South West Marine Ecosystems

Fish Community of Practice (CoP)

2025 Reference Report

Fish & Turtles

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Reference: SWME Fish Community of Practice (2026) Reference Report 2025 for Fish and Turtles.

South-West Marine Ecosystems - Fish Community of Practice (CoP)
2025 Reference Report Fish & Turtles – Highlights & Conclusions

1. **Range Extensions** Document the changes in the fish species doing very well or which are new to the south-west and whose populations are becoming established (range extensions)– including records of them breeding in south-west waters. Key findings for 2025 include:

- Continued high numbers of conger eels including many juveniles – 'bootlace eels'
- Comber *Serranus cabrilla* numbers continue to grow and expand in geographic range now extending east to sightings off the Lulworth Banks
- Widespread records of blackspot (red) bream shoals in Cornwall and Devon both juveniles and large adult shoals offshore
- The continued expansion of black bream, especially eastwards
- Ballion's wrasse – further observations of nesting from the Plymouth area. This wrasse has a discontinuous distribution
- The explosion of Common Octopus and these becoming a food for conger eels and blue sharks

2. **Range Declines and falling populations** Document the changes in fish species whose populations are becoming reduced (range declines). Key findings for 2025 include:

- Basking sharks very few sightings records (3) from the South West
- Mackerel another poor year for summer catches

3. **Rare Fish** Note records of rare fish that are only occasionally reported in South West and UK but may well signal an early warning of a significant range expansion. Key findings for 2025 include:

- Sturgeon – a single large fish caught
- Halibut – a single record for this species in south-west
- Meagre – seven reported – usually only seen in single records annually
- Two banded bream – specimens photographed in Alderney and Devon
- White bream - one record of this very rare species although there is a population in the Channel islands

4.Ecosystem change and regime shift in the South West Further analysis and research has confirmed that changes to planktonic systems have supported significant changes to fish populations since the 2014-2015 period. Small forage fish Sardine, Anchovy and Sprat are doing well but with large inter-annual changes in the biomass, whilst apex predators like the Atlantic Bluefin Tuna and Blue Shark are doing very well.

5.Species of Conservation interest Document changes of key species which are of conservation interest because of their threatened status. Key findings for 2025 include:

- The Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRA) initiative from the IUCN Shark Specialist Group delineated nine ISRAs in the south-west, with a further two transboundary ISRAs running through the region, one candidate ISRA and one potential Area of Interest (pAoI), with seven qualifying elasmobranch species identified.
- Basking sharks – a protected species – seem to have undergone a range shift northwards
- Seahorse observations have been at the usual level and predation by black bream of juvenile seahorses reported again
- Efforts to conserve the Shad are developing

6.Connections to commercial fisheries Document changes and links to fisheries with commercial species where changes are being observed by many different sets of observers

- Forage fish Peltic survey – continued increase in overall Sprat, Sardine and Anchovy biomass
- Interactions of fisheries with skates and rays highlighted including bottom trawling and tangle netting
- A record catch of mature Gilthead Bream
- Lesser Sandeels – decline of larger animals in lesser sandeels (*Ammodytes tobianus)* and failure of angling bait fishery
- Substantial increase in gillnet use in South West (Cornwall), with increase in commercial catch of skate and rays, bycatch of critically endangered shark species (e.g. Tope) and implications for bycatch of other top predators such as cetaceans and seabirds.

7.Events There do not appear to have been any significant 'events' in 2025 such as the 2024 Sardine wreck.

8.Location reports Highlight records and reports from specific locations from various studies
A new development in this report highlights reports from Christchurch and Poole bay, the Scilly Isles, the Solent, Falmouth and Wembury. The way we report such records is challenging and informed by recent Defra mNCEA studies.

9. **Turtles**

- The number of turtles reported in 2025 was about the average for the region.
- There were about equal numbers of hardshell turtles and leatherbacks.

Contents

Introduction

The SWME Fish Community of Practice (CoP) was formed in 2023 and was reconvened in November 2025. The first CoP meeting was held on December 8th (2025) to collect together observations made in 2025 and this process was continued with a further meeting in January (13th 2026) with a webinar held on March 18th. The editorial team of topic specialists has come together in 2024 and this reference report is a product of their contributions drawing upon many individual observations. This information has been used to prepare the 2025 SWME Fish Webinar, Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L63hLdnAEKg&t=3023s the SWME conference presentation. This report will be edited down to form the Fish & Turtles chapter in the SWME Annual Report for 2025. We are still finding our way through the process aspects of bringing such a diversity (60+) people and inputs into recording an annual review!

This Reference Report for 2025 has been produced with the input a large number of people from different communities including divers, sports anglers, commercial fishermen, environmental NGOs, researchers, users of baited and remote video recordings, telemetry, eDNA as well as observers who have reported novel finds in an *ad hoc* way. The report is a powerful endorsement of the *collaborative* approach to annual reporting. It is interesting to see how the inputs from the different stakeholder groups using different methods are *independently corroborating* observations on changes e.g. the growth of the conger eel populations. The information and data sources for this report are **not** held by SWME but by the individual contributors to the Reference Report; their permission should be sought before use.

The aim of this Reference report is to describe the changes that are occurring to the fish species in the south-west which because of the annual nature of the process can act as an early warning of change. Predictions arising from climate change on the composition of the fish fauna suggests that there will be significant changes over time and a number of these predictions seem to be being realised. Two further references cover this:
Projected impacts of warming seas on commercially fished species at a biogeographic boundary of the European continental shelf Maltby et al (2020), and
Poleward Increases and Equatorial Declines in Marine Species: Current Biology. Hastings et al (2020).

This report highlights information from a range of sources corroborating the changes that are taking place.

The objectives of the report are to document:

1. **Range Extensions** Document the changes in the fish species doing very well or which are new to the south-west and whose populations are becoming established (range extensions)– including records of them breeding in south-west waters
2. **Range Declines and falling populations** Document the changes in fish species whose populations are becoming reduced (range declines). Key findings for 2025 include:
3. **Rare Fish** Note records of rare fish that are only occasionally reported in south-west and UK but may well signal an early warning of a significant range expansion.
4. **Ecosystem change and regime shift in the South West** To document change is the role of fish species in the marine ecosystems of the South West.
5. **Species of Conservation interest** Document changes of key species which are of conservation interest because of their threatened status.
6. **Connections to commercial fisheries** Document changes and links to fisheries with commercial species where changes are being observed by many different sets of observers
7. **Events** Document events involving fish populations e.g. sardine 'wreck' and changes at particular locations.
8. **Location reports** Highlight records and reports from specific locations from various studies
9. **Data and research** Document research and recording approaches which are making important gains to our knowledge.
10. **Turtles** Document annual turtle numbers in the south-west in the context of national records

These objectives have been used as the basis for reporting the headline items in 2025

Elasmobranchs

Simon Thomas (ST) Overall editor elasmobranchs bluedogfishing.simon@aol.co.uk

ISRA's (Important Shark and Ray Areas) - Harriet Allen & Sophy Phillips

The Important Shark and Ray (ISRA) project is an initiative of the IUCN Shark Specialist Group (SSG). ISRAs are 'discrete, three-dimensional portions of habitat, important for one or more shark species, that are delineated and have the potential to be managed for conservation'. The selection of ISRAs is based on criteria including vulnerability, ecology, life-history traits, distinctiveness and areas of high diversity. In the European Atlantic region, 124 ISRAs were delineated. Of these, nine fall within the south-west region and were designated for species including starry smooth-hound, common blue skate, nursehound (Bull Huss), undulate ray, small-eyed ray and lesser-spotted dogfish (cat shark). A further two transboundary ISRAs run through the south-west region for highly migratory species such as porbeagle shark, basking shark, tope and starry smooth hound. One candidate ISRA and one potential Area of Interest (pAoI) where data were not current sufficient to designate an ISRA were also identified in the south-west.

Larger sharks

Large shark DNA studies

Charter and recreational skippers successfully swabbed mucous from 274 sharks (223 Blue Sharks (*Prionace glauca*) , 49 Porbeagle Sharks (*Lamna nasus*) and two Common Thresher (*Alopias vulpinus*)) during 2024-2025, which have been stored by the University of Plymouth for future genetic analysis. The project was coordinated by the Pat Smith Database and funded by Sea-Changers. These samples are for use by any researcher with a compelling project. Please contact Simon Thomas at bluedogfishing.simon@aol.com for more information.

Common Thresher (*Alopias vulpinus)*

ST: There were 16 Common Thresher reported during 2025 with the patten of fewer fish off the Isle of Wight repeated during 2025. There were three reported from Looe, 2 from Plymouth and 4 from Falmouth during 2025, with fish reported from early July until the end of October Generally they were seen off Looe and Plymouth early in the summer and then further west in the region when the bluefin tuna appeared. A single specimen was released from the North Cornwall coast. The stranding on Par beach in early January 2025 (reported in the 2024 report); there were two other stranded thresher in the autumn of 2024.

Mike Langman: Common Thresher Shark reported on 29th July from Berry Head at about 9.30am one smallish individual of approximately 2m max including tail. It jumped clear of the water at least twice. Extremely long upper tail fin thrashing around was almost as long as the body of the shark.

Porbeagle (*Lamna nasus*)

ST: 53 porbeagle recorded this year in the SW including 22 small sharks during November and December Just east of the Manacles Again, many were seen, feeding on bass, later in Lyme Bay. Females were fewer in number off the North Coast of Cornwall in the spring of 2025, perhaps deterred by a persistent algal bloom, mid good numbers of males and females were released of the North Coast of Cornwall and Devon during the summer months, although inconsistent weather prevented boats from fishing this area late in the season. The overall distribution pattern during 2025 was like that seen during 2025

Blue Shark *(Prionace glauca*)

Sightings

ST: There were 1115 Blue Sharks caught and released from Looe in 2025, although numbers decreased in the middle of summer. Murray Collings (*Swallow 2*, Looe) released 58 blue sharks on one day in early October, a new port record.

ST: There were fewer large Blue Sharks seen during 2025 than in previous years, with 85 sharks above 70 inches recorded from Looe, compared to 104 in 2024. It is noted that 70 inches is approximately equivalent to size at maturity for the species.

ST: As for the last 10 years, many female sharks were seen with fresh bite marks indicating mating behaviour and the presence of mature males. In addition, over 40 year-zero Blue Sharks were reported and analysis of the umbilical scars from photographs by Michelle Passerotti (NOAA apex predator program) indicated that these fish were likely only 2-4 weeks old.
ST: There was evidence that Blue Sharks were feeding on Common Octopus during the summer as many sharks had octopus sucker marks present.

Blue shark research Fig 1 shows the catches of Blue Shark. Bryce Stewart reported one of his PhD students Hayley Roberts, has shown a decadal time lag correlated with the Atlantic Meridional Oscillation (AMOC). Blue Shark numbers increasing after warmer periods of the AMOC.

NOAA , tagging. In 2024 1785 Blue Sharks were tagged from Looe (SWME Fish CoP2024) a number of these have been recaught off Portugal and the Celtic Deeps**.** The tagging continued on a smaller scale this year with 140 tags deployed. So far 30 tag recaptures have been reported.

BS: Survivorship after tagging Francesco Garzon *et al* has recently completed a study on Blue Shark tag and release survivorship and discovered that 96% of sharks studied survived capture (Garzon *et al*. 2025)

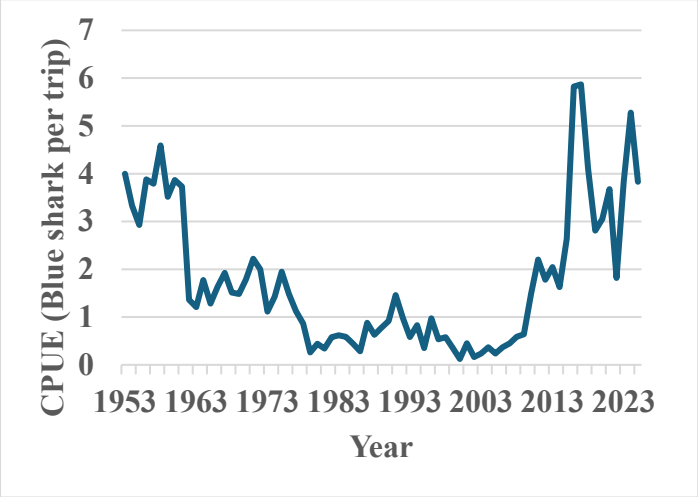

Figure 1 Catch Per Unit Effort (Blue Sharks per trip) from Looe, Plymouth and Falmouth from 1953 to 2025

Atlantic Bluefin Tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*) Tom Horton T.Horton@exeter.ac.uk & **Sophy Phillips** sophy.phillips@cefas.gov.uk

The recovery of Atlantic Bluefin Tuna (BFT) is ongoing story which has led to considerable interest in the specialist and wider community both locally and nationally.

Quota In 2025, the United Kingdom was allocated a total of 66.15 tonnes of Atlantic Bluefin Tuna quota by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). This quota was distributed as follows: Commercial Fishery: 45 tonnes were designated for a trial commercial fishery. Recreational Permitting Schemes: 13 tonnes were allocated to support catch-and-release recreational fishing programs. Bycatch and Tagging Programs: The remaining quota was reserved for bycatch allowances (7.15 t) and scientific research and tagging initiatives (1 t). For more information see the DEFRA website. This quota did not extend to the devolved administrations of the Channel Islands.

Management: The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) manage and permit recreational sea anglers to monitor both fisheries and the catch and release the statistics. 2025 data have been released (~140 licences issued and >2600 captures reported):
Bluefin Tuna Catch and Release Recreational Fishery (CRRF) 2025 - GOV.UK

"Feeding the Comeback" is a new scientific project, led by Tom Horton at the University of Exeter and supported by the Devon Environment Foundation, Cornwall Council, and the Fishmongers Company amongst others focused on studying the diet of returning Atlantic bluefin tuna to ensure their long-term recovery by understanding their prey and informing sustainable management, with strong community and fisher involvement. The initiative highlights the tuna's spectacular return to UK waters after decades and aims to balance fishing with conservation by educating the public and policymakers on ecosystem health. Approximately 100 Atlantic bluefin tuna stomachs were sampled by collaborating with the commercial fishery and the MMO in the 2025 season. Results are expected to be shared in the Spring of 2026.

Sightings

These sightings come from differing observers covering, research, behaviour, feeding and timing.

- Peltic: Co-feeding with Cory's and Great Shearwaters now commonplace – huge increases in these birds associated with the tuna
- Mike Langman: Atlantic Bluefin Tuna – at least four seen jumping from Start Point on 4th August during morning seawatching.
- Sightings close inshore: From Start Point – BBC coverage & Jake Taylor-Bruce (Sept) I've seen a couple of bluefin very close in to Wembury Bay, inside the boundary of the Mewstone but towards the mouth of the Yealm.
- DH: A dead individual was found floating in Plymouth harbour - From 'Nextdoor' **Nic R.** Woodford· 31 Jan 2025 Spotted a rather large tuna floating in the Sound today. It wasn't long before a Barbican seagull spotted it and dived for a free meal. Law of the jungle I guess, or the ocean in this case.
- Behaviour – daily vertical migrations Jess Rudd et al. (2025 - link), "Use of accelerometry to measure the dynamics of activity patterns of Atlantic Bluefin Tuna after tagging and release". This study used high- and low-resolution accelerometer tags deployed on Atlantic Bluefin Tuna in the English Channel to quantify both immediate and longer-term behavioural responses to capture and tagging. The authors found a pronounced burst of activity immediately after release that subsided within hours, followed by an extended recovery period lasting days to weeks with reduced activity and disrupted diel patterns. Longer deployments showed that normal behaviour includes strong diel vertical migration and daytime-biased activity in summer, and that the absence of these patterns early in records likely reflects capture and tagging effects that persist longer and are more complex than previously recognised.ST: Cefas might be doing something similar on catch and release survivorship
- Julie Hatcher Dorset WT Bluefin Tuna off Portland Bill. They have been around in September but at a recent SeaWatch at Portland Bill on 2nd October they were just off the Bill for the whole of the watch and some photos were captured. Not unusual nowadays at this time of year but worth reporting.
- From KH Tuna etc video: (20+) Video | Facebook
- Doug H ITV News West Country 29th October 2025 A record-breaking Bluefin Tuna weighing 210kg has been caught off the Devon coast - using just a rod and line! It's the biggest catch reported so far this year and was sold for more than £2,000 at Brixham Fish Market. https://www.facebook.com/ITVWestcountry.

Channel Islands

- Nicholas Joualt: Jersey Government have undertaken a study to see whether they can open their waters to fishing for ABFT; currently this is banned as they are a protected species. The report is online and has been prepared with Exeter University
- Sophy Phillips: There was one vessel in Jersey permitted to fish for BFT in 2025
- There is good film taking using a drone of a Blue Fin shoal off Alderney – BBC piece
- Jersey & Alderney Published reports of Bluefin Tuna – via Nick Joualt The tuna report is from a couple of years ago, so not relevant for 2025, but gives some measurements and numbers. We do have a local professional photographer who goes after them, but he will not share his information.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRAWB7NcfkM
https://www.gov.je/News/2023/pages/bluefintunareport.aspx

Apex predators - Overview

Ecosystem changes since mid-2010s Simon Thomas

Further to his work in the 2024 reference report Simon Thomas has modelled the changes to a number of fish species (Fig. 2). These figures show a significant change in the fish populations after the 2014-15 period. Key points are:

- Gadoids SSB has decreased.
- Apex predators: Sharks and tuna increased.
- Plaice decreased.
- Sole and hake SSB increased before decreasing which correlated with increased fishing mortality.
- Change in prey species?
- More pilchard and anchovy?
- Mackerel moved north, decreased in sprat and herring.

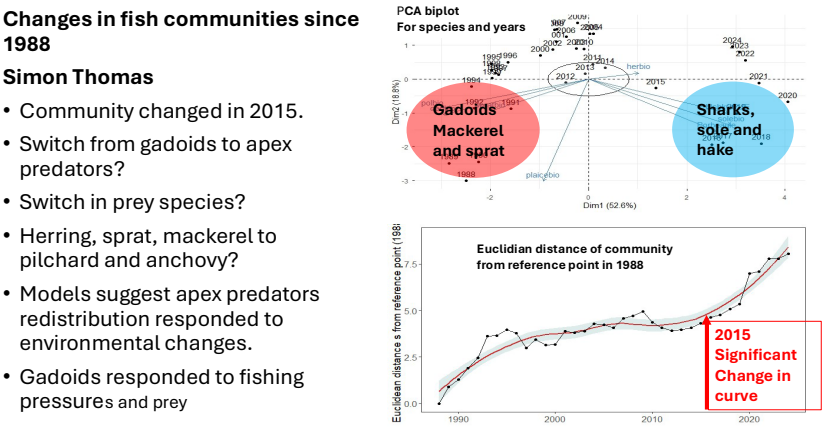

Figure 2 Results from analysis of community changes in prey, mesopredator and apex predator species in the SW from 1988 to 2023. A. Convex hull of state space between cod and blue shark populations between two reference time periods (2000-2005 and 2015-2023). B. Euclidian distance of prey species, mesopredators and apex predators from a reference point in 1988. Analysis performed using the IndPerform package in R.

There is a shift from meso-predators (evidenced by the decline of gadoids Cod, Ling, Pollack and Whiting) to apex predators, notably large numbers of Blue Sharks (Figure 1 and Bluefin Tuna. There are also declines in plaice Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) which occurred during the mid 2010s and a concurrent increase in both sole and hake SSB, although in recent years sole and hake SSB has declined under increased fishing pressure .

Karen Tait: This timing also aligns with a recent paper by Karen Tait and colleagues highlighting changed in fish populations from plankton sampling and DNA studies: Weekly eDNA samples spanning 2012 – 2022 revealed a major decline in fish diversity, with ~60% fewer species being detected. The biggest losses have been among larger commercially important benthopelagic, demersal and reef-dwelling taxa. At the same time, fast-maturing pelagic species such as sardine and anchovy have increased. These changes match a decline in fish egg and larval biomass, suggesting fewer young fish are being produced or surviving. A parallel pelagic biomass size-spectra time series (2008 – 2024) spanning bacteria to fish larvae provided a mechanistic explanation: increasingly steep slopes and declining spectrum elevation show that the marine food web is now supporting far fewer small fish that it used to – around 50% less. This appears to be linked to reduced nutrient supply in summer, which limits how much life the plankton community can support. (Tait, *et.al* 2026)

Other Elasmobranchs

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Basking Shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*) Harriet Allen (HA) Harriet@sharktrust.org

HA: Another low year for Basking Shark sightings in the southwest, with just 3 individuals reported in 2025 to the Shark Trust. Since 2014, this low trend is the new normal in the South West. Increased sighting numbers in Irish waters over the last decade suggest a range/migratory shift for this species, rather than a population decline. Likely following prey availability.
Bex Allen: SeaQuest reported one sighting

An area 'Cornwall' was declared an Important Shark and Ray Area (ISRA), with Basking Sharks as one of the key species, due to historically high sightings of Basking Sharks in the area (up to ~2015). Data submitted from the Shark Trust's Basking Shark Project.

