



April 09

“THE BEST COURSE YET”

The sheer variety of the recent programme may account for this accolade: Keith Denby gave a local Seasearch diver’s perspective, Chris Preece an archaeologist’s view of the Taw Estuary’s 18 fishweirs, ecologist Pip Jollands the importance of saltmarshes, and Robert Down the implications for Ilfracombe of harbour development.

Our speakers have told us about the environment and helped us develop our thinking about it. None more so than artist and writer Peter Stiles who, in Darwin’s anniversary year, introduced us to Philip Gosse, a fellow naturalist with whom Darwin corresponded. During his years at Ilfracombe Gosse influenced many including George Eliot, and popularized marine studies. Increasingly he had to struggle with the implications of his observations for his fundamentalist faith.



A GOOD BEGINNING

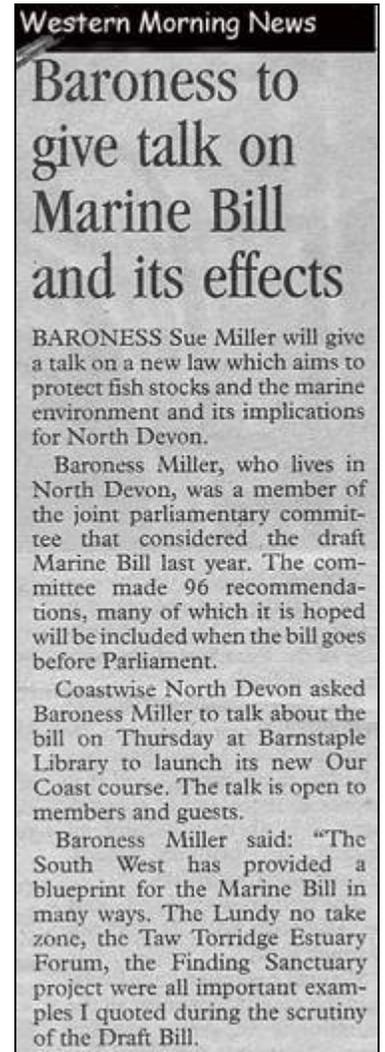
In its first year Coastwise has recruited 70 members, run fully subscribed courses, and taken forward two significant projects: the Living Seas Oral History project in collaboration with the Devon Wildlife Trust and Coastwise’s own Beach Profiles. All the while the Marine Bill has been in the offing, never far from Coastwise sights.

Opening the Spring course, Baroness Sue Miller gave her perspective on the Bill. In the following discussion members voiced their doubts over the Bill’s effectiveness in conserving our threatened fish stocks. The Bill’s main focus is marine planning - “sustainable development” -its goal, to be met through an ill-defined balance between economic, social and environmental factors.

At a later talk conservationist Paul Naylor, author of Great British Marine Animals, showed how much was at stake, illustrating the richness and diversity of life particularly off the North Devon coast, and echoed the reports of local divers that it has some of the best diving in the world. Paul donated over £100, the proceeds of his visit, including sales of his book, to the Marine Conservation Society.

Reporting from Lundy, the country’s first marine nature reserve and the only No Take Zone, Warden Nicola Saunders spoke about the successes that can follow conservation measures. Lobster size and numbers have undergone a big increase in the No Take Zone, and rat eradication has resulted in a tripling of Manx Shearwaters, and given hope for Puffin numbers.

Concerned at the lack of a clear and quantifiable commitment to conservation in the Bill, members drew upon the presentations to lobby Defra and MPs for the inclusion of a specific proportion of fully protected marine reserves in the Marine Bill, noting that in 2004 the Royal Commission’s report Turning the Tide had recommended designating 30% of UK waters.



The exhibition, Vivarium, which Peter has organized, runs at Barnstaple Museum to 25 April, & includes his painting of Gosse (l).

WHAT ELSE HAVE WE BEEN UP TO?

Oral history - The joint project with Devon Wildlife Trust ended in March when Cat Jones completed editing the 20 interviews by members and presented copies of the collected material to Coastwise, the AONB and Barnstaple Museum. Led by Jill Portsmouth Coastwise will continue to do interviews linked to the beaches being profiled - to develop unique natural and cultural histories.

Birds - a visit to Isley Marsh was led by Rob Jutsum and John Broomhead in February. Over 20 members were rewarded with excellent views of 6 Spoonbills, and good numbers of other water birds. A total of 34 species was recorded.

Microscopes were demonstrated by Coastwise members at Ilfracombe Museum during half-term. 55 visitors attended and were duly delighted.

Combe Martin Museum - Coastwise members contributed their expertise to a "science lab" design workshop in February and look forward to seeing the completed display in the summer.

Formal Links with others

Coastwise is seeking to formalize its membership of the Biosphere Partnership representative - Robert Down. Malcolm Roberts attended his first meeting as Coastwise representative on the Taw/Torridge Estuary Forum in January.

Local Networking - Coastwise invited over 30 local people with marine interests to explore the benefits of developing a network comparable to one for marine educators proposed in south Devon. Coastwise was encouraged to take it further and has decided that a marine network comparable to the North Devon Natural History Network is the most practicable method of delivery. Anne Brown has agreed to take the lead and combine it with a sightings database.

Group networking - Jill Portsmouth, External Relations Co-ordinator, will be using the network and oral history to develop links with local groups. Further afield - marine networking developments on a county-wide and national basis are under way, with which Coastwise can link in due course - for more information contact Jim Masters of Devon Maritime Forum, or Coastnet respectively.

Devon Maritime Forum Coastwise is an occasional participant in this county-wide partnership that acts a 'champion of the sea'. Next meeting 20 May, topic EU's Common Fisheries Policy.

WHAT'S NEXT?

As usual there will be a beach clean, provisionally at Downend 26 April, and two Shore Thing monitoring sessions this summer. For the first time, there will also be Coastwise activities led by members for members. Full programme will be emailed to members & posted on the website.

Excursions on offer: a boat trip along the coast and a September visit to the National Aquarium. Don Hills & Marjorie Heath are organizing.

Beach Profilers will host visits to their beaches when members can add their knowledge to developing the profile, or simply enjoy a day out and picnic with friends. A provisional list is being circulated, and each host will send out a reminder a week or so beforehand.

First Beach visit - 27 April 11 am on the beach at Combe Martin with Don Hills. (See full programme on Website)

Shorelife will be running rock-pool rambles at Croyde, for more information contact shorelife@hotmail.co.uk

AUTUMN PROGRAMME

There will be a new 10 week course in the autumn starting 8 October, 9.45 am start, at Barnstaple Library.

John Broomhead and Malcolm Roberts are working on the programme, which will include plenty of variety and take account of comments in the evaluation. If you have any specific suggestions

NEW MARINE NETWORK

Coastwise is initiating an email network, a Yahoo group, to link everyone interested in North Devon marine activities - to share knowledge and information and recordings of sightings.

Interested? Further information from
Network moderator Anne Brown
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please pass them on soon.

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