

## Nigel Mortimer's NATURE DIARY

# Shore survey finds anemones, seaweed and shellfish

WE always love a visit to a rock shore to do some rock-pooling and last weekend's lowish spring tides gave a chance to mix fun and science in equal measure as we joined a Shore Thing Survey organised by the Marine Biological Association in Salcombe. The survey aims to monitor changes in the rockshore life communities over time with changing climate and the arrival and spread of 'alien' species – similar surveys take place around the whole country.

Some animals such as the strawberry anemone are used as a basic indicator of warming seas as it spreads north and east, although they've been around these parts for some time and I remember finding them as a child in Cornwall. They are quite similar to the beadlet anemone – the brick-red jelly blobs that frequent our rocky shores and grow almost to the size of a golf ball, but the strawberry anemone is maybe slightly larger and its body is covered with small green spots and as

you might have guessed, looks just like a strawberry! Our daughter has a real eye for them.

Another warmer water animal we actually looked out for was the painted top shell, a pretty sea snail with a sharply pointed conical shell with often quite dramatic patterns on the shell. As with the other local top shells, the inner part of the shell where the animals retreats to when disturbed is lined with rainbow coloured mother-of-pearl. These are reasonably common right up the west coast to the north of Scotland where the Gulf Stream keep the waters slightly warmer but head east, and they gradually peter out towards the colder waters of the North Sea. So while we have always expected to find them here, other surveys to the east are expecting to find them there as the seas gradually warm.

In a timed survey, we also looked out for alien or non-native species – these are animals and seaweeds that have been introduced by our own

activities, mostly accidentally. While we have over a dozen in the Salcombe-Kingsbridge estuary now, we looked in particular for the brown seaweed – wireweed, the red feathery seaweed – harpoon weed, the Pacific oyster and the slipper limpet. While some of these incomers will gradually find a balance within the local seashore community, there is a genuine concern that others may significantly disrupt the natural balance, displacing some of our native species – the so called 'alien invasives' that may even harm our own human community by affecting our fisheries.

Some years ago, there was great concern about the spread of the wireweed – as it seemed to take over great areas of foreshore. The spores of this seaweed seem to be suppressed by the adult seaweed and pulling them off just encourages more growth of new young seaweeds; and if the ripped off seaweeds weren't removed from the seashore entirely, could still go on the reproduce – an alien invasive

indeed. It didn't quite go on to dominate our shores as once we thought and some of our native animals now seem to enjoy it as a habitat in its own right but in Salcombe there are concerns that where seagrass loses a footing, the wireweed can move in keeping the seagrass from returning. And for the boating public, the wireweed does grow very prolifically in the summer and right up to the surface making these areas best avoided by boats.

The Pacific oyster was deliberately introduced to our shores for oyster farming – they're easier to farm than our native oyster. There were some concerns at the time of their introduction that the Pacific oyster could go feral but there were assurances at the time that our waters are too cold for them to reproduce. But either they were wrong, the waters did reach the critical temperature in a warm summer or the Pacific oyster changed its biology and we now have a pretty 'healthy' feral population in many of our estuaries. While the

farmed oysters are mainly kept in bags, the feral oysters settle and grow on rocks – their other common name is the rock oyster. There is a very easy way of controlling these feral oysters of course but you need to be sure that the waters are good and clean and that they really don't belong to anyone!

The slipper limpet probably came across from America during the 2nd world war and is considered by many as a true alien invasive for its impact on fisheries, particularly in France. They have a rather bizarre biology, they hummock on top of each other with the largest and most female at the bottom of the stack and the smallest and most male at the top – the hole stack can look a bit like a rams horn. And unlike our more common Chinese hat shaped limpet that lick seaweeds off the rocks, slipper limpets filter plankton from the water more like the oysters. Within the Salcombe-Kingsbridge estuary, there is a living 'reef' of slipper limpets off Ox Point

and rather interestingly, the diversity of other animals over this area appears to be much greater than that surrounding. Although pre-recorded history, at least for marine science, much of the beds of our estuaries may well have been covered by similar reefs of our native oyster, long since lost to years of bottom dredging and it is just possible that the alien slipper limpet is giving us something of a long lost habitat back... maybe a bit of a controversial thought?!