HA: Table 1 Number of Basking Sharks reported from citizen science sightings from 1987 to 2025.
Please note that this data is in part derived from the Marine Conservation Society's Basking Shark Watch Programme (1987-2020), for which the Shark Trust are now custodians of the data. Numbers are approximate based on a polygon search for the Southwest. The Shark Trust report for Basking Sharks in 2025 has been published. (new link: https://issuu.com/sharktrust/docs/basking_shark_project_report_2025_97d30c53a966f2)

Year	Count	Year	Count	Year	Count
1987	161	2000	740	2013	542
1988	585	2001	1,626	2014	86
1989	299	2002	1,274	2015	61
1990	154	2003	536	2016	46
1991	107	2004	455	2017	26
1992	65	2005	1,576	2018	19
1993	81	2006	4,145	2019	7
1994	97	2007	814	2020	21
1995	159	2008	705	2021	36
1996	212	2009	1,444	2022	10
1997	267	2010	872	2023	3
1998	2,637	2011	146	2024	7
1999	4,003	2012	1,175	2025	3

Sightings
Peter Holt: One yachtswoman from the Cattewater Cruising Club told me that she spotted a Basking Shark off the Shagstone on Thursday 12th [June presumably], estimated 5m long, she said that she has seen lots before so can ID them reliably.
KH: Basking Shark. A possible sighting on 2nd October (off the east coast of Lundy) recorded in the Lundy Field Society logbook - trouble is, no name of observer. I have asked the Assistant Warden if she recognises the writing or the observer:

Tope Shark (*Galeorhinus galeus*)
Bex Allen Eight tope were reported to the CWT strandings scheme on Friday 22nd August in Newquay Harbour – looked like discarded by-catch (Plate 1).

Plate 1 Photographer Tope were collected for PME – photo by strandings volunteer Nancy Nenning.

STOM: The number of Tope reported by recreational anglers from both the boat and shore in Cornwall has increased in recent years. The average size of Tope is also reported to be increasing and is likely to be related to ongoing statutory tope protective measures The Tope (Prohibition of Fishing) Order 2008. These measures, introduced in

2008, require rod and line anglers to release all tope following capture. Commercial landings are restricted to just 45kg per day. A Facebook video of a fisherman with a bycatch of tope is available from Bex Allen.

Nursehound (or Bull Huss) (*Scyliorhinus stellaris*) Harriet Allen Harriet@sharktrust.org

HA: Three sites all have records of *in-situ* eggcases over a series of years, identifying them as key reproductive areas for this species within the Cornwall ISRA include Hannafore Point, Mounts Bay and Falmouth Bay. In-situ eggcase data were submitted from the Great Eggcase Hunt for these areas as evidence.

Sightings
HA: Wembury (based on many years of work by John Hepburn) and at Hannafore Point (Cornwall) have been declared ISRAS for Nursehound pupping.
KH: A further Nursehound egg laying site has now been identified near Marazion, with eggs laid on the seaweed *Cystoseira*.
KH: Nursehound eggs. On a couple of seashore excursions (Wembury Point and Hannafore) last year, I was seeing 'usual' numbers. Subtidally at Lundy (two locations): I felt seeing slightly less eggcases entangling Pink Sea Fans. Nursehound appear to favour *Gongolaria* (was *Cystoseira*) *baccata* but also (the less abundant) *Ericaria selaginoides* (was *Cystoseira tamariscifolia*) (Plate 2).

Plate 2 Nursehouse egg cases on seaweed – permission given – Keith Hiscock.

Mat Slatter: Nursehound eggs are often seen during CWT Shoresearch surveys – we have a lot of records of Nursehound egg cases at Prisk Cove (mouth of the Helford). The Fal is very important to Nursehound, backed up by Seasearch records. Also we have had many sightings from Seasearch divers and snorkellers from St Austell Bay.

Jake Taylor-Bruce Devon WT In January 2025 while visiting rockpools and snorkelling along Wembury point lots of Nursehound eggs were in various stages of development were recorded. Some looked very fresh, while some had clearly long since hatched with just the tough keels left attached to the seaweed. One had hatched or been predated recently and had a clingfish inside it, apparently eating the remaining yolk.
Jake Taylor-Bruce Devon WT, (Sept) Nursehounds at Wembury Point] seem to exclusively use bushy berry wrack (*Cystoseira baccata*) for their eggs. Coral has noted that the closely related rainbow wrack (*Ericaria selaginoides*) is disappearing, and I wonder is the bushy wrack will follow with it. Much of the area where these wracks grow is thick with wire weed *(Sargassum muticum*), which seems less suitable for raising eggs, and I speculate whether wireweed is slowly outcompeting the wracks.

STOM: Nursehound are a commonly encountered species by recreational anglers in Cornwall and frequently captured over hard or mixed broken ground. The number of Nursehound appear to be stable. The Fal estuary has long been known to have a large population of Nursehound with fish of all sizes encountered.

Spurdog (*Squalus acanthias*)
ST: The numbers of large Spurdog reported in the waters off Plymouth and Salcombe during 2025 was less than in 2024. However, large specimens were reported from Penzance during this period. South Devon Sea Angling magazine (March). Mike Spiller travelled to the north coast of Devon, where he fished in deep water and big tides, enjoying another good day on the Spurdogs, although the size was generally a bit smaller this time with fish only up to about 12lbs.

STOM. Spurdog have started to reappear in recreational sea angler catches having been largely absent since the early 1980s due to excessive commercial exploitation. The Spurdog recovery measures appear to have had a positive impact upon this slow growing species.

Starry Smoothounds (*Mustelus asterias*)
South Devon Sea Angling magazine (March) Heritage charters out of Watchet are reporting that the first of this year's Smoothhounds are being caught, a sure sign that spring is on the way.

Starry Smoothhounds have become more common since the early 2000s in Cornwall and are now regularly caught from both the boat and shore. Overall, numbers in 2025 appeared to be slightly lower than in previous years which may reflect increased commercial captures.

Greenland Shark (*Somniosus microcephalus*)
A tag from a Greenland Shark was found on a Cornish beach. (A dead Greenland Shark was found on a Cornish beach in February 2022.)

Rays & Skates

Blue Skate (*Dipturus batis)*
HA: 5 egg cases found in north Cornwall (see below)
ST: One caught in the Chesil area by an angler.

Flapper Skate (*Dipturus intermedius*)
ST: One caught five miles off the Lizard by an angler.

Cuckoo Ray (*Leucoraja naevus)*
STOM: Regularly caught by commercial vessels in deeper water. Recreational boat anglers in West Cornwall occasionally encounter them. There have been no reported Cuckoo Ray captured by recreational shore anglers in Cornwall.

Small-eyed Ray (*Raja microocellata*)
Small-eyed Ray are locally abundant in the Bigbury and Whitsand Bay area during 2025 but have been notable by an almost complete absence from areas off Falmouth and SW Cornwall, where they have been previously abundant. There have been reports by commercial fishermen of large numbers of the species in the West of Lyme Bay during 2025. The species continues to have a patchy distribution in the South West.

Jake Taylor-Bruce Devon WT, Wembury On 21st November I found the remains of a large, Small eyed Ray in one of the deeper rockpools on Blackstone reef. Both the wings had been chewed off quite raggedly and all that was left was the head and central body down to the tip of the tail. I wondered if it was seal predation perhaps?

STOM: Recreational anglers in Cornwall recorded far lower number of Small eyed Ray on both the North and South Cornish coasts in 2025. It was evident that the fish were extremely localised when present.

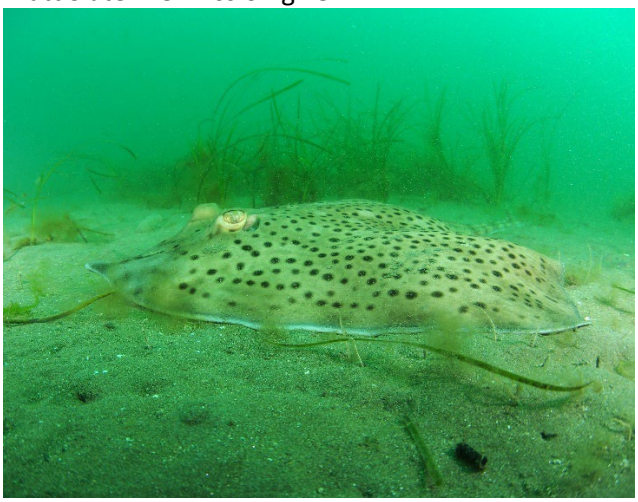
HA: Data for generation of the ISRA for small-eyed ray at Weymouth. There is no enforcement related to it however, it would appear to be a means of increasing awareness.

Spotted ray (*Raja montagui*)
April 2025 From DASSH - Chloe Figueroa Ashforth: In April we received a sighting of a Spotted Ray found in Plymouth. I think this report was sparked by the Easter Sunday BBC Countryfile where the MBA had a feature on spotted rays.

STOM:- There has been a very significant reduction in Spotted Rays around the North and Cornish coasts in recent years. The Fal estuary has been regarded as a notable hotspot for the species appearing inshore in late April and Early May extending through the summer months. However, very few have been captured by shore or boat anglers

in the Fal estuary in recent years. Similar declines have been recorded on the North Cornish coast with the species historically frequent along the coast from Navax point up to Penhale Point, near Newquay

MS: We have had a lot of records this year of Spotted Ray from St Austell bay in the seagrass beds picture Plate 3 Matt Slater Permission given



Thornback Ray (*Raja clavate*)
KH: I also feel like I am seeing less Thornback Rays in Plymouth Sound whilst diving.

April 2025 From DASSH - Chloe Figueroa Ashforth "Generally the Plymouth marina fishes well for Thornback Rays but Spotted Rays have been putting in more frequent appearances. We are pleased that this is happening. All fish caught by anglers are returned . Generally speaking the Thornbacks that we catch are in the 2 lbs to 9lbs in weight category and the Spotted Rays are 2lbs to 6 lbs in weight. The Thornbacks are an even split between male and female and the Spotted Rays appear to be exclusively female, so far Spotted Rays can be more frequently caught to the east of Plymouth from the mouth of the River Erme to the mouth of the Salcombe estuary."

STOM. The numbers of Thornback Ray recorded by recreational shore and boat anglers in Cornwall have declined significantly in recent years. The Fal and Helford estuaries have long been regarded as a stronghold of the species with adults appearing inshore from February through to November. However, within the last 5 years numbers have declined substantially. A small population has however become established in the Fowey estuary over the same period where they were once rarely recorded.

HA: Thornback Ray wings landed by commercial fishermen are subject to a TAC.

Undulate Ray (*Raja undulata*) Martin & Sheilah Openshaw Martin@stardis.co.uk, Matt Doggett
"The ISRA (Important Shark and Ray Area) for Undulate Ray in Kimmeridge Bay was based on the citizen science data from The Undulate Ray Project. SeaLife and the IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group also consolidated existing published data from: Porcupine Marine Natural History Society Bulletin, Inshore fishes of Britain and Ireland by Lin Baldock and Francis Dipper 2023, PhD Thesis - The application of genetics and proteomics for the conservation of sharks and their relatives. Samantha Hook."

ISRAs delineated areas do not offer any extra protections but highlight potential areas for consideration for future research and or conservation activities.

Strategy for undulate skate (*Raja undulata*) in British and Irish waters
There is also an initiative underway led by SeaLIFE and supported by the IUCN Conservation Planning Specialist Group to produce a strategy for Undulate Ray (*Raja undulata*) in British and Irish waters with the aim of maintaining sustainable populations underpinned by a robust understanding of the species. At the time of publication this had not been published. There was a stakeholder meeting at the end of September last year (2025) and they are working to produce the strategy document during 2026. Hopefully this will provide a framework for a better understanding of the species.

STOM: Undulate Ray are not recorded by recreational anglers in Cornwall and there are no shore or boat records for Undulate Ray in Cornwall. Some landings of Undulate Ray wings have been substantial, particularly on Brixham fish market in 2025.

MO: Undulate Ray sightings at the Kimmeridge site continue to decline. It is difficult to continue the monitoring because they are now difficult to find. The Undulate Ray Project is not actively promoting reports via the website; it still accepts reports but hasn't received any sightings in the last year. The Kimmeridge site, a few years ago, would often produce 10-20 sightings on a single dive. In 2024, I did 2-dives explicitly looking for Undulate Rays and saw only 5. In 2025 I did 2 dives when I would reasonably expect to see Undulate Rays, I only saw 1 small juvenile. Therefore, at this site the numbers continue to decline.

The ICES stock assessment for undulate ray in the English Channel concludes the stock remains healthy. This may be true, time will tell, but for reasons undefined it does not reflect experience on a more local basis. The big disconnect is that the ICES assessment is based on an overall English Channel assessment and not influenced by local variations. Site fidelity may be one issue that creates a significant difference between local and Channel wide assessments however there appears to be insufficient data to draw a strong conclusion. The *Undulate Ray Project* started in 2012 when we discovered a site, close to Kimmeridge in Dorset that guaranteed sightings of Undulate Skates. The inshore bottom trawling of Poole and Christchurch bay – see Mal Thomas page 42 – also reports a marked decline in angling catches in that location.

The correlation between the period when the Undulate Rays were protected 2009-2018 and noticeably increased and the period since when the protection has been removed and sightings declined almost to zero has been noted.

The Shark Trust's Great Eggcase Hunt –Harriet Allen HA Harriet@sharktrust.org

HA: Verified finds for uncommon eggcases (in the Southwest) in 2025:

- 4x Cuckoo Ray eggcases

Blue Skate eggcases
Five Blue skate records off Cornwall were the notable records.
via KH, note on Blue Skate egg-cases Tracy Williams (tracey.williams@twpr.co.uk):
The Shark Trust confirmed they were Blue Skate egg cases. The measurements are below in case you need them.
Eggcase 1 found at Watergate Bay 5th July 2025 50°26'39.5"N 5°02'32.2"W
125.81mm (length without horns) x 68.31mm (width) (length with horns 175mm)
Eggcase 2 found at Perran Sands 5th July 2025 50°21'42.6"N 5°09'00.2"W
125.58 (length without horns) x 65.98mm (width) (length with horns 165mm)
Eggcase 3 found at Watergate Bay 6th July 2025 50°26'54.0"N 5°02'28.9"W
118.11mm (length without horns) x 67.38mm (width) (length with horns 170mm)

Table 2 – Eggcases by year for the South West. Numbers are approximate based on a polygon search for the South West and include the values for both verified and unverified records.

Year		*Scyliorhinus canicula* Small spotted Cat Shark	*Scyliorhinus stellaris* Nurse hound, (or Bull Huss)	*Raja clavate* Thornback Ray	*Raja montagui* Spotted Ray	*Raja microocellata* Small-eyed Ray	*Raja brachyura* Blond Ray	*Raja undulata* Undulate Ray
2018		509	561	377	920	129	190	158
2019		510	234	274	1606	179	115	93
2020		418	245	170	1185	155	141	64
2021		586	339	333	1740	334	359	114
2022		490	424	328	2062	197	428	61
2023		673	442	545	2660	239	359	105
2024		577	423	446	1460	184	320	107
2025		279	428	208	916	65	183	39

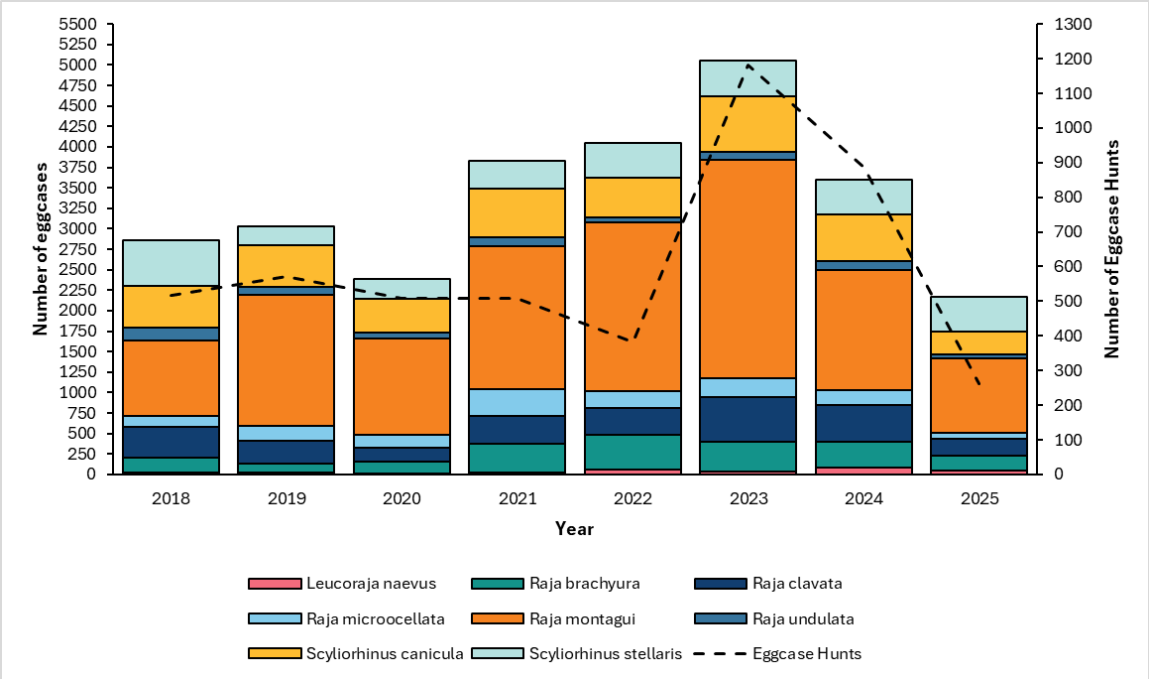


Figure 3 Eggcases by year for the Southwest. Numbers are approximate based on a polygon search for the Southwest and include the values for both verified and unverified records.

Fisheries for Rays by Fixed Nets

STOM, ST, MT There has been a reported substantial increase in the deployment of fixed nets around the Cornish coast in recent years to target crawfish often in deeper water. To put this into context, in 2012, Cornwall IFCA were quoted as stating that up to 1.068 million metres of fixed gill nets were in use per week within the inshore coastal waters of Cornwall. A St Andrews University bycatch assessment report (Defra evidence report) quotes that up to 3500 km of fixed gill net were in use per week (3.5 million metres) around the Cornish coast. It would seem imperative that a more accurate estimate of fixed gill net use is established by marine management authorities.

The extent of use of monofilament gill nets in Cornwall alone is undoubtedly an issue not just for ray but many other species including birds, seals, cetaceans, and migratory fish. I think it is worth making the wider audience aware of the extent of gill net use off our coast (the figures are for inshore coastal waters out to 6 miles and apparently crawfish nets are set out further than this). The figures are staggering and I hope are questioned and the original email from the former Chief Officer of Cornwall IFCA exists to prove if this is questioned. It is apparent that ray species continue to be landed commercially in significant numbers and often placed onto the market as processed "wings" which can underestimate the impact upon the species in terms of live weight exploited. Small Eyed, Blonde, Spotted, Thornbacks, Cuckoo as well as other offshore ray species have all appeared in commercial landing on Newlyn and Brixham fish markets throughout 2025. Some landings of Undulate Ray wings have been substantial, particularly on Brixham Market.

SP: When skates or rays are landed as wings, conversion factors should be applied to the reported landings by the MMO which gives the total live weight landed and these are the values we use in national reporting and assessments. So it should not result in underestimating the impact of removals.
Bob Earll My sense of this issue with 'wings' is that is not so much the total weight but we then get no sense of which species are being fished … Have I got this wrong? The earlier undulate ray section makes rather depressing reading.

SP: I don't think the issue with the wings is regarding the species, as wings are not usually skinned, but perhaps I misunderstand too. Undulate Ray is an interesting one - the Kimmeridge site has clearly seen a decline, but this is not represented across the Channel and the assessment is positive - so as I added to the report this is the disconnect seen between localised trends and stock-wide assessments.
BE: But the 'localised' for undulates extends from Kimmeridge to Poole and Christchurch.

