely places.

Returning to the opisthobranchiata, the divers have again been making some excellent finds and taking splendid photographs. Sue Daly in the Channel Islands found and photographed a beautiful specimen of *Dendrodoris limbata* (Cuvier, 1804), primarily a Mediterranean species, when diving at Les Ecrehous, NE of Jersey. Regular contributor Jim Anderson, whose Scottish Nudibranchs website is always worth a visit, made a further find of *Cuthona nana* (Alder & Hancock, 1842), a species which until the previous year had eluded him. Again the specimen was associated with the hydroid *Hydractinia* on shells housing hermit crabs, and this time there was also spawn present. Several divers have also been collecting and providing sublittoral substrate samples from sites all over Britain and Ireland for analysis. Some have proved very diverse (82 mollusc species from one small bag sample from West Wales) while others, albeit much less diverse, have provided fresh records for more commonly recorded species, e.g. *Manzonina crassa* (Kanmacher, 1798) and *Tornus subcarinatus* (Montagu, 1803) off Norfolk.

The Society’s week-long Yorkshire marine recording trip has been documented in Mollusc World (Issue 37 March 2015) and produced several records of note, particularly from the dived and dredged material available, such as a first North Sea record of *Doto hystrix* Picton & Brown, 1981 and numerous firsts for the waters off Yorkshire. The find causing the greatest stir however was a pulmonate practically from dry land, namely the *Otina ovata* (Brown, 1827) population found in caves at Flamborough by Jan Light (you obviously can’t keep a good marine recorder down). Not only is this species rarely encountered live, this represented a first live record for the entire British east coast, a huge range extension. It is also worth mentioning here that specimens from this find were used by Ian Smith to generate one of his photographic accounts for the species. All of Ian’s excellent photographic species accounts may be found here: www.flickr.com/photos/56388191@N08/collections. There are also links from the British Marine Mollusca group on Facebook (www.facebook.com/groups/british.marine.mollusca) which continues to thrive, with 283 members at the time of writing and a continuous stream of interesting and stimulating postings.

Whilst on the subject of pulmonates, and at the risk of treading on the toes of my colleague the Honourary Non-marine Recorder, *Myosotella* [= *Ovatella*] *myosotis* (Draparnaud, 1801) is another of

that small suite of molluscs inhabiting the supralittoral zone and hence has half a foot in both the marine and non-marine camps. It has been good to see potential progress being made in 2014 to resolve the long-standing issue of whether the strongly dentate and weakly dentate forms, both found frequently around Britain and Ireland, represent separate species, subspecies or are merely ecomorphs of a single species. Anatomic work by António M. de Frias Martins at the University of the Azores suggests that although *M. myosotis* is indeed actually a complex of species, all British specimens belong to a single taxon, the available name for which is *M. denticulata* (Montagu, 1803). More detail is given by Martin Willing in Mollusc World (Issue 36 November 2014) and Prof. Martins is still keen to receive further British and Irish specimens for anatomical examination, particularly from rocky, exposed habitats.

2014 also saw some technological advances in the Society's recording activities. Some will be aware of the online iRecord facility (www.brc.ac.uk/irecord) where users can log their records and recording activities, including photographs. The Society's Recorders have undertaken to verify mollusc records on the system, thereby helping users to confirm their identifications and at the same time making those records available to the Society's datasets. There had been some concern as to how that data might actually be migrated between iRecord and the Society's datasets (held in the Recorder 6 software) and thence to the NBN Gateway website (see www.nbn.org.uk) where all the data is made publicly available. This hurdle has now been crossed and recently over a thousand marine mollusc records were migrated from iRecord into Recorder 6 and from there to NBN. Online submission of records is increasingly popular, so this represents a significant step forward for the Society.

Huge thanks are given to everybody who has contributed to the ongoing development of the Society's marine recording activities. Singling people out can be controversial but for 2014 particular thanks is given to Paul Dansey (for submission of a very large batch of *Ensis* records), David McKay (for large numbers of records submitted, particularly from offshore, with many more to follow in 2015), John Fisher (for continued support and for long, long hours spent sorting grit samples and compiling lists) and Mike Weideli, whose support and assistance with Recorder 6 are beyond value.

Simon Taylor 24/03/2015