Particularly in the marine environment, ridding our shores of alien invasive species is just not a realistic option and prevention should maybe be taken a bit more seriously but changes are certain to happen. Climate change too is very likely to drive many changes, there will as ever be winners and losers, but one thing that is becoming clearer scientifically, if we want a healthy marine environment that supports us through all these changes, it is important that it is as robust and healthy as possible to get through it.

# Daisy rides in toad-mobile

A FIVE-STRONG team from Toad Hall Cottages will take on the Plymouth Half-Marathon in June in a bid to raise money for The Devon Air Ambulance Trust and The Daisy Palmer Trust.

The two charities were chosen as they recognise the important role played by the Devon Air Ambulance and The Daisy Palmer Trust holds a special place in their hearts.

Daisy Palmer, aged 8, from Essex, suffers from a rare and debilitating illness known as Chronic Intestine Pseudo-Obstruction which means she cannot eat anything orally and is instead fully reliant on being fed intravenously directly via her heart and can

spend up to 18 hours a day attached to a feeding machine. Daisy and her family have been holidaying in a Toad Hall Cottage near Salcombe for years with doctors constantly amazed at the improvement a few weeks in the Devon air makes to her overall condition; the family are now raising money to fund vital adaptations to their home to ensure Daisy can receive all the care she needs.

Last week, Tim Stathers and James Norton from the cottage agency were fortunate enough to catch up with Daisy and her parents at The Winking Prawn in North Sands where she has become something of a local celebrity over recent years. The family were delighted to hear of the fundraising plans and Daisy was keen to have a ride in the 'toad-mobile'. James said: 'It's easy for us to take living in the South Hams for granted but Daisy is someone who appreciates every second she gets down here and reminds us how lucky we are. For all of the obstacles in her life, you wouldn't know she had a care in the world!'

Daisy's Dad Damon Palmer said: 'As you can imagine, we were extremely pleased to hear that the guys from Toad Hall had offered to run the half marathon for Daisy. It really means a lot to us that they are doing this. After all, we are just customers to them, so to go out of their way like this for Daisy is truly wonderful.'

'They barely knew Daisy, yet after reading her story they have taken her to heart, with this special offer to run the half marathon. It's very humbling to know these people care so much.'

'We have been coming to Salcombe for many years now, even before Daisy became really ill. The past two summers have been extra special as they followed very lengthy spells in hospital for Daisy.'

'Time spent there, in and around Salcombe and the North Sands beach always does absolute wonders for Daisy. Many locals always look out for Daisy with some shops in the high street even having her collection



Daisy Palmer in the 'toad-mobile'

Contributed

pots on their counters. Also The Winking Prawn restaurant kindly store Daisy's 20ml ice-pops in their freezer (these are the only things she can eat orally as they melt) so that when we order our lunch, they can bring her ice-pop out too, so she doesn't feel left out. They always make a fuss of her in there.

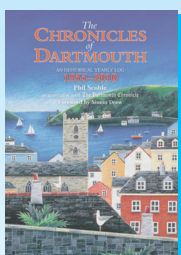
'The local school and church have also

held fundraising events for Daisy. It really is so much more than just a holiday for us when we come down.'

Tim and James will be joined for the half marathon by colleagues Helen Ford and Oli Masters and Oli's wife Viki.

To sponsor the runners visit [www.justgiving.com/toadhallcottages](http://www.justgiving.com/toadhallcottages)

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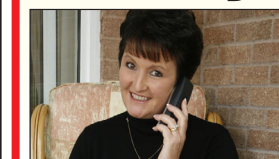
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