Pelagic Species Douglas.Herdson@btinternet.com

Other tunas

Bonito (*Sarda sarda*)
DH: One juvenile caught out of Plymouth in October.
Anglers from Minehead and Ilfracombe reported catches of large bonitos, some up to 5kg. Dan Hawkin's charter boat *Reel Deal* was catching them during the summer of 2025 during bass fishing trips, and in December Dave Kiddy caught a record specimen of 4.13kg measuring 73cm. [Douglas Herdson; Simon Thomas; Keith Hiscock]

Species mentioned in the 2024 report but not in 2025.
Skipjack Tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*)
Chub Mackerel (*Scomber colias*) No chub mackerel have been recorded by shore or boat recreational anglers in 2025.
Garfish (*Belone belone*)
Pilot Fish (*Naucrates ductor*

Small Pelagic species

Mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*)
ST: Another poor year for mackerel; one good catch of large fish reported off the Eddystone.
It is not clear whether smaller fish have returned in the autumn.
STOM:- The average size of mackerel caught by recreational shore and boat anglers in Cornwall has declined substantially in recent years. It is also evident that the timing of mackerel presence within inshore waters has also changed markedly since 2016.

ICES have proposed a lower TAC but this has been ignored by authorities allocating quota Northeast Atlantic mackerel faces collapse as scientists advise 77% catch reduction - Ocean and Coastal Futures
EU Raises Mackerel Quotas Despite Scientific Overfishing Warnings - The Fishing Daily - Irish, UK and European Fishing Industry News A quota reduction of 48% agreed.

Horse Mackerel or Scad (*Trachurus trachurus)*
Paul Naylor: In August in Firestone Bay, Plymouth, a huge fish shoal that was a mixture of horse mackerel (*Trachurus trachurus*) and small Blackspot bream (*Pagellus bogaraveo*).
ST: Historically scad have been an important industrial fishery but caught offshore. Scad catches were slightly decreased this year, with fewer really large specimens encountered.

Lesser Sand Eel (*Ammodytes tobianus)* Simon Toms <simon.toms@environment-agency.gov.uk

STOM & MS There has been a notable significant decline in the abundance of larger specimens of lesser sandeels, *Ammodytes tobianus* within the inshore waters of Cornwall particularly that has progressively been getting worse since 2018. Lesser sandeel have long been regarded as very common and the most common bait fish used by recreational sea anglers in Cornwall for many years. The extent of the observed decline is such that that angling bait suppliers based in Cornwall no longer supply frozen sandeel as fishing bait (Premier Baits, Redruth and Ammodytes, St Ives) after many years in business (Ammodytes Ltd was established in the late 1970s). The loss of larger specimens of lesser sandeel is also true for Devon, the origin of most sandeel bait for Devon and Cornwall.

Premier baits have kindly provided details of the numbers of frozen Sandeels packeted for a number of years since 2013. In each year approximately 50 to 60 netting trips were undertaken each year. Table 3 shows the catch of Lesser Sandeel (captured using a rowing boat and beach seine net from beaches predominantly on the south Cornish coast).

Year	Number of Sandeel "packets" produced
2013	45,495
2016	44,586
2020	20,621
2022	9,886
2023	3,561
2025	200

Table 8.3 The number of Sandeel packets produced.

STOM & OL The owner of Premier baits noted that from around 2022 the Lesser Sandeel population inshore has progressively become dominated almost entirely by very small Lesser Sandeel with few larger Sandeels present, making the fishing operation no longer worthwhile. [The owner of Premier Baits is happy for this information to be used] They had been fishing for Sandeels for many years before establishing the business and had never observed any reduction in larger Sandeels until approximately 2019. This decline is not believed to be related to overexploitation as handheld nets are used and it only takes place in accessible parts of the coast, rather there is something far more profound occurring, most likely driven by climate change. Interestingly, it coincides with the increasing populations of Atlantic Blue Fin Tuna and Pilchards which again suggests a climate related link (as seen with Blue Sharks). There is a likely influence of zooplankton abundance changes and in particular barnacle larvae (RSPB report). There is a CPR survey paper in ICES J Mar Sci on zooplankton spatiotemporal variation and lesser sandeel - no mention of barnacle larvae - driven by Calanus copepods.(Olin et al 2022).This is an area for further work.

Josh Pickett 28 July 2024, I saw a large shoal of ammodytids, likely *Ammodytes tobianus* which wrapped 100m around the outer harbour wall at Mevagissey (similar large shoals frequent here in recent years, although this was the largest), but I have only seen sporadic clusters of them in 2025.

The CEFAS/PELTIC pelagic survey Highlights – Jeroen van der Kooij – Cefas jeroen.vanderkooij@cefas.gov.uk

Peltic Highlights

- Sardine (*Sardina pilchardus*), Sprat & Anchovy biomass annually recorded and submitted to ICES for advice
- Sardine and Anchovy (*Engraulis encrasicolus)* are expanding in range and show overall increase in biomass over last decade.
- In 2025, biomass increased from 2024 for the three main species: Sardine biomass was at more than half a million tonnes, the highest in time series (since 2013); Anchovy and Sprat biomass estimates were the second highest in the time series.
- Sprat size in Lyme Bay remains small as observed in the last few years, largely driven by an absence of fish older than 2 years.
- All three species show interannual biomass fluctuations with occasional 'spike' or drop
- Increased understanding of ecology and distribution, especially for Sardine and Anchovy stocks
- Anchovy northward range expansion due to different processes:
- Other species, such as Herring, Horse Mackerel and Boarfish are also recorded and quantified but their distribution is only partially captured.
- Systematic sightings of Blue Fin Tuna recorded by observers capturing their return in 2014; also rarer pelagic species.
- A Report of the 2025 Peltic Cruise can be found at https://swmecosystems.co.uk/annual-reports - in Fish Reports 2025

Boarfish (*Capros aper*)

Boarfish are well known in deep water out to west of the south-west. They were caught in large numbers in deeper water at the mouth of the Channel by the PELTIC survey, and the video surveys off the Scilly Isles by Exeter University (report link p45) also demonstrated Boarfish shoals. Boarfish have been regularly reported at the cooling water intake screens at Hinckley power station. [Robin Somes]

Ocean Sunfish (*Mola mola*) **Bex Allen** Rebecca.Allen@cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk

Sightings
ST: Less than 2024, but sill regularly encountered by charter boats in the SW
DH: Mike Langman Fish From boat trips: Ocean Sunfish two singles seen:

- One on 10 August just off Scabbacombe head South Devon at about 2.30pm
- One on 18th July 4 miles out see due East of Froward Point at about 11.30am

KH: 12/06/25 Marine Discovery Penzance – largest sunfish I have seen.
Mola mola in Poole bay Posted 20/06 by Saeed Rashid– from local newspaper
Julie Hatcher: We also had a few anecdotal reports of Ocean Sunfish, *Mola mola*, being spotted along the Dorset coast in July. Frequent sightings in August around the south-west (Dorset to Combe Martin Bay) of sunfish.
More sunfish were seen around the Isles of Scilly than in 2024. There being 16 reports of a total of 40 fish between mid-June and late September; compared with 11, mainly single, sightings from late July to mid-October the year before.

Quantifying observations is difficult, however they are recorded in effort-based surveys in the Cornwall Wildlife Trust Seaquest project. This shows a decline in sightings for Cornwall and none were reported in surveys for 2024 (the decline is also reflected in the total number of records (excluding the Seaquest data) held in the Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall and the Isle of Scilly (ERCCIS) databases (Fig. 4). Survey data and sightings suggest a strongly seasonal presence peaking in July and August (Fig. 5)

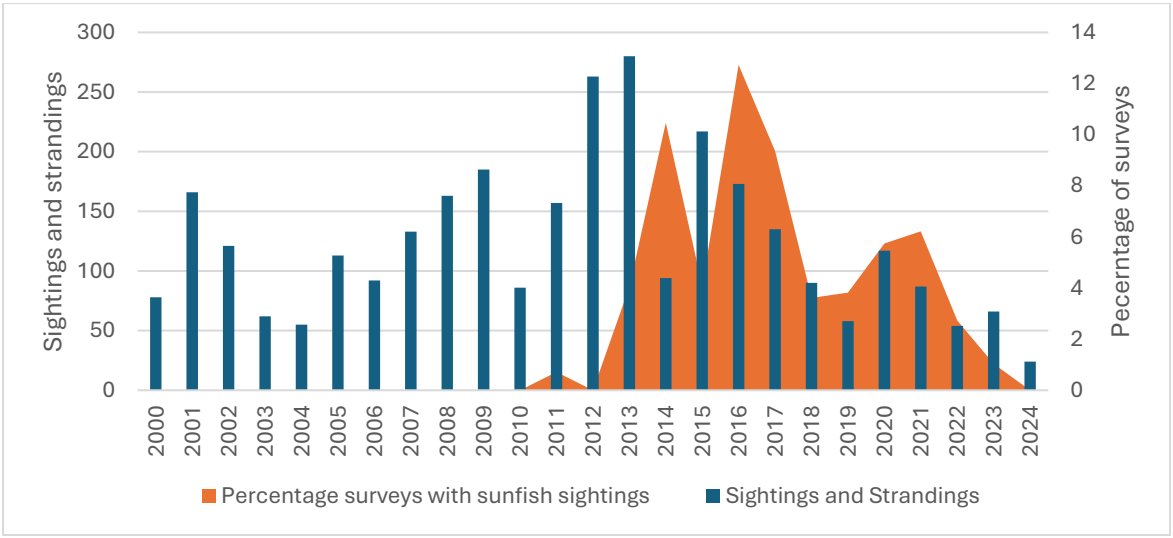


Figure 4 Ocean Sunfish (*Mola mola*) sightings reported to Cornwall Wildlife Trust/ERCCIS (excluding Seaquest project data) and Seaquest survey records for Cornwall

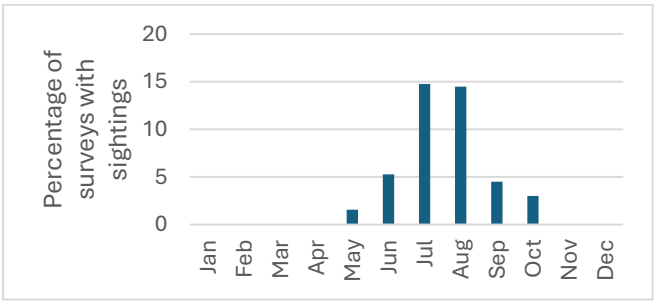


Figure 5 **Effort corrected** seasonal pattern of Ocean Sunfish (*Mola mola*) (percentage of Seaquest surveys with sunfish sightings)

Species Linked with Riverine Life History Stages

Robert Hurrell rhhurrell@hotmail.co.uk RH & Simon Toms simon.toms@environment-agency.gov.uk STOM

Marine Lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*)
Sea Lamprey are recorded annually spawning in the lower reaches of the River Tamar in the vicinity of Gunnislake. Smaller Sea Lamprey (juveniles) are often regularly recorded as being attached to marine fish species later in the year (November, December and January) in the Tamar estuary attached to species such as Whiting, and, on one occasion Bass. (S. Toms, direct observations)

Eels (Anguilliformes)

European Eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) Robert Hurrell
A number of new records of glass eel, elvers and yellow eels were reported from the Isles of Scilly in the 2023 to 2025 period (Plate 4). Numbers of glass eels observed in late April/early May were very small. A much wider geographic distribution of European Eels using brackish and freshwater habitats across the Isles of Scilly was found than previous incidental and ERCCIS reported records had indicated (Hurrell, R IoSBNHR *in prep*).

Plate 4 Glass eel, 7-8cm long. Great Porth beach, Bryher, Isles of Scilly. Spring 2025. Permission from Robert Hurrell

Salmonids
STOMS The Environment Agency reports that runs in Tamar and Exe. 2024.
Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*) runs in Tamar, Plym and Yealm. The numbers of Atlantic Salmon recorded in all rivers in the South West of England have declined substantially since 2024. The automatic fish counter located at Gunnislake on the River Tamar has recorded some of the worst runs of adult salmon since being established since 1994.

Numbers of Sea Trout (*Salmo trutta*). The numbers of adult Sea Trout are more stable compared to those of Atlantic Salmon. However, in recent years it is evident that the numbers of returning adult Sea Trout have also declined suggesting much reduced marine survival. Some have suggested that the reduction may be linked to the influx of Blue Fin Tuna that coincides with the return of many Sea Trout to their rivers of origin in the South West (July and August).

Sturgeon (*Acipenser* spp.) – **Steve Colclough** srcifm@gmail.com

Since restoration began 39 fish arising from the various restoration works have been taken in British waters, ranging from 90cm to 1. 8m in length. This latter size is a full adult sized fish but no spawning has been seen as yet. The majority of these fish have come from coastal waters in the South West of England.

The 2025 specimen caught on 7th May by Michael John Brown [FY368, FV *Majestic*] off Dodman Point, South Cornwall and was 1.9 m long. It is thought that this is a 10–11 year old *Acipenser sturio.* (Plate 5) This and other recent records suggest that there are feeding grounds for immature sturgeon off South Devon. This individual was caught and released. The only population of this sturgeon in the world breeds in the Gironde Estuary in France. Sturgeon have been found in United Kingdom waters for as long as records are available. For further information see – www.savethesturgeon.com & https://uksturgeonsightings.org/?page=Home. The UK Sturgeon Alliance has been amassing historic records since 2005. At the present time we have over 5,200 records of Sturgeon being taken or

Plate 5 Sturgeon (thought to be *Acipenser sturio*) caught off Mevagissey. MJB Fishing - Permission given

seen in this country since 1195. Most of the records come from the early 1700s onwards. At one time, the only species thought to have been associated with the UK was *Acipenser sturio*, the European, Common or Sea Sturgeon. However, in the last thirty years, it has become apparent that at least some records from the East Coast of England have in fact been a closely related species *A. oxyrinchus. A sturio* was once found across Western Europe with the last known spawning population existing in the Gironde in Southern France. There has been no active spawning there since the early 1990s. *A. oxyrinchus* is more normally associated with the East Coast of North America and the Gulf of Mexico. It is now considered that a small population came across via Greenland in the last 500 years ago and established populations in the Baltic Sea and possibly in the North Sea.

Modern restoration programmes are underway for both species. Juveniles arising from broodstock, themselves originating from the Gironde stock, are being stocked in the lower reaches of the Gironde and also in the Elbe in Germany. Early restoration is underway in the Rhine. Baltic nations are collaborating to stock juvenile *A. oxyrinchus* originating from Canadian stock in several rivers in the Baltic. At present in the UK, records are being collated to determine if a restoration project is the best approach. There is little information on past spawning in the UK. It is possible that past UK stocks of both species were maintained by breeding in mainland Europe, or by UK spawning, or possibly both.

Shad (*Alosa* spp.)
South West Water, Natural England and the Environment Agency are progressing a multi-million pound fish pass project at Gunnislake on the River Tamar to improve the passage of Atlantic Salmon, Sea Trout, Allis Shad and Smelt into freshwater. Designs and planning approval have been obtained and there is an intention to progress construction in 2027 if all other obstacles to the construction can be overcome.

Shad Forum - Westcountry Rivers Trust https://wrt.org.uk/
WRT recently hosted the second annual Shad Forum in partnership with Natural England and South West Water. This event brought together stakeholders across fisheries science and conservation to share updates on various projects, as well as hearing from the Stiltskin Theatre about their Shad themed children's play (featuring a lovely Shad puppet!). Shad are members of the Herring family and the UK has two native species; Twaite Shad (Alosa fallax) and Allis Shad (Alosa alosa). These fish used to be numerous and run up the rivers in great numbers however their population has declined and now the River Tamar is home to the only known spawning grounds of Allis Shad in the UK. However, over recent years these fish have been reported in several rivers around the UK indicating a potential population increase and return to their historic range. Westcountry Rivers Trust have been involved in several projects to support Shad populations including an ongoing eDNA project along the River Taw, through Devon Environment Funding, utilising citizen science to investigate whether either species has returned to these waters and begun spawning again.

People involved include:

Rob Hillman – Environment Agency
Angie Gall angela.gall@naturalengland.org.uk
Olivia Cresswell at WRT is the lead contact.
Fergus Mitchell – Natural England starting collaborative Species Recovery Programme

Rob Hilman: I've attended the first two Shad Forum Workshops hosted by WRT/SWW. For information, there is a pending Species Recovery Programme project bid lead by WRT and NE and including other partners, on shad in the Taw/Torridge catchment where there appears to be a significant recolonisation in recent years. Little is known about which shad species are present and the location of the spawning areas but in the last few years good numbers have been caught and reported by anglers there.. At least one fish carcass recovered from the River Taw and examined by WRT was confirmed as an Allis Shad.

Sightings
DH An Allis Shad *Alosa alosa* of about 1.2 kg was caught in an unspecified Devon river in June by Will Birch. [Aidan Bordiuk, Angling Times]

Conger eel (*Conger conger*)

The conger eel 'explosion' continues to be reported with large numbers of smaller fish being widely reported by anglers and divers. Anglers report the 'bait never seems to touch the bottom without catching a conger'!

Plate 6 Eight conger eels in a ship wreckage Kirsty Andrews (Permission given)

Sightings
NIckJ Below is a report from Simon King new recreational rep in Jersey. I would add he also noted a large number of "bootlace" congers this year, as did I on the shore early in the year, my fish were circa 1 to 2 kg. But only early in the year. I would add we have seen a big drop in large 10kg + conger in the channel islands in the last couple of decades, some of this is down to a long lining some 20 years ago, and parlour pots, there is now a legal move away from parlour pots, but implementation has been very slow. Anglers have been in constructive dialogue, which is positive.
STOMS: Recreational shore and boat anglers have observed a significant reduction in the size of conger eels in recent years. The population is now dominated by smaller individuals that are present inshore in large numbers.
ST: Congers reported going into lobster pots to catch Common Octopus with range extended from their normal preference for rocky substrate to areas of coarse sand
ST: Catches of conger in the Tamar suggest they are replacing lesser spotted cat sharks in terms of frequency of catch.
ST: There seem to be fewer very large fish on wrecks than previously, although this may be explained by less people fishing for them
PN: Still lots of smaller congers in crevices at inshore diving sites like Wembury
Mal Thomas: Poole & Christchurch bay. Very common for anglers

KH Severn Estuary - 'Black Rock lave net fishermen' have recorded 'endless' dead conger eels. Discussion: Congers are especially prone to cold snaps which affect shallow water
From Julie Hatcher, Dorset WT (March) We had a couple of small conger eels found in the intertidal in March and it made me think that over the last few years we have seen quite a few (Lyme Regis, Kimmeridge, Looe) whereas years ago we never saw these intertidally

Plate 7 A conger eel with the sucker marks of Octopus. There was an explosion of the common octopus in the south-west in 2025 and a number of species including conger and blue sharks have been photographed with sucker marks presumably from their feeding activities.

Photographer: From John Locker, The fish Locker – permission given

John Dory (*Zeus faber)* Simon Thomas - bluedogfishing.simon@aol.co.uk
ST: The species has been captured in smaller numbers than previous years by anglers, but still significantly higher numbers than the historical average. Many of the fish captured during the late summer are full of milt and roe.

Gadoids
ST: Gadoids in general, whiting, western cod, and haddock are doing very badly in the south-west currently with ICES assessments showing low SSB

Pollack – Simon Thomas bluedogfishing.simon@aol.co.uk

Rachel Brittain LinkedIn: We've now collected over 9,000 individual fish lengths through the industry-led onshore pollack sampling here in the SW! 🥳 🙌 With a limited monthly bycatch allowance per vessel (commercial sector), fishing effort has drastically reduced & it hasn't been easy to collect samples. Every fish measured improves the stock assessment, but as always... more data is needed!
From Bob Earll Pollack monitoring programme https://www.linkedin.com/posts/rachel-brittain-798487175_plymouthfishing-activity-7368911802253860864-q7kP?utm_medium=ios_app&rcm=ACoAAASLTG8BndI3l-pFRrRHTIWHI4rEKCOo6zM&utm_source=social_share_send&utm_campaign=mail

<u>These species were covered in 2024 but no observations in 2025</u>
Pouting or Bib (*Trisopterus luscus)*
Norway Pout (*Trisopterus esmarkii)*
Tadpole Fish (*Raniceps raninus*)

Seahorses Neil Garrick-Maidment (NGM) theseahorsetrust@gmail.com

There have been seahorses in the UK for centuries, however, the setting up of the National Seahorse Survey and its database, the National (now World) Seahorse Database by The Seahorse Trust in 1994 has led to a massive increase in records (over 3,500 for the UK) over the last few decades. This does not mean an increase in numbers of seahorses; however, it does mean an increase in numbers reported because the public know where to report them and because there is now a central national repository for seahorse records. As a result this database has led to them becoming protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, Schedule 5, Section 9 in 2008. It has also been used to introduce Marine Conservation Zones into a variety of areas, notably Studland Bay in Dorset.

