

Report from the Co-Chairs, December 2011

This report reviews a very busy year for Coastwise. The 2011 Spring and Autumn talks programmes proved to be amongst the most popular so far. The Shore Safari Team attracted over 1000 members of the public to an ambitious summer programme of rock-pooling, and 3 new microscope workshops were held.

Our focus is on marine wildlife, complementing the work of local natural history groups with more terrestrial interests. Within that we try to provide something for everyone, touching on the cultural as well as natural history of our coast. We have done so this year against the background of the Marine Act and MCZs, the EU's Common Fisheries Policy review, and the proposed Atlantic Array windfarm, the latter calling for responses from the public, and at a later stage from Coastwise as a consultee. We have used the talks to brief ourselves, whilst not allowing the policy agenda to deflect us from learning about life on the shore, at first hand whenever possible, with plenty of beach visits.

Coastwise has come a long way in a few years. This has been possible because of the support, encouragement and efforts of many loyal members. Hopefully in return they have fun and get pleasure from the coast, which increases with their growing knowledge. Some deserve our special thanks: Secretary Marjorie Heath for her wonderfully amiable efficiency, Jim Monroe for leading the Shore Safaris, and our talks programme organizers John Broomhead and Malcolm Roberts.

Coastwise relies on all its members, and is dependent on their lively interest and the contributions they can make, sharing their expertise and skills. Our activities are based on feedback received through evaluations and informal comment. Members have enthusiastically responded with suggestions for a wide range of topics for 2012, indicating that interest is as buoyant as ever.

Our Coast

The Spring and Autumn series of Our Coast talks continue to be fully subscribed. Enrollments have remained high, at 60 – 70 full and part-time members with attendances of around 40 at each session. All the topics covering a wide range of interests have been well received, but two stand out. In February leading underwater cameraman, Doug Anderson, gave Coastwise a privileged glimpse of the making of the BBC's Frozen Planet series in a talk that had everything - science, beauty, courage and drama. More recently Coastwise favourite Tegwyn Harris, a former university lecturer and broadcaster, proved himself to be a presenter without equal when he launched the Autumn session with a talk on plankton, a fascinating topic fascinatingly delivered.

Amongst the most memorable of this year's additional activities were excursions: the Avocet cruise on the Exe on a crisp and sunny day and local birding trips, a visit by members to Lee Bay on an exceptionally low tide, where amongst a huge array of animals found were some 40 Devonshire Cup Corals, a lobster, conger eel and an uncommon Pistol Prawn. In July a dozen or so members visited the Dorset Wildlife Trust Marine Centre at Kimmeridge VMCA and went snorkeling. This has whetted our appetite for closer links with other neighbouring VMCA's, to be pursued next year. Sixteen members visited the Met Office in Exeter in September and were given a detailed presentation on their activities worldwide, followed by a guided tour of many departments. Event organizer Marjorie Heath reports that "It was a fascinating day and everyone came away with a better understanding of what is involved in the preparation of the forecasts we see on our televisions."

Shore Safaris

Project Co-ordinator and Shore Safari leader Jim Monroe reports that during the two years of the project so far 34 members have been through one of the two training programmes, 22 completing in 2009/10, and a further 12 in 2010/11, resulting in a core group of 21 members actively engaged in delivering shore safaris in 2011 as follows:

11 Public events at 7 venues.

3 at Barricane

2 at Westward Ho! & Combe Martin

1 at Croyde, Saunton, Lee Bay & Ilfracombe

Safaris were also held for specific groups as follows:

at Lee Bay for members in March

at Croyde with British Naturalists Association in September

at Saunton with Braunton Brownies in September

The Biosphere Partnership

As Coastwise representative on the Partnership and Chair of the Biosphere's Marine Working Group, Robert Down reports:

- The BMWG submitted its recommendations to Finding Sanctuary, DEFRA's public consultation delivery agent for the South-West. These were well-received, and Finding Sanctuary commended the Biosphere on the integrity and quality of the submission. Now that the Science Advisory Panel has just published its recommendations to the government, its advice is that the South West suite of MCZs will provide good ecological status as a network, but it warns that the protection measures may need to be improved. The SAP also comments that there are not enough reference sites in the south west that meet the Ecological Network Guidance. The MCZs recommended by the Biosphere MWG received good scores on the SAP's assessment scale, but we do not yet know whether they will all be adopted.
- The Fisheries Local Action Group received an offer of £1.1M for North Devon to fund projects which will support and build the local fisheries industry, on a wide range of activities. However, initially it was stipulated that this would have to be matched by 40% private funding, a figure which was deemed unachievable in North Devon, with a depressed economy. Further discussions between North Devon+ and the MMO appear to have eased this and some other restrictions, but this negotiation continues.
- The Biosphere Foundation is handling projects which attracted funding of approx. £170K. These relate to interpretation and improvement of local paths and trails, Torridge catchment area land management, and an art/technology project involving a number of local schools".

Microscope Workshops

Under this new project Coastwise received a £500 grant from the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund towards the cost of low-powered microscopes to be located at three local interpretation centres. Coastwise ran workshops to promote their use and public awareness of the microscopic life of the shore at the Northam Burrows Centre and Combe Martin Museum, in May, as part of AONB Discovery Days, and at Morteheo in August. All three were successful, exciting considerable interest amongst children and adults. The last, at Morteheo, included use of a digital scope to share live images, and the showing of pre-recorded members' film clips, valuable additions to the activities on offer during a day that attracted nearly 200 visitors.

Membership Numbers

Our Coast enrollments showing Full and Associate membership:

Autumn 09/10 - 49, 14; Spring 09/10 - 44, 16

Autumn 10/11 - 48, 16; Spring 10/11 - 48, 22

Autumn 11/12 - 47, 18

Paula Ferris

For Co-Chairs, Robert Down & Paula Ferris

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