Two seahorse species are routinely reported from the South West: the Spiny or Long Snouted Seahorse (*Hippocampus guttulatus*) and the Short-snouted Seashore (*Hippocampus hippocampus*). There have been a lot of seahorse records during the year, see the Table (4). In discussion at the Fish CoP it appeared that most

Table 4 Sightings of Seahorses in 2025 provided by the Sea Horse Trust

Species	**Devon**	**Dorset**	**Cornwall**	**Total**
Spiny Seahorse (*Hippocampus guttulatus*)	13	107	1	**121**
Short Snouted Seahorse (*Hippocampus hippocampus*)	3	4	8	**15**
Total sightings	**16**	**111**	**9**	**136**

observations of Spiny Seahorses (*H. guttulatus*) were in seagrass and seaweeds (including *Halidrys* and *Gracilaria*), whilst Short Snouted Seahorses (*H. hippocampus*) had much wider range of habitat preferences**.** Numbers reported in 2025 are broadly similar to previous years. Dorset once again is higher because of the high effort at Studland and Weymouth Bay, biasing numbers towards Dorset. Large numbers were also recorded in Southampton waters and the Thames. High numbers of sightings were usually a result of a media push by the Sea Horse Trust. Additional sightings from Devon and Cornwall are known but there are some recorders who would not share their data with the Seahorse Trust.

Sightings

- Cornish Seahorse May 2025 David Hamilton 21st May 2025 Super excited to see this Seahorse in Cornish open waters today. Approximately an inch in length. The Seahorse Trust confirmed it is a sub adult female short snouted seahorse (*Hippocampus hippocampus*).
- July via KH: Seahorse numbers in Studland Bay reach post-pandemic high - BBC News – numbers well up and comparable to after the peace of Covid restrictions. £100K per annum to maintain eco-moorings.
- ST: As in 2024 Black bream reported to be eating seahorses when the bream was gutted by anglers (Plate 8)
- MS: Not many sightings in Cornwall in 2025

Plate 8 Seahorses from the stomach of a black bream in West Sussex – from a black ream stomach is 'Adam Williams post on W Sussex sea fishing 290925' Permission given

Species recorded in 2024 with no observations in 2025
Scorpaenidae and Cottidae

- Red Scorpionfish (*Scorpaena scrofa)*
- Norway Bullhead (*Micrenophrys lilljeborgii)*

Bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*) **Robin Bradley** bradley4ne@btinternet.com

The Cornwall Bass Investigations Group has made a short film about its juvenile bass survey work on the Fal and Helford estuaries. This can be viewed via the following link https://youtu.be/oAotfsDQLsA
Membership of the Cornwall Bass Investigations Group has increased to 75. The group completed 28 surveys on the Fal and 14 on the Helford, involving a total of 155 volunteer days. In total an estimated 47,424 animals from 28 species were netted, of which 2,537 were measured. Total bass catches were 2,651 ‘0’ group, 1,408 ‘1’ group and 37 ‘2’ group on the Fal. The corresponding figures for the Helford were 88, 42 and 2 respectively.

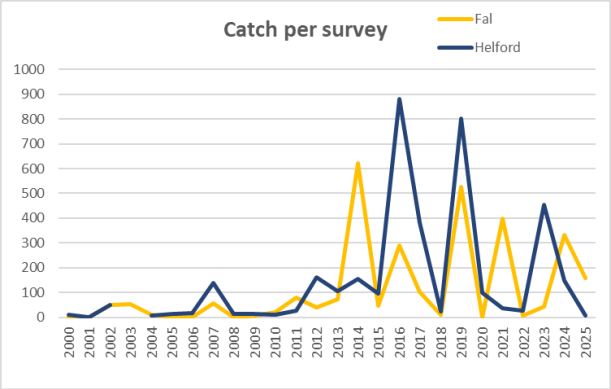


Fig. 6 Bass '0' group Catch Per Survey on the Fal and Helford estuaries from 2000

Although '1' group results do not allow us to confirm our provisional assessment of 'Good' for the 2024 year class on the Helford, last year's '0' group results for both estuaries, in conjunction with this year's '1' group results for the Fal, support this for the Fal & Helford SAC as a whole.

A single '0' group was found at Tresemple on the Tresillian River (part of the Fal complex) on 20th May, the earliest we've seen them, and at 22mm also the smallest. The regular appearance of '0' groups in early surveys, in conjunction with a prolonged marine heatwave in the spring, suggested that a 'bumper' year class might be on the cards, but this was not to be the case.

'0' group numbers were good on the Fal, but were variable, both between and within sites; a single result of 1,731 at Lamorran constituted 65% of all the '0' groups netted. The Catch Per Survey (CPS) was 158.4, slightly less than half of last year's value.
The situation on the Helford is quite different. Just 88 '0' groups were found during the whole survey programme, only reaching a maximum of 31 at Bonallack, and totally absent on four surveys during part 2 of the survey programme. The CPS was just 6.7. The reasons for this are unclear but could include the effects of easterly winds in March and April and competition between juvenile bass and gilthead bream (*Sparus aurata*).

Previously, our year class assessment has covered the Fal and Helford SAC as a whole. The thinking was that, given the proximity of the two estuaries, whatever factors determined the success of a particular year class would apply across the whole SAC, and any differences between the two estuaries was due to sampling variations. This year, the difference in results is so stark that we feel it is more appropriate to give separate assessments for each estuary.

The results of this year's survey programme suggest a provisional assessment of Fair/Reasonable for the Fal, and 'Poor' for the Helford. The growth of both '0' and '1' groups is increasing over the years in both estuaries. Good '0' group growth is evident for 2025 in both estuaries. '1' group growth appears similar to 2024 on the Fal, but lower than 2023. '1' group growth on the Helford looks better than 2024 (no trend for 2023).

This year we have calculated average survey species counts and abundance for each estuary. We will do this going forward, to track any changes in habitat quality. The Helford produces a greater variety and abundance of species than the Fal, suggesting it is a better ecosystem for juvenile fish. Our survey data is now included in the annual ICES assessment of the Northern bass stock. Annual reports and survey data can be found on our website.

Bass Anglers' Sportfishing Society (BASS) Catch Recording Scheme 2025 – Key Performance Indicators (KPI) – report published end of Feb 2026 covers 2021-2025

Details of the Bass Anglers Catch Recording Scheme which I run can be found **here,** with key data available here.
Robin Bradley RB bradley4ne@btinternet.com

Data are available on Key Performance Indicators (KPI) from scheme participants fishing in areas with commercial bass fisheries (UK & Channel Islands) for 2025 and the preceding four years of the scheme (where available).

Key Performance Indicators from scheme participants fishing in areas with commercial bass fisheries (UK & Channel Islands) for 2024 and the preceding 3 years are available as a pdf download: BASS KPI Data 2024. The 2025 data is available here: BASS KPI Data 2025.

ST: Bass are not a quota species – but there is a quota of 5 tonnes! The Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) is thought to be good. Bass of a good size are now being caught on deep wrecks 60-90m which is unusual. The size of bass is improving but fish of 60cm+ are still rare and the distribution of size classes suggests that certain years classes are coming through but the distribution of large fish is still patchy. Commercial fishermen in Lyme Bay were reporting fish with ripe roe and milt at the end of November, which is unusually early.

STOM: There has been a notable reduction in the numbers of larger bass (>7lb) caught by recreational shore anglers in Cornwall around the Cornish coast since 2019. It has however been evident that larger specimen bass (>7lb) are now predominantly captured in estuaries which may reflect the benefit of a prohibition on commercial netting within estuaries in Devon and Cornwall since 2017.

Wreckfish (*Polyprion americanus*) Douglas Herdson Douglas.Herdson@btinternet.com

Wreckfish, sometimes called Stone Bass, are regular but generally scarce in British and Irish waters. They are usually solitary but can occur in groups; its common name coming from its tendency to aggregate below floating rafts or other material. It has been proposed that European *P. americanus* originate from the Blake Plateau in the Western Atlantic crossing the ocean on the North Atlantic Drift (Sedberry, et al., 1998). It is unusual for more than a few to be recorded in any one year. 2025 was exceptional with at least eight being reported. One was caught south of the Eddystone in mid-August, another 10 miles offshore in Falmouth Bay in September and a further one in mid-October. One was seen and photographed 17 miles south of Lamorna in September. Plate 9

Sedberry, G. R., J. L. Carlin, and G. M. Menezes. 1998. Movements of a pelagic-phase wreckfish, *Polyprion americanus* (Schneider, 1801), as indicated by tag and recapture. Arquipélago. Life Mar. Sci. 16A:69-72.

[Charles Hood, Keith Hiscock, Simon Thomas, Roisin Chapman]

Plate 9 Wreckfish, Charles Hood (Permission given)

Carangids

Amberjack (Seriola spp.)

DH In September 2024 an Amberjack of about 500g was caught in St Ives Bay. It was not an Almaco Jack (*Seriola rivoliana*), rather it appeared to be a Greater Amberjack (*Seriola dumerili*). However, identification can only be confirmed by examination of the fish. [David Inch; Mark Hutchings]

Meagre (*Argyrosomus regius*) Douglas Herdson Douglas.Herdson@btinternet.com

One of the outstanding features of the year was the sudden occurrence of numbers of Meagre (*A. regius*). There were at least 7 recorded in 2025 – from Penzance to Essex, but mainly off the South Coast of Cornwall, with anecdotal reports of more than 8 others, including some from the Bristol Channel. There was a further one or more

in Cornwall, and one in Ireland in 2026. This is exceptional; as normally only the occasional individual is reported, with only 9 recorded in Britain and Ireland between 1997 and 2024.

Fig. 10 Meagre, S of Mewstone, Wembury, 3 January 2025, Chris Kelly permission given

Previously the most recorded in a single year was seven in 1852. In North-West Europe they were slightly more common in 1835 to 1853, also 1863 to 1875 and 1959 to 1972. Only 16 years with more than one from 1819 to 2019 (Figure 7) (Quigley and Arronte, 2021). Surprisingly the monthly distribution in 2025-2026 is very different to that over the preceding 200 years, with 5 in January, and one each in March, July, October and November.

Sightings: Mark Parry; Simon Thomas; Jonathan Short; Rachel Brittain; Declan Quigley; Emily Theobald; Shane Carter; Andy Giles; Richie Bait.

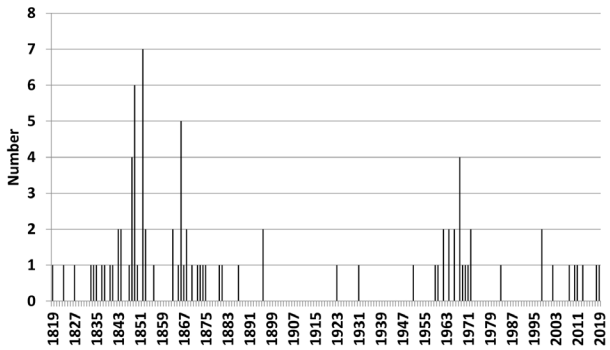


Figure 7. Number of Meagre (*Argyrosomus regius*) recorded from NW European waters between1819 and 2019 (N=88). Quigley et al 2021.

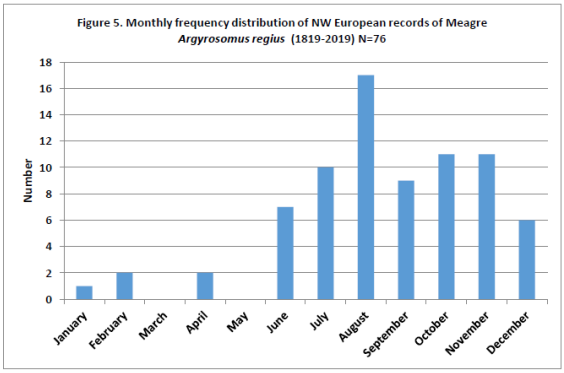


Figure 8 Monthly recordings of the number of Meagre (*Argyrosomus regius*) recorded from NW European N=76 Quigley et al 2021

Comber (*Serranus cabrilla*) Douglas.Herdson@btinternet.com

Introduction

Comber is one of the smallest members of the grouper family (Serranidae) and is relatively common from southern Africa to the Mediterranean and Lusitanian coasts.

Numbers

From 1998 to 2020 there were occasional observations of comber, often with none recorded in many years. Since 2022 the numbers have increased to the point where there are too many sightings to record individual fish. Quigley has reported similar numbers of comber from North Western European waters (Table 6)

Numbers by month (2003 to **2023**)	
Jan	
Feb	
Mar	2
Apr	
May	3
June	7
July	10-12
Aug	4
Sept	8
Oct	2
Nov	1
Dec	
Unknown	
TOTAL	**37 - 39**

Numbers by year (2003 to 2024)	
2003	1
2007	1
2015	1
2019	1
2020	4
2021	3
2022	20
2023	8
2024	LOTS 100's
Total	**40+**

Table 5 Seasonal distribution of comber (*Serranus cabrilla*) (Herdson)

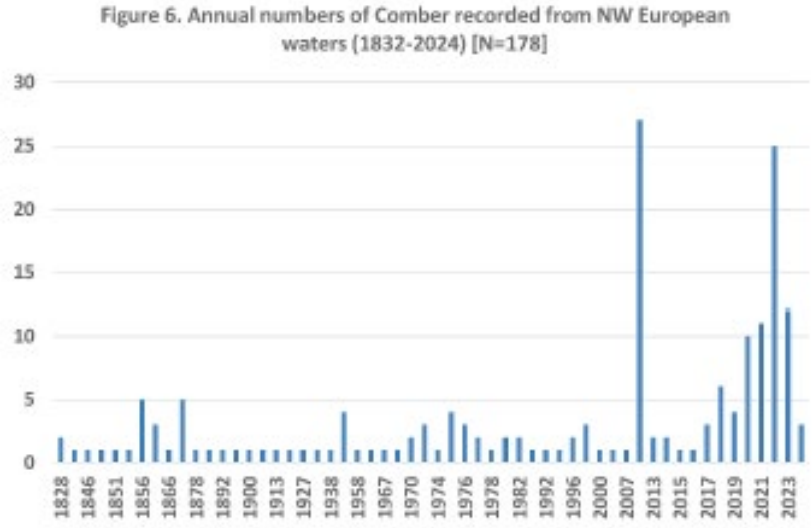


Table 6 Annual numbers of comber recorded from NW Water (1832-2024) N = 178
Quigley, D. (2025) *Comber* (*Serranus cabrilla*) in Irish and NW European waters. Marine Times Newspaper, April 2025, p30 – 31.

Seasonality

Once only found in the summer, they now seem to be found in the South West all year-round (Table 5)

Locations Sightings in 2025 from:

Their distribution in Britain was predominantly around the Channel Islands, Cornwall and Devon, but in 2025 they were seen as far east as Lulworth Banks (Dorset). The majority of sightings reported now come from the Plymouth area. Initially caught by commercial fishermen, they are now being caught by anglers from the shore and offshore, and wide range of observations by divers.

- On certain reefs at Land's End, Penzance, and off Looe they are now very numerous.

- Dodman Point, Cornwall
- Plymouth – Breakwater & Mewstone, Wembury,
- East of Portland - Lulworth Banks – Mike Markey
- Jersey - Nick Jouault – only 2nd Jersey record

Recorders: Keith Hiscock, Josh Pickett, Olivia Langmead, Mike Markey, Matt Doggett

Sightings

Matt Doggett (MD) I saw one on Long Ledges in Lyme Bay on 31st July this summer (N 50 41.040, W 002 48.284). Image attached (Plate 11) Is this the easternmost record to date? Possibly, but Lin Baldock (LB) will know if there are other records from Dorset Seasearch this year. Certainly the species would appear to be moving eastward as numbers increase.

LB: Comber has now been recorded east of Portland Bill on Lulworth Banks, Mike Markey has the details.
mike mikemarkey@btinternet.com Comber photographed on Lulworth Banks 27 September 2025: 50° 35.377'N 002° 19.059'W at 22m bsl (position from towed GPS), adjacent to the base of a low reef scarp. The fish was around 10cm long. Photo taken during a drift dive, so I managed 1 image only (Plate n).

Josh Pickett JP: Comber (*Serranus cabrilla*) became a frequent angling catch in 2025, with several being caught in single reef/wrecking trips throughout the year, between Plymouth and Penzance; notable hotspots being the reefs around Looe and Dodman Point. The earliest shore capture of the year that I know, was 10th May (coinciding with the earliest boat captures), at Haldon Pier, Torquay by Lee Russell, and it was a juvenile (approx. 10cm), supporting the hypothesis from 2024, that they are now breeding on our southwestern shores. These shore captures persisted into mid-September with young adults and were all very close in (caught by anglers using 'ultra-light' gear, limiting their casting distance significantly). In the case of shore captures around Dodman, there are reefs amongst this ground which have previously sighted *S. cabrilla*, so it may be the case that younger fish are venturing regularly away from the reefs, with captures typically under 40m from the shoreline. Boat caught individuals in Cornwall were also reported up to early November.

Plate 11: Comber (*Serranus cabrilla*) off Lyme Bay Matt Doggett Permission Given

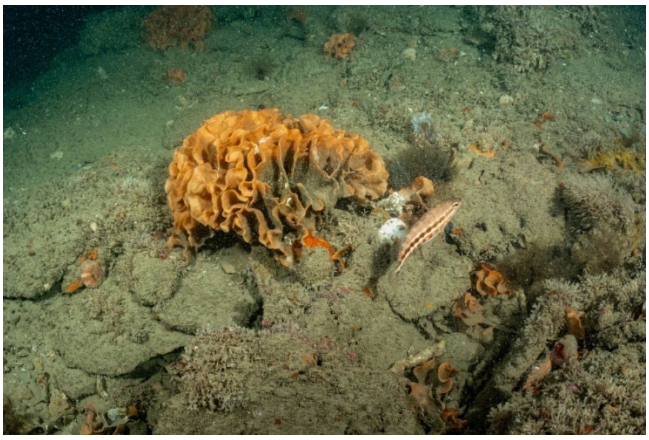


Plate 12 Mike Markey Comber (*Serranus* cabrilla) on the Lulworth Banks permission given

Olivia Langmead (OL) reported a Comber this on 13th June. NBN Atlas has records for further west in Cornwall and the Scillies. [NBN is probably not currently up to date on comber either with the records collated by Douglas Herdson or the 'explosion' of comber sightings in 2024.In addition Fiona Crouch saw one at the Plymouth Breakwater Fort on 16th June and on 17th June I saw another in Wembury Bay just to the east of the Plymouth Mewstone (video available) - I have attached a short video (I don't have any stills but Fi might).

Olivia Langmead Comber - 5-10 individuals per hour dive in the Mewstone Ledges area. Less on other reefs locally. I have also seen them at the offshore reefs of both Hand Deeps and Eddystone (both 1 individual over the course of an hour's dive).

Mike Markey, already sent to KH and DH Comber: Image attached from a dive on 27th September on Lulworth Banks (image location around 3.2Nm 239° from Lulworth Cove): this was taken on a drift and I managed to grab just this one shot. The fish was seen at the base of a low broken reef scarp in 21m bsl. As far as I know this is currently the most easterly record for the species in UK waters (Plate 12).

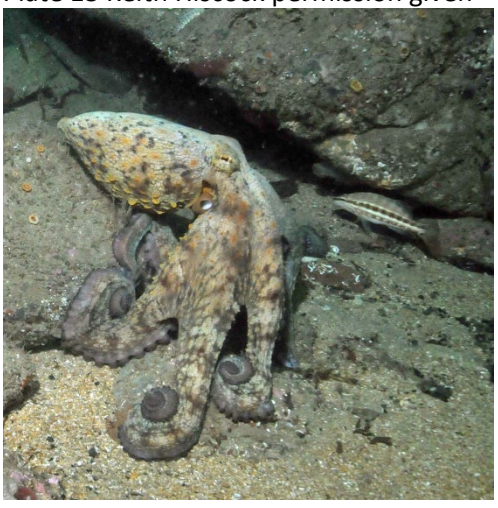
Mike Markey: Last Saturday (9 August) I saw six *Serranus cabrilla* along the reef forming the west edge of the Old Erme Riverbed channel, all in the range 9 - 11cm (images of one of these are attached), then three further ones the following day on the Eddystone Reef, same size range again. The one in the images (about 11cm) could possibly be gravid. KH sees singles at Hilsea Point Rock and Blackstone Pinnacle during August.

Nick Jouault jouault@hotmail.com The second Comber from Jersey. I came across it whilst reviewing our annual Jersey records, and probably worth mentioning as we get few records or reports for Jersey; I know there are a few Guernsey reports in the last couple of years. https://uk.inaturalist.org/observations/282862676
From Kaila Wheatley 20th May 2025 Off Les Ecrehous, east of Jersey Comber (*Serranus cabrilla*). This is only the second Jersey record of the species; we seem to be on its eastern boundary.

Combers and octopuses

Keith Hiscock (KH) My observation (text from a draft article) is "*O. vulgaris* is reported to be 'followed' by fish during foraging (Kayes, 1973). Example species include *Serranus scriba,* the Painted Comber, a species characteristic of the Mediterranean (Earll, pers.com) and the eastern Atlantic south of the Straits of Gibraltar. In South West England, there has been an increase in abundance of Comber (*Serranus cabrilla*) in recent years and at least one sighting of an individual with a Common Octopus (Plate 13).

Plate 13 Keith Hiscock permission given



Blackspot (**or Red**) **Sea Bream** (*Pagellus bogaraveo*) and **Axillary (or Spanish) Sea Bream** (*Pagellus acarne*)

Doug Herdson Douglas.Herdson@btinternet.com & Matt Slater matt.slater@cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk
DH: Axillary (or Spanish) Sea Bream (*Pagellus acarne*) were a very rare fish in British and Irish waters with less than twenty records prior to 2020 (11 from the 19th century). Over the next few years some juveniles started being caught by anglers off the South Coast of Cornwall and Plymouth. About fifty years ago Blackspot (or Red) Sea Bream

(*Pagellus bogareveo*) were the second most common bream species on the English coast, but subsequently became scarce, with both Gilthead Sea Bream (*Sparus aurata*) and Couch's Bream (*Pagrus pagrus*) becoming more common in coastal waters. There now appears to be a resurgence of the Blackspot Sea Bream.

Resolution of identity. DH 2024

Whilst *P. bogaraveo* and *P. acarne* can be distinguished *as adults* by their markings – *P. bogaraveo* having a dark blotch at the origin of the lateral line and *P. acarne* having a black base to the pectoral fin, these features are generally missing in the juveniles. These features are hard to spot in the field or whilst diving. There are minor differences in eye size and snout length, but these can be difficult to determine. The two species can be identified by *P. acarne* having a yellow lining to the mouth, a dip in the dorsal fin (the first soft ray being longer than the last spiny ray) and having 3 spiny rays and 10 soft rays in the anal fin; while *P. bogaraveo* has 3 spines and 12 to 13 soft rays.

Sightings

DH: Most of the records in 2025 seem to have been Blackspot Sea Bream.
DH: Juvenile Blackspot Sea Bream– Weymouth 22/03/2025
PN: A mixed shoal of Blackspot Sea Bream – with the black spot obvious – were sighted withScad (*Trachurus trachurus)* in the Plymouth Sound.
ST: Anglers are catching Blackspot Sea Bream out of Plymouth Sound.

Plate 14 Josh Pickett Blackspot Sea Bream (*Pagellus bogaraveo*) young juvenile, 16th August 2024, Plymouth (top), compared to an older juvenile 7th September 2025, Mevagissey (middle & bottom). Photos: Joshua Pickett permission given.

Josh Pickett: In late Summer–Autumn 2024, juvenile *Pagellus bogaraveo* had become the most tallied estuarine species in South West angling competitions (The Big Lerf had said it was their most recorded capture, during their catch and release Weekender event 20–22 September); present in the Plym, Fowey, and Fal estuaries (feeding well into darkness). Now, the average stamp of those individuals appears to have tripled in size, but these older juveniles are a little further away from the shoreline, and there are fewer of the younger juveniles; perhaps indicating a change in spawning conditions between the 2024 and 2025 offspring. These older juveniles still (mostly) seek the shelter of the lower estuaries, but are holding in deeper water, frequently over 100m from the shoreline in over 20m depth. It's clear they're prevalent, as sonar detects shoals of *P. bogaraveo* an impressive seven metres high (see figure below), circling the same patch every 10 minutes for the duration the kayaker was here. This sonar imagery was showing almost entirely *Pagellus bogaraveo* with some *Trachurus trachurus* on the outskirts, possibly feeding on them, by how dense the shoal is. *P. bogaraveo* started to be reported by shore anglers in May, and they were being caught into December. The larger adults with the black spot of their namesake were also caught more frequently in boats launching from Cornwall. Other reports indicate that they're expanding northwards, with a single iNaturalist observation near Swansea, and claims on social media I could not verify, further north still. The lower estuaries provide a great shelter for juvenile *Pollachius pollachius* too, but in both 2024, and 2025, they appeared thinner in shape, and more localised than in previous years, in the Fal and Plym. I am curious as to whether this correlates with the resurgence of *Pagellus bogaraveo*, suggesting competition, or if this pattern is entirely unrelated.?

I would add, I'm not convinced that the yellow lining in the mouth is a discerning feature between *P. acarne* and *P. bogaraveo*, as even in subadults, where the black spot begins to appear in *P. bogaraveo*, they still have this yellow

lining (I will try to photograph this myself or ask some other anglers to do so). I wonder if observations of dead specimens (where colouration fades) have led to this belief that it is absent in *P. bogaraveo*?

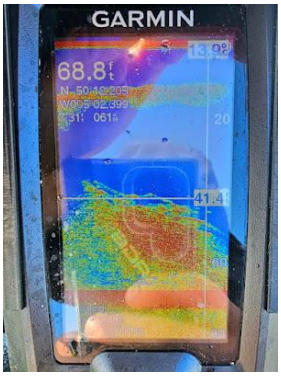


Plate 15 Caleb Dunn - Permission granted via **J**osh Pickett Depth aggregation of Blackspot Sea Bream on a Garmin echo sounder

Kieran Faisley (his boat was being used for fishing) also has pictures of Blackspot Sea Bream showing their distinctive black spot, he allowed me to use one for an article I did on them in *Sea Angler*; he has been catching the adults on his boat out of Newlyn the last couple of years (Plate 16).

Plate 16 Blackspot Sea Bream (*Pagellus bogaraveo*) – Kieran Faisley Permission granted via Josh Pickett

The 1983-1984 decline of Blackspot Sea Bream – Simon Thomas

Anecdotal reports from older fishermen suggest that Blackspot Sea Bream disappeared in 1983-1984 (sources:Murray Collins, skipper of Swallow 2 from Looe, Dave Uren, Skipper of Mirage of Plymouth). I have documented from 1985 and caught 1 Blackspot Sea Bream that year and noted that they were numerous until 1984 when they almost vanished. The skipper who I worked with, Ken Dodgson R.I.P) described Blackspot Sea Bream as being a “plague”..

<u>Sightings</u>

Olivia Langmead (OL): Schools of what I think are likely to be juvenile Blackspot Sea Bream (*Pagellus bogaraveo*) at the Eddystone.

Rob Hilman: Snorkelling in summer/autumn 2025 I saw shoals of juvenile seabream off the North and South Coasts of Cornwall. At the time I wasn’t certain if these were Blackspot Sea Bream or Axillary Sea Bream but it now seems likely that these were Blackspot Sea Bream. At both locations where I saw the shoals of approximately 50 x ~10cm

long seabream (South coast: small cove (Gue Hole) south of Towan beach, St Anthony; North coast: small cove (Spy Cove) in the Gazzle, Newquay), the cove faced away from the prevailing swell direction providing shelter.

Matt Slater: I attach a nice picture of Blackspot Sea Bream taken off the Manacles this summer – they were more rarely seen by snorkellers so perhaps have grown and moved more offshore.

Plate 17, by Guilhem Duprat clearly shows the black spot, especially on the fish towards the top of the image where light is not shining off their.

Plate 17 Shoal of Blackspot Sea Bream (*Pagellus bogaraveo*) over the Manacles, Cornwall, Guilhem Duprat (permission given)

White sea bream (*Diplodus sargus*)
DH: The White Sea Bream (*Diplodus sargus*) occurs from North Africa to Brittany and has also established populations in the Channel Islands, mainly Jersey. In March, one was caught by an angler from Swanage Beach, Dorset. They are very rare in English waters with all previous records being from Cornwall; where one was caught in September 2009 and two or three more between then and 2020.

Plate 18 White Sea Bream (*Diplodus sargus*), Swanage, March 2025, Will Chellingworth - permission given

Nick J: Highlighted the very local and persistent distribution of white bream in a marina on the Channel islands.

Couch's Sea Bream (*Pagrus pagrus*)
ST Still common in the south-Devon rias.
DH: Couch's Sea Bream continues to sustain a good population, still being common in the South Devon rias, and were highly prolific in estuaries around the lower Fal in summer.
In December 16, one caught near Dartmouth by Peter Kibel measured 59cm (23in), a new UK record.
Perhaps the most unexpected record was of one of around 40cm caught in a hake net in about 100 metres (50 fathoms) in the St George's Channel (51° 05'N 007° 19'W). They have not previously been reported this far offshore.

STOM: Couch's Sea Bream are now very common in many estuaries on the South Cornish coast and have been increasing in numbers since 2019. There are no Couch's bream in the shallower estuaries on the North Cornish Coast.

Gilthead Sea Bream (*Sparus aurata*)

Robin Bradley (RB) A large catch of Gilthead Sea Bream comprising 637 fish averaging 102mm in length were recorded during a survey at the head of Polwheveral Creek on the Helford Estuary on 9th August 2025. (Plate 19) The first mention of Gilthead Sea Bream was in our 1999 report for the Helford, and they have been seen regularly since; presumably their numbers are likely to increase with global warming. Could there be possible competition with juvenile bass?

Plate 19 Gilthead Sea Bream (*Sparus aurata*)netted by the bass survey Permission granted by Ben Harris

Olivia Langmead (OL)In October 2025 I saw a big school of Gilthead Sea Bream at Firestone Bay, Plymouth Sound. It was the first time I have sighted a large shoal of 30- 40 individuals and large sizes classes - 30cm at least (10th October 2025). Previously I have only seen a couple of individuals these mixed with bass and Black Sea Bream at the Eddystone [Plate 20]

Plate 20 Gilthead Sea Bream (*Sparus aurata*) – note the large black bar on the operculum Olivia Langmead – permission given

STOM: The number of Gilthead Sea Bream on the open coast and estuaries of Cornwall has increased substantially since 2003. Before 2003, Gilthead Sea Bream were encountered in some tributaries of the Fal and Helford estuaries and in Carnsew Pool, Hayle. Since 2003 the average size has increased substantially, with several specimens over 9lb recorded (the Cornish shore record now stands at 10lb 1 oz). Prior to 2003, on the open coast, particularly the North Cornish coast Gilthead Sea Bream were a very rare capture. However, since then, the numbers and size have increased significantly. There is now some evidence to suggest that Gilthead Sea Bream are now being targeted commercially both on the open coast and within estuaries, and there is a need for increased fishery protection measures to prevent over exploitation by both shore and commercial anglers. All specimens larger than 3lb are female.

'The Gilthead Wonder Catch' – January 2026

Olivia Langmead Further to my observation of gilthead in the northern part of the Plymouth Sound - the Brixham Fish market posted on Facebook last week (20/01/26) that one vessel landed 100+ boxes (3.2 tonnes) of gilthead bream. They remarked that they "don't often (if ever!) see Wild Gilthead Bream in these quantities, making a haul of

this scale truly spectacular." To scale the catch - gilthead landings in 2025 for the whole UK were 6.9 tonnes. This - unprecedented catch fits with my observations of large numbers of mature fish back in October. This has fisheries implications (since there are no management measures as its not normally encountered much).

Robin Bradley: I reported this catch to Matt Mander (D&SIFCA) on the 20th January and it is good to see James' comments. Although this may have been a chance encounter, I suspect that the 'cat's out of the bag' as they say, and commercials will now be targeting giltheads - apparently this catch fetched £108,000 at market! Regardless of where these fish were from, I suspect they were aggregating for spawning; such a catch must have damaged the stocks in that area.

Shows the importance of taking part in the consultation exercise https://consult.defra.gov.uk/fisheries-management-plans-1/copy-of-consultation-on-the-proposed-seabream-fish/

Dr James Stewart Senior Environment Officer Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
email: J.Stewart@devonandsevernifca.gov.uk
Unfortunately I don't have time at the moment to provide any substantial feedback on the report but did think it would be useful to provide more information on the large landing of Gilthead Sea Bream (3.2 tonnes at Brixham market) which is highlighted in the report and was also mentioned on the webinar - particularly as there has been speculation that this has been targeted in estuaries.

D&S IFCA has investigated the landing and there is irrefutable evidence of when and where the catch was taken. The catch of Gilthead Sea Bream occurred on 19th January 2026 whilst an inshore otter trawler was working in Lyme Bay. Having spoken to the master of the trawler and reviewed the historical track of the vessel, D&S IFCA is satisfied that this was a chance encounter with a shoal of gilthead bream. The level of the catch was significantly higher than any previous landing by a trawler or any other vessel that we are aware of.

Though the Gilthead Sea Bream catch occurred at sea, the speculation around it has highlighted some concern about illegal netting in estuaries. Monitoring of this activity poses significant challenges due to the nature of the activity, very often undertaken during darkness by small mobile unlight vessels. D&S IFCA has substantial restrictions on netting in estuaries in its District, and monitoring of illegal netting in estuaries has been a focus for enforcement resources with increased intelligence gathering, patrols and collaborative working with other organisations.

Dr James Stewart Senior Environment Officer Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
email: J.Stewart@devonandsevernifca.gov.uk phone: 07720683624

Black Bream (*Spondyliosoma cantharus*)

Sightings
ST: Anglers are continuing to report the westward movements of Black Bream – in a size range 0.75-1kg.
A tagged fish – originally captured from Poole – was recaptured off the Eddystone

Matt Doggett (matt@marine-ecosol.com) : Spearfishers now report encountering shoals of large adult Black Bream off Portland on a year-round basis - probably related to warmer winter water temperatures.

There have been reports of growing numbers of juvenile Black Bream off the Sussex coast in large numbers.
Along the Sussex coast anglers have reported they often find it hard to catch much other than juvenile bream at many popular locations as the fish are attracted to the bait before any other species have the chance. Generally, the anglers are reporting the highest numbers of black bream they have known. Also been seen off Kent. Further afield there was a probable sighting of a juvenile Black Bream among a shoal of pout on the Cromer chalk reefs off north Norfolk. Further evidence would be required but overall, it points toward both population and range expansion for this species.

STOM: Juvenile Black Bream are very abundant within estuaries along the South Cornish coast throughout the summer months.

Two-banded Sea Bream (*Diplodus vulgaris*)
DH This distinctive species is found commonly in the Mediterranean; it appears that the only one previously found in English waters was caught off Padstow in September 2021, and so these novel new sightings.

Nick Jouault: Swam with a large shoal of juvenile Two-banded Sea Bream off Alderney (Plate 21)

DH: Cathy Oetegwnn reports on 120825: Two-banded Sea Bream (*Diplodus vulgaris*)(two juveniles) seen whilst snorkelling at Elberry Cove (Torbay) today. They are not one of the species I normally see around Torbay Doug Herdson confirms from images – Plate 22.

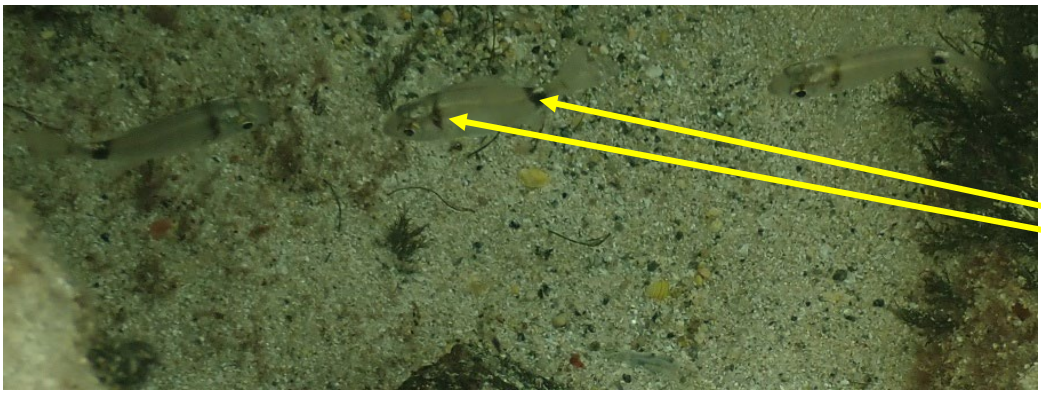


Plate 21 Two-banded Sea Bream (*Diplodus vulgaris*)

Nick Jouault

The two bands – permission given

Plate 22 Two-banded Sea Bream (*Diplodus vulgaris*), Elberry Cove, August 2025, Cathy Oetegenn – permission given

Pandora (*Pagellus erythrinus)*
A small specimen was capture by Simon Toms in the Helford Estuary in 2025.

Flatfish

Halibut (*Hippoglossus hippoglossus*)
In February a small Halibut weighing 2.95 kg was caught near Salcombe, by Mike Johnson. These are rare in English coastal waters. They are normally caught in the colder northern waters from Norway to Alaska, where the world record stands at a mighty 234 kg [515lb].
[John Sherlock; Torbay Weekly]

Thor's Scaldfish (*Arnoglossus thori*)

Jim Ellis (CEFAS) jim.ellis@cefas.gov.uk Several specimens of this poorly known coastal fish were taken in recent trawl surveys, notably in the Fowey to Falmouth area in 2025. Some fish were deposited in the Natural History Museum and a paper on this species will be published.

Rob Hilman: 'The Thor's scaldfish referred to in the talk were caught in Environment Agency otter trawls in St Austell Bay as part of the Marine Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment Inshore Evidence Project. This was part of a multi-method fish monitoring trial with NE, CEFAS and AIFCAs. I was present on these trawls and identified the fish as Thor's scaldfish. As part of the same project, EA carried out Stereo BRUV monitoring at 35 sites in St Austell Bay and recorded octopus, several Stevens gobies, Couch's seabream and many other species.

Rare fish NOT recorded in 2024 but not in 2025

- Salema or Saupe (*Sarpa salpa)* – see table of the 5 UK records in the SWME Fish CoP Reference report (2024)
- Spinefeet – Siganids Rivulated Rabbitfish (*Siganus rivulatus*) – Douglas Herdson Douglas.Herdson@btinternet.com

Clingfish

Connemara Clingfish (*Lepadogaster candolii*)

These clingfish are gregarious and localised around rocky and wooden structures in the Falmouth town with at least 4 individuals present at any given time (although that number is expected to be higher with hidden individuals). They remain in well-featured, inshore areas which still hold water on a spring low tide. The nearest two groups I know of, are 200m apart as the crow flies. They are reliably present in these areas in late Spring to Autumn, which makes me suspect they are males guarding nests; having captured some particularly small individuals, suggests to me that the surviving young are not venturing far. Late July to early November is when they get caught the most in Falmouth, a contrast from Weymouth, when they start to get regularly caught much earlier in the year. They have consistently been in the same spots since 2023. I first started taking notice of them that year (so this might mean nothing), although Light Rock Fishing (LRF) anglers I have spoken to have not heard of them in these Falmouth spots before 2023.

Small Headed Clingfish (*Apletodon dentatus*)

Josh Pickett Approx. 28 sightings of *Apletodon dentatus*, with the most surveyed in Falmouth and Plymouth postcodes during March (based on iNaturalist observations). A 100% increase from 2024, where most were surveyed between December–February.

Cornish Sucker (*Lepadogaster purpurea*)

See Falmouth observations table (8.10).

Wrasse, Blennies & Gobies

by Lin Baldock metacnephia@gmail.com and Paul Naylor paul@marinephoto.co.uk

Wrasse

Baillon's wrasse (*Symphodus bailloni*)

This species has now been reported as present and nesting in Plymouth Sound, further, to reports from its original strongholds in the Solent and off the Dorset coast since the early 2000s. This wrasse has a discontinuous distribution around Britain and Ireland with records extending along the English Channel coast from Shoreham in West Sussex to now as far west as Plymouth with a cluster of records from around the Isle of Wight, the Solent and Dorset east of Portland Bill. There are records from Pembrokeshire and in Ireland the species has been reported regularly from Kilkieran Bay, Co. Galway.

Plate 23 Ballion's wrasse tending a nest - Olivia Langmead - permission given

Olivia Langmead (OL) reported a male Baillon's wrasse nesting at Firestone Bay, Plymouth Sound on 5th June 2025 (Plate 23), having possibly seen a pair a month earlier on 2nd May. These were thought to be the first report of this species in Devon. OL and Fiona Crouch saw a pair in the same location as the June nest on 26th November 2025 and there have been other diver observations at Firestone Bay by Keith Hiscock and Paul Naylor (PN) with further divers reporting sightings to PN. OL also reported sightings from the reefs by Pier Cellars (Cawsand Bay, Cornwall) but has not seen them on more open coast such as at sites around the Mewstone, Hilsea Point or the wrecks in Whitsand Bay. Two colour forms of this wrasse were noted: male with pink lips and fins and a blue-greenish overall hue, or with bold, brownish stripes with the distinguishing black spot on the rear fleshy part of the dorsal fin. The latter fish are juveniles, females or non-breeding males.

Lin Baldock while diving in Poole Bay observed a small (12cm) male Baillon's wrasse in fully developed male colours apparently patrolling around a nest. Suddenly a much larger fish, also in male colours, appeared on the scene and within 15 seconds the smaller male had adopted the non-descript brown with dark stripes colouring and departed the scene.

Donny Midas fishing off Crabbers Wharf (50º 34.14'N, 002 26.62'W), Portland Harbour, Dorset caught 10 individuals on 10th October 2025. Further captures were reported from Shoreham (West Sussex) by Lee Jackson where they were said to be prolific.

A scale-rayed wrasse (*Acantholabrus palloni*) recorded in August 2023 by Owen Exeter (Plate 28 b) – p47.

Fish louse – *Anilocra* spp

The impression continues that there is an increasing level of parasitism in many areas, particularly on wrasse. For example, Josh Pickett reports *Anilocra* sp. parasitise *Symphodus melops* (Plate 24) which inhabit rocky ground and breakwaters around Falmouth; at HMS Forte IV marker and Custom House Quay, as many as 1 in 5 this year would have 1–2 *Anilocra* sp. attached. In the colder months, *Anilocra* sp. were present on almost half of all *S. melops* caught, although the fish were less active, lower in the water column, and hidden between rocks, thus easier to parasitise.

Jim Ellis – Cefas jim.ellis@cefas.gov.uk **Parasitic isopods:** CEFAS trawl surveys, especially those in the western Channel, are finding several parasitic isopods, including multiple species. Work on these cymothoid isopods in ongoing with Peter Barry (CEFAS). Parasitic isopods were also found on adult pollack during 2025 (Simon Thomas, direct observation)

Plate 24 Male and female *Anilocra* sp. attached to a *Symphodus melops*, 1 July, Falmouth. Photo: Joshua Pickett. Permission given

Blennies

Black-faced Blenny (*Tripterygion delaisi*)

It appears that 2025 was a good year for this blenny with Matt Slater reporting sightings made by Seasearch volunteers from new locations on the south Cornish coast in St Austell Bay and slightly further south along the coast at Port Melon, while Josh Pickett (JP) reported it from Mevagissey. JP also reported that the species was common around Weymouth and Portland being particularly conspicuous during the breeding season, generally associated with metal structures such as outfall pipes and metal wreckage. JP also noted this blenny over featureless, silty ground in Falmouth Harbour, not the usual sort of habitat for this blenny. Nicolas Jouault recorded that the species was present in good numbers around Jersey.

Paul Naylor observed several territory-guarding males in Wembury Bay (and one at Falmouth) over the spring and summer, with females present on some occasions. On 31st May in Wembury Bay, PN filmed a 'sneaker' male (female colouration) approach a mating pair before darting in next to the female four times, with remarkable speed.

In mid-July Lin Baldock watched females, each closely tended by a brightly coloured male, laying eggs on various vertical metal surfaces under Swanage Pier. Patches about 8cm x 8cm had been scrupulously cleaned of silt and taller bryozoan growth by the attentive males who were actively attracting females to these patches. These specially tended spaces show up clearly as can be seen in the accompanying photograph. Close inspection of these areas revealed widely scattered, single eggs attached to the turf of small tunicates, sponges and bryozoa.

Plate 25 male Black-faced Blenny tending an area of vertical concrete ready to attract an egg-laying female. Note the patch cleared of silt and tall bryozoan growth. ©Lin Baldock – permission given

Tompot Blenny (*Parablennius gattorugine*).

Paul Naylor's long-term study of recognisable individuals in Wembury Bay continues, with one individual passing the 9-year mark in 2025. A new area of reef was added to the study in 2025 while no observations were possible at an area used in previous years, where the raised sand level (by >1 metre) had smothered reef crevices. PN believes that such habitat changes, along with greater occupancy of crevices by competitors (e.g. juvenile conger eels) may explain the greater incidence of fighting injuries sometimes seen. PN observed a prolonged fight between two adult males at Falmouth on 20th May (i.e. in the March to June egg-guarding period), having only ever previously seen such behaviour between August and October.

Variable (Ringneck, Bi-colour) Blenny (*Parablennius pilicornis*).

Paul Naylor considered that this species was doing well in Plymouth Sound, where he saw several males guarding eggs in 2025, although some other divers thought their numbers were down. PN was able to recognise individual fish from their underlying 'honeycomb' skin pattern to show that an egg-guarding male can change quickly between the 'dark' and 'bold stripe' colouration.

In contrast to Plymouth, Matt Slater did not report any records from the Fal in 2025, where a few years ago this blenny was common.

The species has been recorded from Dorset waters since 2017, first off Chesil Beach in Lyme Bay and then more recently east of Portland Bill in Weymouth Bay and Poole Bay with males seen guarding eggs. In August 2025 Seasearch surveyor Lindsey Scott diving the Rampion wind farm site south of Brighton, East Sussex with Sussex Wildlife Trust photographed a Ring-necked blenny on the wind turbine structures. Particularly interesting was the fact that the individual photographed was the bright yellow colour morph of this species which to our knowledge has not been reported previously from English sites (apart from a single possible observation in Plymouth Sound several years ago).

Plate 26 The yellow form of the Variable Blenny photographed on the Rampion windfarm, East Sussex. ©Lindsey Scott *Permission given to use this image*

There have been numerous diver and angler records for this species in 2025 from Dorset and the south coast of Devon and Cornwall. Dates ranged from 9th February from Plymouth (Lucas Theocharides - angler), to 1st November Devon (Aaron Bovey - angler) and locations from Cornwall east to Rampion wind farm in East Sussex.

Josh Pickett Has noticed an increase in reports from the Torbay area and beyond for *Parablennius pilicornis*, but there appeared to be less reports in Cornwall. Unusually, none confirmed from Falmouth, where many sightings have usually been (two previously known locations in the town, and one at a dive site in Carrick Roads, living amongst discarded bottles and maerl beds with *Blennius ocellaris*. At least one area in Falmouth, where *P. pilicornis* were reliably present in several cracks and holes prior to 2025, is now populated by *Conger conger,* of substantial sizes.

1. Plymouth, February 9, Lucas Theocharides (angler)
2. Plymouth, March 19, Phoebe Marshman (diver)
3. Wembury, April 15, Alan Mundy (angler)
4. Elphinstone, Plymouth, between April 15–20, Alan Mundy (angler)
5. East side of the Plym, between April 15–20, Alan Mundy (angler)
6. Brixham, May 31, Lucas Theocharides (angler)
7. Brixham, June 2, Brenton Prigge (diver)
8. Plymouth, June 20, Brenton Prigge (diver)
9. Haldon Pier, Torquay, June 23, Steven McDonald (angler)
10. Plymouth, June 27, Brenton Prigge (diver)
11. Devon, between 4th -11th August, Darren Starkey (angler).
12. Plymouth, August 7, Brenton Prigge (diver)
13. South-West , August 8, Timmy Extreme (angler).
14. South-West , August 21, Andrew Grimmer (angler).
15. West Bay, Dorset, 8 September, Jon Trevett (angler)
16. Plymouth, October 18, Lucas Theocharides (angler)
17. Portland, late October, Alan Mundy (angler)
18. Brixham, November 1, Aaron Bovey (angler)

Gobies

Giant Goby (*Gobius cobitis*)
Nicolas Jouault reports that Giant gobies are common around Jersey with good numbers above 20cm in length, with an individual up to 30cm long seen underwater. Jersey Race 15th August. Giant gobies common here, I try and measure them, did see one underwater circa 30cm. Good numbers over 20 cm.
Josh Pickett: Lots of observations from Falmouth listing (see locations p 43)

Couch's Goby (*Gobius couchi*)
Josh Pickett reported *Gobius couchi* to be common in highly localised areas in Portland Harbour, Dorset. At one site the associated fish fauna included species such as Sand Smelt *Atherina presbyter*, juvenile Pollack *Pollachius pollachius*, Black-faced blenny *Tripterygion delaisi*, Black goby *Gobius niger*, and Greater Pipefish *Syngnathus typhle.*

Couch's goby occurs widely in Dorset waters with records from Poole Bay west to Weymouth Bay and Portland Harbour, typically in depths of less than about 12m on often silty, mixed ground. There has been a single record from waters off Dartmouth, Devon; finally there are good populations in Cornwall in the estuaries of the Fal and the Helford (the type locality). The species is widely distributed in Ireland.

Steven's Goby (*Gobius gasteveni*)
Paul Naylor reported that there appeared to be fewer Steven's Goby seen at Firestone Bay in Plymouth Sound in 2025, although he saw one at Brixham (Shoalstone) for the first time. Matt Slater reported the goby as less numerous on the maerl grounds around the Bizzies reefs just east of the Fal entrance, Cornwall. Lin Baldock, while on a Cornwall Seasearch Tor to Shore Event, reported Steven's goby guarding eggs in St Austell Bay, Cornwall off Black Head on maerl between low-lying rock ledges in about 18m BSL (2nd June 2025**).**
MD: This goby is recorded commonly on the maerl around the wreck of the Hera in Cornwall.

Tom Greenland caught an individual off Wilcove at the mouth of the Tamar early in the year (21st March).

Douglas Herdson brought it to our attention that there was a new British "mini species" record ratified by the Angling Trust for Steven's Goby caught in Plymouth Sound by Chris Scott (16th December 2025), weighing in at 9.33g (1/3rd of an ounce).

Plate 27 A Steven's Goby – Paul Naylor – Permission given

Two-spotted Goby *Pomatoschistus flavescens*
Josh Pickett reported that *Pomatoschistus flavescens,* a common *winter* goby species, appeared to be less frequent in late 2024–early 2025, at least in harbours and marinas where they are known to be numerous. In Sutton Harbour, Plymouth, there was significantly less algal growth around the steps and harbour walls where the Two-spotted Goby typically shelters. The goby was instead more common between the rocks at a nearby beach, possibly suggesting a shift in habit preference.

Painted Goby *Pomatoschistus pictus*

Lin Baldock has noted from dives in Poole Bay and Weymouth Bay that the Painted Goby seems much less abundant than in the past, not gathering around in crowds as a diver disturbs the sediment. Larger individuals did not appear until unusually late in the season. This was also noted at Scottish dives sites. How widespread is this phenomenon?

Josh Pickett: Lots of observations from Falmouth listing (see locations p 43)

Guillet's Goby (*Lebetus guilleti*) No observations for 2025

Grey Triggerfish (*Balistes capriscus*) Douglas Herdson & Josh Pickett

The numbers of Grey Triggerfish (*Balistes capriscus*) recorded in 2025 was higher than previous years Table 8.7. Sightings for Grey triggerfish for 2025 are listed in Table 8.8. Whilst only a few Grey Triggerfish were reported by divers and beachcombers, good numbers were captured by some chartered angling boats, mainly on the North Coast. In July there was a Grey Triggerfish at Swanage Pier over a couple of weeks or so. It had a rarely found goose-barnacle on its back by the dorsal fin - *Conchoderma virgatum*. This tells us the triggerfish has arrived here from the Atlantic Ocean as the goose barnacle is pelagic from open water and attaches to fish and other marine animals. Off the coast of Newquay, there is a location on shallow ground where *Balistes capriscus* frequent for just a few weeks every September before they move on, however this year, they were first recorded here in late July and continued to be recorded into the second week of November. In a single day in September, the charter boat which reported them (MV *Atlantis*), caught 75 Grey Triggerfish, with the largest being 1.9 kg (4lb 3oz). Markedly up from the previous year, where 15 Grey Triggerfish were caught on the best day . Most records were in the autumn (Table 8.9)

Table 7 Number of sightings of Grey Triggerfish (*Balistes capriscus*) by year (from SWME Annual Reports): –
-

Year	**Number of sightings**
2014	few
2015	few
2016	21
2017	14
2018	18
2019	23
2020	10
2021	38
2022	77
2023	38
2024	18
2025	94+

Table 8 Reports of Grey Triggerfish (*Balistes capriscus*) around SW England

Date	**Location**	**Number**	**Comments**
3/01/2025	Porlock Ridge & Saltmarsh, Minehead	1	Dead, ignvik iNaturalist
4/01/2025	Gwinear-Gwithian	1	Dead, Daisy Laing
6/01/2025	Perran Sands	1	Dead, Tracey Williams
11/01/2025	Fistral Bay, Newquay	1	Dead, Carly Graham
13/01/2025	Watergate Bay	1	Dead, Tracey Williams
30/06/2025	Sutton Harbour, Plymouth	1	Alive, Steve Dennis (sighting, no photo)
31/07/2025	Newquay	2	Alive, at least 2 fish 1 kg and 1.2kg. Matt Robins, *Atlantis* charter boat
July/August 2025	Swanage Pier, Dorset	1	One (alive) with a rarely found goose-barnacle on its back by the dorsal fin - *Conchoderma virgatum*. Julie Hatcher, Dorset WT

16/08/2025	Plymouth	1	Spotted on a Baited Remote Underwater Video Systems camera. John Hepburn.
September	Newquay	1 or more	Alive, 1.6 kg, Allan Duggan, *Atlantis* charter boat
September	North of Newquay	75	Caught in one trip. Largest being 1.9 kg. Matt Robins
October	Newquay	1 or more	Alive, 2.6kg Allan Duggan, *Atlantis* charter boat
October	Sussex		On Video
7/11/2025	Newquay	1+	Alive, Matt Robins, *Atlantis* charter boat
28/11/2025	Tolcarne Beach, Newquay	1	Dead, busybee77, iNaturalist
8/12/2025	Perran Sands	1	Dead, Tracey Williams
10/12/2025	Porth Cressa, St Mary's, IoS	1	Dead stranded. Richie Aston
24/12/2025	New Polzeath, Wadebridge	1	Dead, Claire, iNaturalist

Table 9 Numbers Grey Triggerfish (*Balistes capriscus*)in 2025 by month

Month	Number reported
Jan	5
Feb	
Mar	
Apr	
May	
June	1
July	2
Aug	1
Sept	76+
Oct	1
Nov	2
Dec	3
TOTAL	**94+**

Location reports

Poole Bay and Christchurch Bay - **Mal Thomas** Poole Bay Small Boat AC mal@castlemoreltd.co.uk

Here is a snapshot of our Clubs Season from Poole and Christchurch Bay. We keep systematic records of our catches – see Fig.8.8.

1. Sea Bream made a reasonable showing; however the average size is way down. We usually see a few 3.8lb bream, but not in 2025. We did notice more Gilthead Sea Bream (*Sparus aurata*) and I managed a few, again small, say up to 2lb, the majority 12oz.
2. We had a one or two Comber (*Serranus cabrilla*) caught, very small ones.
3. Mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*) were even more elusive or just not there in the numbers observed years ago. This is a gradual decline over five years, and we are buying summer fish baits because we cannot guarantee catching fresh.
4. Flat fish like Brill (*Scophthalmus rhombus*) and Turbot (*Scophthalmus maximus*) are not worth targeting in our waters. We have to travel to Alderney or Weymouth and even then numbers and size are well down on ten years ago.
5. Plaice (*Pleuronectes platessa*) are so heavily targeted in Poole Bay especially just off the beach with rows of nets. The RSA catch very little, may be a pot buoy in your prop for trying to drift between them. The majority of fish

are small, hand sized and all go back. One in ten fish might just be 1.5lb if lucky. A 2lb fish is becoming real bonus and a 3lb fish rare. It has been at least six years since I caught a 3lb plaice.

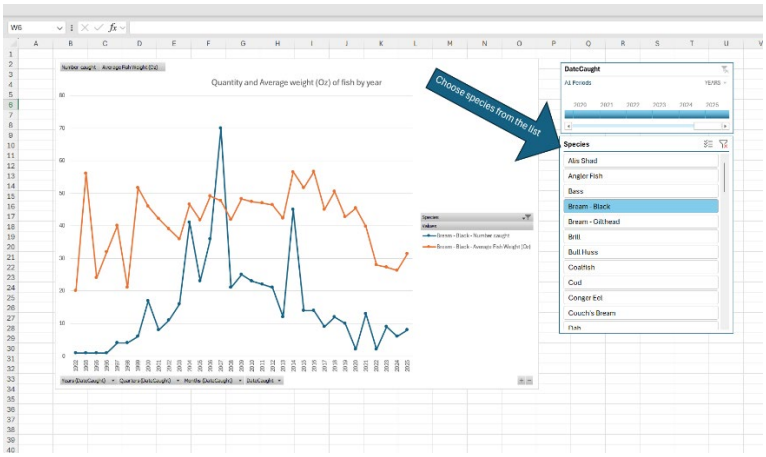
6. Rays have again been low in numbers and size, Undulate Ray (*Raja undulata*) are very scarce and Blonde Ray (*Raja brachyura*) are becoming much smaller. We had an Autumn flurry for two weeks and the rest of the year was very poor both boat and beach anglers reported poor catches.
7. Conger Eel (*Conger conger*) numbers are still rising and taking all baits, they are from bootlace to 25lb size and a real pest on all types of ground, they are no longer a rough ground fish and here all year.
8. We saw and caught some Porbeagle Shark (*Lamna nasus*) and Thresher Shark (*Alopias vulpinus*) this year. In , our waters shark are on the increase but not an explosion by any means, with several encountered
9. Tope Shark (*Galeorhinus galeus*), were not believed to be as widespread or numerous in 2025.
10. Spurdog Shark (*Squalus acanthias*) were rare and only encountered occasionally in low numbers (1-2).
11. Bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*) were in good numbers.
12. Pollack (*Pollachius pollachius*) has no longer been a target for some years unless trips are specifically made to wreck, but even then catches have been poor. It is believed that if a wreck is targetted, repopulation will take many years., I also believe commercials have worked out how to efficiently ring net a wreck and wipe out the shoals. They also leave discarded fouled nets caught on the wrecks leaving them nearly unfishable for the RSA. I believe we need a bag limit because this has become a highly targeted fish by charter boats to compensate for poor days. Pollack suffer barotrauma when brought up from the depth and rarely survive the haul up, so very few are returned in good condition. In my opinion, this species needs a comprehensive protection plan soon; a bag limit is a blunt tool targeting the wrong type of fishing. Wrecks need designating as MPAs in the new rethink by DEFRA and the MMO so they are breeding sites for new shoals can provide a refuge.
13. Wrasse and Gurnards we believe are also on the decline; although no reason is known. Commercial fisheries for wrasse for Salmon sea lice control is believed to be very much reduced; 1 boat in Weymouth is allowed to harvest wrasse when SIFCA was last consulted.
14. Sole are now a rarely encountered, this is attributed to overfishing by commercial bottom trawling offshore and netting inshore. Beach anglers particularly are suffering from what we call 'curtain netting', many overlapping nets deployed progressively out from the shallows to 40ft, offering little chance escape for the fish feeding along the shoreline food.

The overall picture is a gloomy one for the RSA, aside from recovery in Bass stocks. Even though I attend many meetings with SIFCA, our stakeholding has taken far too long to recognise, our input and feedback a long time ignored and the fish stocks already depleted. I do hear a different tone from the Environment Agency representatives, but they are 5-10 years too late. We needed a New Zealand type approach of action now and plenty of enforcement, but that is not even under consideration. We have over complicated things for decades and not protected our fish stocks. We are now seeing the ramifications of that action. Bass have regenerated over the ten year period since they were under the spotlight raised by B.A.S.S to take protection measures, now they are potentially undoing that rather than sticking with the regeneration from lower quotas and two bag limits and a closed season.

The word sustainability is banded around like they know what is sustainable, when asked they could not tell me if a full time bottom trawler often joined by one or two more, plus dozens of commercial netters all in two small bays is sustainable. Our club catch reports show clearly that it is not sustainable, but they do not see that as their problem because they are doing what is required by Defra or the MMO. They never look outside the box or listen enough to other stakeholders reporting declining numbers, if they did they might report back to the Agencies with conviction that things are not good in our patch. One SIFCA manager did report to me that they have little money nor resource to do so.

I wonder how many Anglers or passionate Naturalists are in these jobs, not enough. I have some encouragement when I read the December 2025 letter from the Angling Trusts (AT) CEO and Hannah Rudd of the AT, both of whom I know have an affinity and passion with fishing or nature, which I hope drives them in their work and makes them a better representative. The AT are very late on the scene and not well funded, so their impact will be glacial but welcomed. I am clinging onto the hope that the AT will have increased revenue and powers to stand up for the RSA. I have just joined as an independent member whilst also being a club member in an effort to do what I can. I do hope you find some of that useful for your 2026 publication.

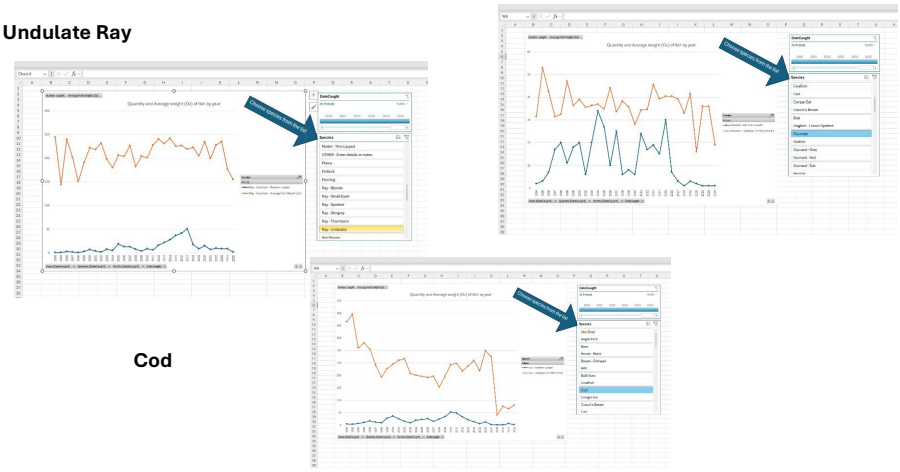
Figure 8a POOLE & CHRISTCHURCH BAY – Systematic Records of Catches from 1992 - Present
Mal Thomas - Black Bream catches – Blue line numbers caught – Orange line average weight



POOLE & CHRISTCHURCH BAY – Clear evidence of declining catches of many species including Undulate ray, Flounder & Cod Mal Thomas

Flounder

Undulate Ray



Cod

8.8 b Catches of Undulate Ray (*Raja undulata*) , Flounder (*Platichthys flesus*) and Cod (*Gadus morhua*)– Blue line numbers caught – Orange line average weightR

Scilly Isles Fish Report Exeter University - Owen Exeter o.exeter@exeter.ac.uk

A study conducted by the University of Exeter and published in 2025 aimed to comprehensively survey the Isles of Scilly and surrounding shallow reefs to quantify fish and mobile benthic assemblages using stereo baited remote underwater video (stereo-BRUV) systems. Survey locations were spatially balanced across habitats throughout the archipelago to depths of 40 m during the summer months (late May–September) of 2022 and 2023 (Fig 9). This study represents one of the largest and most spatially comprehensive stereo-BRUV surveys conducted in English waters to date. Overall, the findings demonstrate that stereo-BRUV surveys can provide robust, repeatable benchmarks for spatially assessing fish assemblages and biomass in temperate UK waters and highlights the ecological importance of the Isles of Scilly as a regional biodiversity hotspot for a variety of fish species.
Full publication available open access here: https://doi.org/10.1002/eap.70104.

Key findings:
Across 280 successful stereo-BRUV deployments, the survey recorded 11,950 individuals representing 64 species, with demersal fishes dominating the dataset (~6,743 individuals). Teleost fishes accounted for the majority of species richness (41 species). The survey showed that deeper, topographically complex circalittoral reefs to the west of the archipelago (e.g. around Bishop Rock) and at Seven Stones Reef supported higher fish species richness,

diversity, and biomass than shallower reefs and sediment habitats. Depth and structural complexity were the strongest predictors of fish richness and biomass, highlighting the importance of complex reef habitats within local

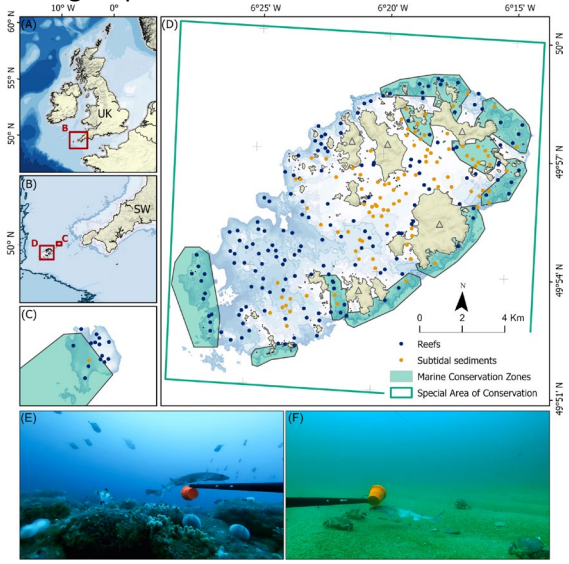


Fig 9 Sampling sites on Scilly

MPAs. Several commercially and conservation-relevant species were recorded at regionally high frequencies, including European Pollack (*Pollachius pollachius*), Small-spotted Catshark (*Scyliorhinus canicula*), Nursehound (*Scyliorhinus stellaris*), and European Spiny Lobster (*Palinurus elephas*), with wrasse (*Labridae spp.*) notably also abundant, occurring in over 75% of deployments.

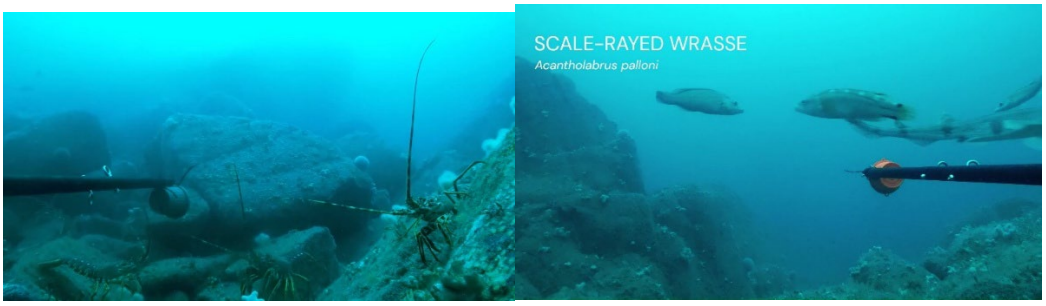
A total of 43 fish and invertebrate species and 1,641 individuals were measured using stereo camera capabilities, with European pollack the most frequently measured species (n > 400). Larger fish sizes were primarily associated with greater depth and increased remoteness from inhabited islands. Stereo-BRUV data also enabled detailed analyses of species-specific size patterns; for example, most European spiny lobsters measured exceeded the minimum landing size, indicating a healthy size structure. Overall, larger fish body sizes were generally linked to depth, shelter from exposure, and remoteness from inhabited islands.

Seven Stones Reef

Seven Stones Reef, an offshore reef complex northwest of the main archipelago, emerged as one of the most ecologically important sites in the survey. Deployments recorded consistently high demersal fish richness, diversity, and total biomass relative to most inshore locations. The reef's greater depth and pronounced topographic complexity were key drivers of these patterns, supporting a diverse assemblage of reef-associated fishes and elasmobranchs. The site also hosted larger-bodied individuals of commercially important species, particularly European Pollack and Catsharks (*Scyliorhinus spp.*). Notable observations included large aggregations of deep-water species such as Boarfish (*Capros aper*) and John Dory (*Zeus faber*) in relatively shallow water, pelagic aggregations including Atlantic Bluefin Tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*) swimming close to the seabed, dense schools of forage fish (*Scomber spp.*), and a scale-rayed wrasse (*Acantholabrus palloni*) recorded in August 2023 (Plate 28 b)

Application of spatially robust stereo-BRUV sampling for quantifying fish assemblages in UK marine protected areas

Owen M. Exeter, Annette C. Broderick, Xavier A. Harrison, Francesco Garzon, Sarah Morcom, Ricky Pender, Trudy Russell, Ian Saunders, Paul J. Somerfield, Kate Sugar, Colin Trundle, Julie Webber, Tom Hooper, Kristian Metcalfe
First published: 12 September 2025
Ecological Applications: https://doi.org/10.1002/eap.70104



Plates 28 a & 28b Stills from baited remote underwater video survey of 1. Scale-rayed wrasse (*Acantholabrus palloni*) and 2. Large aggregation of Spiny Lobster (*Palinurus elephas*). Permission from Owen Exeter

Isles of Scilly ISRA:
The results of this study also informed the designation of the Isles of Scilly as an IUCN Important Shark and Ray Area (ISRA) in 2025, primarily for Small-spotted Catshark (*S. canicula*), with Nursehound (*S. stellaris*), Porbeagle (*Lamna nasus*), and Blue Shark (*Prionace glauca*) listed as supporting species. We have now published the blog for this survey, which includes the YouTube recording of the talk as well as a write-up of the Q&A and any useful links that we shared during the live event: https://biologicalrecording.co.uk/2026/03/10/exploring-underwater-scilly/

Douglas Herdson – Articles on the Marine Fish of the Isles of Scilly.
Herdson, D. (2021). Marine Fish of Isles of Scilly. Part 1*. Isles of Scilly Bird and Natural History Review 2020: 213-224.*
Herdson, D. (2022). Marine Fish of Isles of Scilly. Part 2*. Isles of Scilly Bird and Natural History Review 2021: 208-220.*
Herdson, D. (2010). *Isles of Scilly Fish and Fisheries. Isles of Scilly Marine Biodiversity Project*. 59p

Solent Inshore Fish Survey – Zoe Morrall (zoe.morrall@noc.ac.uk)
Spatio-temporal assessment of nearshore fish communities in a temperate estuary using functional and community metrics for restoration and management.

Our recent published paper (here - https://lnkd.in/euUYTucQ) using 12 years of biannual survey data (2007–2018) from the Solent's estuarine nearshore zones, examines changes in fish community composition, abundance, species richness, and estuarine dependency. Our results show clear spatial and seasonal variability and a significant long-term decline in abundance. Using Fish Estuarine Association Scores (FEAS), we identified areas that support species more reliant on estuarine environments which offer a practical way to set ecological baselines and prioritise restoration in real-world monitoring contexts. This work demonstrates the power of long-term, multi-site monitoring and highlights how trait-based approaches like FEAS can support ecological baselining and practical restoration planning.

The findings of Morrall et al. (2025) provide a detailed long-term picture of how nearshore fish communities are changing in a highly urbanised temperate estuary. The study draws on 12 years of consistent seine-net data across 15 sites in the Solent and reveals a clear long-term decline in overall fish abundance, a pattern also reflected in global and national trends in degraded estuarine environments. The decline, occurring alongside continued habitat pressure and rising temperatures, underlines the importance of maintaining long-term datasets capable of distinguishing between natural variability and genuine ecological change.

Seasonal and tidal variation played a strong role in shaping the observed fish assemblages. Autumn surveys consistently recorded higher species richness than summer, and the structure of the communities present at high and low tide showed measurable differences. Low-tide samples tended to include a more diverse species set, while high-tide assemblages were more tightly grouped. These patterns show that monitoring design significantly influences our ability to detect shifting ranges, juvenile recruitment events and rare species, reinforcing the value of maintaining seasonal and tidal coverage.

The study also demonstrates that the nursery function of estuarine and nearshore habitats is dominated by a small number of species. Across the Solent, only six taxa accounted for 96% of all individuals recorded, including Sand

Smelt (*Atherina presbyter*) , juvenile clupeids, Bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*), gobies and Golden Grey Mullet (*Chelon auratus*). These species represent a mix of estuarine residents and marine migrants, illustrating the tight ecological connectivity between estuarine nurseries and the wider coastal zone. This functional dominance is highly relevant to the south-west, where juvenile bass, mullet, sprat and sardine also form the core of nearshore communities and appear sensitive to warming seas and changing seasonal patterns.

One of the major contributions of this work is its use of functional metrics, including Estuarine Use Functional Guilds (EUFG) and Fish Estuarine Association Scores (FEAS). These tools reveal habitat importance that abundance alone cannot show. Some sites recorded high numbers of fish but were mainly used by transient marine species, whereas other sites, though less abundant, supported species highly dependent on estuarine habitats for critical life stages. This distinction is vital when identifying areas of high functional value within the SWME region, as FEAS makes it possible to recognise habitat that supports species with the greatest reliance on estuarine conditions, and therefore the greatest vulnerability to change

Spatial variation across the Solent was pronounced, with catchments such as Southampton Water supporting particularly high abundance, species richness and a wide range of functional guilds. Other areas, including sites near high-quality habitats such as saltmarsh and mudflats, supported high diversity even with less sampling effort. Conversely, more exposed or habitat-poor sites recorded much lower abundance. These findings mirror emerging observations from south-west waters, where site-specific patterns—such as strong conger presence, shifting mullet distributions or localised clupeid events—suggest that fine-scale environmental differences strongly influence community composition. The study demonstrates that estuarine and coastal systems cannot be treated as ecologically uniform, reinforcing the SWME CoP's emphasis on place-based reporting and local knowledge.

Overall, the Solent dataset presents a compelling case for the value of long-term, multisite, multi-agency monitoring that integrates traditional survey methods with newer tools such as baited video, eDNA and telemetry. Morrall et al. show how functional metrics applied retrospectively to existing datasets can produce ecological baselines that are otherwise difficult to establish in dynamic, data-poor environments. This approach closely mirrors the direction taken by the SWME Fish CoP, which relies on combining observations from divers, fishers, BRUV users, researchers, NGOs and others to create a coherent, region-wide understanding of change in fish populations.

Demonstrates value of retrospective trait-based metrics (Fish Estuarine Association Scores FEAS + EUFG) for setting ecological baselines, especially when environmental data are missing.
Provides a framework applicable to other data-limited estuaries.

You can find the paper here - https://lnkd.in/euUYTucQ

Temporal patterns (Fig 8.10)

- Significant decline in fish abundance (2007-2018)
- Species richness and composition varied strongly

by season: autumn richer than summer

- Tidal state influenced community structure: higher richness at low tide

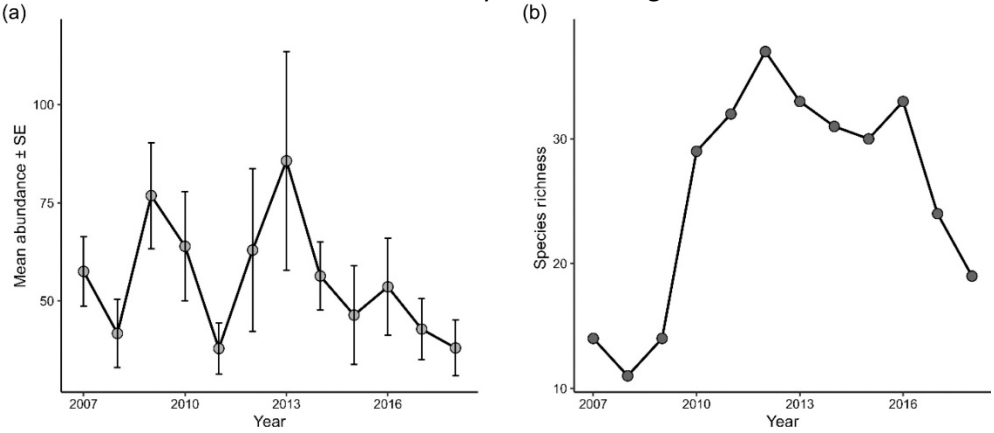


Fig 8.10 Temporal fish abundance and species richness

Spatial patterns
Clear differences among catchments:–
Southampton Water: highest abundance & richness; widest range of guilds.–
Chichester Harbour: high FEAS (more estuarine-dependent species).–
Isle of Wight: lowest richness/abundance

Management implications
FEAS + guilds help identify functionally important nursery areas, not obvious from abundance alone.
Highlights the need for long-term, multisite, seasonal monitoring to detect real ecological change.

Falmouth Observations – Josh Pickett thebichirhandbook@gmail.com

Observations are made using snorkelling, conventional and light tackle angling. The table 8.10 is a first attempt to structure the observations being made with a SACFOR scale.

S - Superabundant: The species is present in extremely high numbers.
A - Abundant: The species is present in large numbers.
C - Common: The species is frequently encountered.
F - Frequent: The species is encountered regularly, but not in high numbers.
O - Occasional: The species is found from time to time.
R - Rare: Only a few individuals of the species are found.

Table 8.10 – Fish Abundance Scales & Numbers

SPECIES	ABUNDANCE	OBSERVATION NOTES
Black Goby *Gobius niger*	**A** *over sandy/silty ground; localised* **S** *town populations*	Prolific throughout the town, between Maritime and Prince of Wales pier. They were sparser in 2023.
Rock Goby *Gobius paganellus*	**C**	Populations appear stable, with no discernible change in Falmouth.
Giant Goby *Gobius cobitis*	**F**	Populations appear stable, with no discernible change in Falmouth. Now frequent at Trevone, on the north coast.
Two-spotted Goby *Pomatoschistus flavescens*	**R**	Only three sightings of Two-spotted Goby *Pomatoschistus flavescens* in Falmouth (no rod and line captures), still low like previous years.
Painted Goby *Pomatoschistus pictus*	**N/A**	No sightings of Painted Goby *Pomatoschistus pictus*, although uncommon here, in previous years they were spotted from Swanpool to Prince of Wales pier. There may be competition with other Gobiiformes, like Black Goby *Gobius niger*.
Montagu's Blenny *Coryphoblennius galerita*	**F**	Populations appear stable, with no discernible change in Falmouth. In 2024 and 2025 Montagu's Blenny *C. galerita* appeared on average larger (6–7cm).
Tompot Blenny *Parablennius gattorugine*	**C** *in Summer/Autumn months;* **O** *rest of year*	Populations appear stable, with no discernible change in Falmouth.

Ringneck (or Variable) Blenny *Parablennius pilicornis*	**N/A**	No reports in Falmouth this year.
Common Blenny *Lipophrys pholis*	**A**	Populations appear stable, with no discernible change in Falmouth.
Butterfly Blenny *Blennius ocellaris*	**N/A**	East Narrow was common with Ringneck Blenny *Parablennius pilicornis* and Butterfly Blenny *Blennius ocellaris*, but these have not been reported here this year (that I know of), and it is instead common with Dragonets *Callionymus* sp..
Corkwing Wrasse *Symphodus melops*	**A** *in Summer/Autumn months;* **F** *rest of year*	Still in good numbers, but fewer are at Prince of Wales pier than there were in 2024 and 2023.
Fifteen-spined Stickleback *Spinachia spinachia*	**F**	In good numbers in the marina, with plenty of juveniles feeding on small, translucent decapods, probably *Hippolyte varians* throughout August; and larger adults exploring around the quay and pier between late spring and mid-autumn. I spotted at least 10 individuals every visit over the summer, in a six metre diameter.
Topknot *Zeugopterus punctatus*	**O**	Populations appear stable, with no discernible change in Falmouth.
Thick-lipped Grey Mullet *Chelon labrosus*	**C**	Populations appear stable, with no discernible change in Falmouth.
Worm Pipefish *Nerophis lumbriciformis*	**F** *in rockpools only*	Populations appear stable, with no discernible change in Falmouth.
Long-spined Sea Scorpion *Taurulus bubalis*	**C**	Populations appear stable, with no discernible change in Falmouth.
Five-bearded Rockling *Ciliata mustela*	**C**	Sightings of Five-bearded Rockling *Ciliata mustela* up by nearly 67% compared to 2024, based on iNaturalist observations. This might just be due to a better awareness of their habitat and more observations on the app (an 18.6% increase of overall iNat observations this year compared to 2024), although I have noted more gaidropsarids than usual in the rockpools between Swanpool and Silver Steps. They are very low in the intertidal zone, and are often found alongside Cornish Sucker *Lepadogaster purpurea*.
Shore Rockling *Gaidropsarus mediterraneus*	**C**	Sightings of Shore Rockling *Gaidropsarus mediterraneus* up 60% compared to 2024, based on iNaturalist observations. They are very low in the intertidal zone, and are often found alongside Cornish Sucker *Lepadogaster purpurea*.
Cornish Sucker *Lepadogaster purpurea*	**O**	More numerous in the lowest part of the intertidal zone you search. I've found clusters of up to six individuals together under nearby rocks, whereas slightly higher up I find few or none together.
Connemara Clingfish *Lepadogaster candollei*	**O**	Gregarious and localised around rocky and wooden structures in the town, with at least 4 individuals present at any given time (although that number is expected to be higher with hidden individuals). They remain in

		well-featured, inshore areas which still hold water on a spring low tide. The nearest two groups I know of, are 200m apart as the crow flies. They are reliably present in these areas in late Spring to Autumn, which makes me suspect they are males guarding nests; having captured some particularly small individuals, suggests to me that the surviving young are not venturing far. Late July to early November is when they get caught the most in Falmouth, a contrast from Weymouth, when they start to get regularly caught much earlier in the year. They have consistently been in the same spots since 2023. I first started taking notice of them that year (so this might mean nothing), although 'LRF' anglers I have spoken to have not heard of them in these Falmouth spots before 2023.
Montagu's Snailfish *Liparis montagui*	**R**	Found low in the intertidal zone, between and including the months of January and April. Few individuals are reported, typically <10 a year.
Sand Smelt *Atherina presbyter*	**S**	The sheer numbers of Sand Smelt *Atherina presbyter* in Falmouth are proving to be an important prey fish for several species, with mass feeding events in the year, during the hours of darkness and early morning (many of which I witnessed between 12 August–6 September). Predators have included Atlantic Mackerel *Scomber scombrus*, Bass *Dicentrarchus labrax*, Horse Mackerel (or Scad) *Trachurus trachurus*, and older juvenile / subadult Whiting *Merlangius merlangus* and Pollack *Pollachius pollachius*, often feeding on the Sand Smelt *A. presbyter* together, at the same time.
Atlantic Mackerel *Scomber scombrus*	**C**	Present year round, but feeding and moving increasingly more in the lower estuary during the summer/autumn months.
Bass *Dicentrarchus labrax*	**C**	Juveniles can be seen regularly in the upper estuary, with a greater density of adults of varying sizes lower in the marinas.
Horse Mackerel *Trachurus trachurus*	**O**	Appears to move sympatrically with feeding Atlantic Mackerel *S. scombrus* during dusk.
Whiting *Merlangius merlangus*	**O**	Juveniles <20cm appear over sandy ground in the town marinas, from late summer through to winter.
Pollack *Pollachius pollachius*	**C**	Juveniles <17cm tightly hang around natural and artificial structures in the lower estuary throughout the year. Reports of larger fish in the estuary are very rare.
Goldsinny Wrasse *Ctenolabrus rupestris*	**C**	More populous throughout the town harbour, when in previous years, the majority in the town area were restricted to the end of Prince of Wales pier. This may relate to the recent installation of the reef cubes and habitiles in the town, having matured over the last year.
Dragonets *Callionymus* sp.	**O**	Seldom seen from the town, but do live amongst the maerl beds in Carrick Roads (occasionally seen by divers and anglers) with the maerl turning the females a vibrant red colour. Both Common dragonet *C. lyra* and suspected Reticulated dragonet *C. reticulatus* were present.

		
Couch's Sea Bream *Pagrus pagrus*	**C**	Highly prolific in the upper stretches of the rivers around the lower Fal during the summer.
Black Sea Bream *Spondyliosoma cantharus*	**O**	Occasional reports from the upper stretches of the rivers around the lower Fal during the summer through into autumn.
Gilthead Sea Bream *Sparus urata*	**O**	Reports from the upper stretches of the rivers around the lower Fal from as early as April and caught throughout the year (occasionally closer to the town), further supporting that they are resident in Cornish estuaries.
Blackspot Sea Bream *Pagellus bogaraveo*	**S**	Larger juveniles are prolific in deeper water in the estuary, with the smaller individuals moving to shallow water at night to feed on the shrimp. Adults still present in deeper offshore marks, caught by angling charter boats.
Striped Red Mullet *Mullus surmuletus*	**R**	A handful of reports from the upper stretches of the rivers around the lower Fal during the summer through into autumn.

Wembury Observations – Jake Taylor Bruce – Rock Pooling & Snorkel tours
jtaylorbruce@devonwildlifetrust.org

Jake Taylor-Bruce Devon WT, Jan 2025 from Wembury rockpooling I've seen a number of young **topknot** (palm sized) recently which is always nice, and have found a **few worm pipefish** caught in the act or males carrying eggs, it seems like late winter is the time they mate which was a nice discovery.

Jake Taylor-Bruce Devon WT (Jan 2025) I went for a rockpool/snorkel along Wembury point a few weeks ago and found lots of nursehound eggs (around 20), in various stages. Some looked very fresh, some had clearly long since hatched and were just the tough keels left attached to the seaweed. One had hatched or been predated recently and even had a clingfish inside it apparently eating the remaining yolk which I got a photo of, really cool to see!
Jake Taylor-Bruce Devon WT, from Wembury rockpooling

I've had three of the four species of clingfish at Wembury recently so I'm keeping my fingers crossed for a two spot to be found here this year so I can say we have all four species present. Lots of topknot around including quite a lot of very young ones, some no bigger than my thumb. I've also found a number of small wrasse in rockpools recently which was interesting as well as one adult. Most were corkwing but there were a couple of very young ballan wrasse.
Jake Taylor-Bruce Devon WT, from Wembury snorkelling, sent 3/4/25] I've been seeing small groups of sand eels in the bay for the past couple of weeks.

Species list for rockpooling at Blackstone Reef, Wembury on 3 March sent by Eleanor Goodman Corkwing Wrasse, *Symphodus melops*

- Montagu's Sea Snail, *Liparis montagui*
- Small-Headed Clingfish, *Apletodon dentatus*

- Topknot, *Zeugopterus punctatus*
- Jake Taylor-Bruce Devon WT, from Wembury snorkeling May The blackface blenny I've seen on Blackstone also has a mate now which is nice as I couldn't see her on my previous visits. [PN note, my understanding is that (like in combtooth blennies) the females make transitory visits to male territories to lay eggs]

Jake Taylor-Bruce Devon WT, from Wembury rockpooling/snorkelling …we have been mostly busy with schools so only in the upper pools. Something I have noticed is there just doesn't seem to be much about. Might be due to the heat but I feel like we've been finding less stuff in the school pools than normal. Certainly less worm pipefish. Common hermit crabs now seem outnumbered again by St Pirans while earlier in the year it was the other way around, again I presume this is due to the warmer waters. I guess the common hermits just move further down shore and go into deeper waters but couldn't say for certain. Snorkelling has been usual, lots of sand eels and bass around although the regular octopus I was seeing seem to have disappeared. May have been fished but it doesn't look like others have moved in to take their place.
Jake Taylor-Bruce Devon WT, Wembury On one of our snorkel safaris saw what sounds like either a great or snake pipefish judging from the size. I didn't see it but it's a nice record as they are such a rarely seen species while snorkelling.
Jake Taylor-Bruce Devon WT, Wembury Something I noted is that the **nursehounds** in that area [Wembury Point] seem to exclusively use bushy berry wrack (Cystoseira baccata) for their eggs. Coral has noted that the closely related rainbow wrack is disappearing and I wonder is the bushy wrack will follow with it. Much of the area where these wracks grow is thick with wire weed, which seem less suitable for raising eggs, and I do wonder if the wireweed is slowly outcompeting the more suitable wracks. Just supposition though!

Inshore Evidence: Bringing new techniques and natural capital approaches into long-term evidence collection (mNCEA year 2) - ME4519

Published in 2025. Passive eDNA capture by SCUBA divers and snorkellers for monitoring inshore fish biodiversity November 2023 Natural England Commissioned Report NECR506 An interesting number of initiatives took place on monitoring inshore fish populations lead by Natural England: this link includes observations from south-west sites. https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/6703751331840000

In 2022, (Reports Published in 2025!) Natural England trialled video and diver-based, visual census techniques for inshore fish populations with a primary focus on southwest England. Initially the project was funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) as part of the marine Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA) programme which led the Government ambition to integrate natural capital approaches into decision-making for the marine environment. Various trials were undertaken over both kelp and seagrass habitats which looked at the differences in data collected between transect surveys, fixed-point observations, unbaited video footage and eDNA techniques. In subsequent years, the methods have been employed over seagrass, kelp and maerl habitats at sites in Dorset, Devon and Cornwall and have been used in Natural England's wider SAC monitoring surveys. Natural England holds the data from these surveys.

This project (NC76: Future Monitoring) was led by Natural England and delivered in year 2 of the mNCEA programme. It was used to inform development and delivery of project NC76 in year 3.
Objective
The objectives of this work were:
(1) To collate, review and re-analyse existing monitoring data to understand what this tells us about natural capital and how it can be used to support decision making in contexts including Good Environmental Status, Good Ecological Status, the Energy Security Strategy, the Environmental Improvement Plan and marine spatial prioritization, as well as identifying IFCA evidence needs.
(2) To collect further primary evidence on the extent/abundance and potentially condition of habitats and species within 12nm and understand how this connects to the ecosystem services they provide.
(3) To continue to trial new methods for marine monitoring using eDNA and earth observation that seek to reduce costs and improve efficiency;
(4) to continue the programme of citizen science begun in Year 1.

Marine Natural Capital Ecosystem Assessment Project Documents can be accessed here and include:

- Final Report : NC76 WP1.2 Development of an inshore fish and cephalopod monitoring programme
- Final Report : NC76 WP1.3 Understanding inshore fish and cephalopod data in the natural capital context
- Final Report : NC76 WP1.7 Essential fish habitat and ecologically important areas for fish - Part 1 Summary Report
- Final Report : NC76 WP1.7 Essential fish habitat and ecologically important areas for fish - Part 2 Case-studies
- Final Report : NC76 WP3.3 Citizen science shore-based inshore fish monitoring programme – guidelines and field report

How do we record fish seen regularly at particular sites - Abundance scales for fish – Bob Earll bob@bobearll.co.uk

How do we record fish at sites that are routinely visited and where records are made? Can we use a/the same SACFOR scale for records for records from anglers, snorkellers, divers, rock pool studies or baited trap videos? The reality is that the observations are being made and a sense of abundance is being established – but the question is how is this to be recorded? Can the birders teach us anything about this? As we are including more location reports from a variety of inputs there seems to be scope for a further discussion: the possibility of a summer meeting to discuss this have been raised to discuss this.

Methodologies, Projects and Data

UK Marine Fish Recording Scheme – Douglas Herdson Douglas.Herdson@btinternet.com
Since 1999 Douglas Herdson has been compiling records of rare fish from various sources including well over 100 personal contacts. This process enables rare records to be set in a clear historic context so that the number times the species has been recorded – expressed at 'the nth' record can be used in this report and others. The geographic range of these records extends from the Western Approaches to Shetland and includes Irish records. The records are held in individual paper records along with correspondence, pictures etc in a personal filing cabinet.

Records from sea anglers – Simon Thomas bluedogfishing.simon@aol.co.uk
Records from anglers fishing for sharks have been obtained from 1953-current from the archive of the Shark Angling Club of GB and been stored by the Pat Smith Database . In addition, partner skippers supply information on other fish species encountered as well as Cetaceans and seabirds, which are recorded and available on request. Pollack sizes are recorded as part of the now completed FISP project led by the team of Prof Emma Sheehan at the University of Plymouth and continued via FASS funding with the Angling Trust, The PFSO and the CFPO. Data on other species encountered is provided by participating skippers.

SWME Annual Compilation of Observations
Paul Naylor compiles observations for SWME sent in from multiple sources on each of the thematic topics that the SWME covers. The fish observations, and their connections, to other topics have been included in this report.

University of Plymouth – Fish Intel Network and FISP Peter Davies Davies@plymouth.ac.uk
The University of Plymouth has expended its Fish Intel Network, with sensors placed along the south coast of England to detect fish tagged fish. The Angling for Sustainability project has been tagging and tracking black seabream, tope, starry smooth-hound, undulate ray and thornback ray. Pollack FISP has been tracking pollack, as well as working with a charter skipper consortium to collect data on pollack caught along the south coast of England. Both projects were funded by Defra through the Fisheries Industry Science Partnership scheme. Our reports, but they are available online:

Data – Records & DASSH – Julie Bunt April 2025
I usually reply to Paul Naylor's emails on behalf of DASSH when he requests sightings on a monthly basis and I can see that these have been included. Surprisingly, we have very few individual sightings that are sent directly to DASSH and therefore don't always have a huge amount of data for Paul, as part of iNaturalist UK we encourage *one-off* sightings to be reported via this route as this captures all the information needed, including a photo and will follow the same data flow as the sightings reported to us. Much of the data that we process comes from complete surveys rather than *one-off* occurrences and these can be found on the DASSH mapper and are available on the MEDIN Portal once published. There is a lot of data in the report that would be useful to publish via DASSH but

we would not wish to duplicate data if it was already recorded elsewhere. We are working closely with The Shark Trust and the pollack data mentioned is part of the FISP projects that we are currently working on.

eDNA Karen Tait PML KTAIT@pml.ac.uk
Karen, I believe has an overview of marine fish species (>80) in the south-west and has been working on eDNA studies for 8 years at PML. Karen's recent paper is described on page 7.

Hinkley Point C: Fish populations under threat after permit change - £700m plan with 'fish disco' could save 90% of marine life, says Hinkley Point C study

Major developments like Hinkley Point C nuclear power station which could have profound impact on fish populations will be covered by the SWME Development Community of Practice.

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/feb/10/hinkley-point-c-plan-could-save-fish-being-sucked-into-pipes-study-finds
https://oceanographicmagazine.com/news/stayin-alive-fish-disco-saves-90-of-marine-life/

Hinkley Point C ultrasonic fish deterrent trials successful, could replace farmland flooding compensation plans - Ocean and Coastal Futures OCF News 16/02/2026
Testing of a £50m ultrasound system designed to stop fish being sucked into the cooling pipes of Hinkley Point C nuclear power station has gone "really well", according to engineers working on the Somerset project. The trial by Swansea University found the system "highly effective," and project leaders are now considering scrapping plans to flood 900 acres of farmland in Gloucestershire which had been proposed to provide compensating habitat for fish. Two tunnels bored 1.8 miles under the Severn Estuary will deliver 120,000 litres of water per second into the plant's cooling system. The estuary is home to large numbers of sprats and salmon, and the twaite shad, a protected migrating species which spawns in the tributaries of the River Severn. Older power stations have simply placed grills across inlet pipes, filtering out fish in the process. At Hinkley Point C, officials are planning what one government reviewer described as "more fish protection measures than any other power station in the world."

How the system works Dubbed the underwater fish disco, a network of ultrasonic speakers has played sounds deterring fish from swimming close to the plant's pipes for six months. The system was designed in Devon by Fishtek Marine and tested by Swansea University in the Severn Estuary. Trials found only one tagged twaite shad came within 30 metres of the intake heads, compared to 14 before the system was switched on.
Chris Fayers, head of environment at Hinkley Point C, said the ultrasonic speakers are lowered into the seabed "a bit like a lobster pot. We can raise it up again after a year to change the batteries. That means we can avoid using divers, which is a really risky operation that we wanted to avoid." Pete Kibel, managing director at Fishtek Marine, said "We have now developed a highly effective system that will protect fish in the Severn Estuary and potentially be an option for many more power stations throughout the world."

Turtles

Douglas Herdson & Rod Penrose
Conclusions

- The number of turtles reported in 2025 was about the average for the region.
- There were about equal numbers of hardshell turtles and leatherbacks.

Report
An average number of marine turtles were reported in 2025 (Table 8.12). A total of 61 were seen in British and Irish waters, with 12 in the greater south-west region. Of these, 8 were found around Cornwall, 2 in Devon, 2 from Dorset, with none sighted around the Isles of Scilly, or the Channel Islands (Table 8.11). The south west turtles consisted of nine reports of a probable six Leatherback Turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*), of which five were swimming and one found dead; four Loggerheads (*Caretta caretta*), two swimming alive and two dead on the beach; one Kemp's Ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*) dead on the shore; and finally, one unidentified alive and swimming. The year was more usual in having a similar number of reports of 'hardshell' (all marine turtles other than Leatherbacks), to definite Leatherbacks. This is in contrast to 2023 with most being hardshells. It is probable that the majority of 'hardshells' were juveniles being stranded in the colder months of the year. were cold-shocked. 2025 was exceptional for Britain

and Ireland in the number of Loggerheads. 34 were recorded mainly in Ireland and Scotland, this is one of the highest annual counts of this species reported.

Table 11. Turtles reported in south-west England in 2025.

Date	Record No.	Species	Location	Status	Comments
23/02/2025	T2025/04	Kemp's ridley	Hoodny Cove, Portwrinkle	Dead Stranded	Reported with photographs but a subsequent search failed to find it.
1/03/2025	T2025/07	Loggerhead	Talland Bay	Dead Stranded	Carcass moved to deep pool by the finder. NHM
31/05/2025	T2025/08	Unidentified	3 miles East South East from Weymouth Harbour entrance.	Alive, Swimming	Andrew Routh
17/05/2025	T2025/ ?	Leatherback	St Austell Bay, Charlestown	Alive, Swimming	Cornwall WT
19/05/2025	T2025/ ?	Leatherback	St Austell Bay, Polkerris	Alive, Swimming	Cornwall WT
18/06/2025	T2025/10	Leatherback	Branscombe, Devon	Alive, Swimming	Video by Petra Threlfall. Mike Threlfal
19/06/2025	T2025/11	Leatherback	Seaton, Devon	Alive, Swimming	Dave Gardener. Possibly T2025/10.
27/06/2025	T2025/14 T2025/15	Leatherback	off Rumps Point south of The Mouls, Padstow.	Alive, Swimming	Observed from the Old Coastguard, Mousehole. G J Simmonds
3/07/2025	T2025/13	Leatherback	Mousehole, Cornwall	Alive, Swimming	Joshua Nawras
13/08/2025	T2025/21	Leatherback	Off Stoke, Devon	Alive, Swimming	Sighted 5metres from boat 600 metres from shore. Richard Holman
28/08/2025	T2025/25	Leatherback	Off Porthleven	At sea dead	1.5 miles straight out from Porthleven. Dead carcass disentangled from pot rope by fisherman. Anthea
3/09/2025	T2025/26	Leatherback	Porthleven	Dead Stranded	Headless carcass on beach. (One was reported dead entangled a week earlier by a fisherman just off Porthleven so it was assumed it was same one. Highly likely T2025/25.) Anthea
2/11/2025	T2025/36	Loggerhead	The Island, St Ives	Alive, Swimming	CWT Seaquest survey. Dan Jarvis BDMLR
7/12/2025	T2025/41	Loggerhead	400 metres off Pendeen Point.	Alive, Swimming	Seen through binoculars. Pete Combridge
20/12/2025	T2025/48	Loggerhead	Bournemouth	Stranded dead	

Table 12. Occurrence of Turtles 2017 to 2025

	South West England				Britain and Ireland		
	Leatherback	Other and unidentified*	Total		Leatherback	Other and unidentified*	Total
2025	6	6	12 (or 15)		20	41[2]	61
2024	7	7	14		12	25	37
2023	6	16[1]	22		13	34[1]	47
2022	3	4	7		8	7	15
2021	3	5	8		19	14	33
2020	4	1	5		9	5	14
2019	13	1	14		13	5	18
2018	17/18	2	19/20		17	2	19
2017	8	5	13		28	9	37

*Many unidentified turtles were probably Leatherbacks [1] All 'hardshell'. [2] 34 Loggerheads

Information from

BDMLR - British Divers Marine Life Rescue
ERCCIS – Environment Record Centre for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly
IoSBNHR – Isles of Scilly Birds and Natural History Review
MCS – Marine Conservation Society
MSN – Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Marine Strandings Network
BIMTR - British & Irish Marine Turtle Strandings & Sightings
NHM - Natural History Museum

References

Tait, K., Mynott, S., Parry, H., McEvoy, A., Beesley, A., Sims, D. W., Kaloudis, D., Biggs, T. & Atkinson, A. (2026) Monitoring with eDNA and size spectra reveals an abrupt dominance shift within a fish assemblage. *Nat. Commun.* (2026, submitted).

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Tait, K., Mynott, S., Parry, H., McEvoy, A., Beesley, A., Sims, D. W., Kaloudis, D., Biggs, T. & Atkinson, A. Monitoring with eDNA and size spectra reveals an abrupt dominance shift within a fish assemblage. *Nat. Commun.* (2026, submitted).

Thompson & Couce,2024 Predictions arising from climate change on the composition of the fish fauna suggests that there will be significant changes

Editorial Notes

Common names: Capitals have been used in the text for fish common names following the convention used in ornithology and that used by the American Fisheries Society.

Regional names: Regions are capitalised without hyphens e.g. South West

Images: Images are an important part of the report but can only be used with the express permission of the photographer