

Alderney Wildlife Trust's Living Seas Programme 2019 Annual Report

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Summary

This report aims to summarise the *Alderney Living Seas Programme* of works for 2019. It includes background information, works completed and funding received during 2019.

For 2019, all primary *Alderney Living Seas Programme* work-streams were completed, including marine based Alderney Wildlife Trust projects (i.e. works required for the island's Ramsar Site), species and habitat assessments, citizen science projects and outreach/engagement activities. Additional funding from the AWT, States of Guernsey, Seasearch and Swansea University enabled new training opportunities for AWT staff to undertake subtidal surveys.

Background

The *Alderney Living Seas Programme* is the mechanism through which the Alderney Wildlife Trust (AWT) responds to all marine activities and issues within Alderney's territorial waters (intertidal zone – 12 nautical miles).

The programme aims to follow and support the TWT's Living Seas ambition and challenges, yet is adapted to suit the island. This is due to Alderney's unique island status, geographical location, local governmental designations (with the island owning its own territorial waters (within 12 nautical miles)) and regional governmental links (Channel Islands, France and the UK).

To do so, the Alderney Living Seas Programme comprises of five key themes:

- **Securing and managing protected sites at sea.**

This theme consists of undertaking marine based work-streams within the island's Ramsar Site and local nature reserve (Longis nature reserve), as described in their subsequent annual action plans/management strategies.

For 2019, the majority of marine based work-streams were completed, including:

- Intertidal habitat map survey of Clonque Bay;
- Green Ormer population dynamics assessment;
- Invasive species assessment;
- Strandline survey;
- BRUV fish surveys;
- Snorkel surveys with the AWT Snorkel Seasearch Group;
- Marine mammal surveys.

A full description of completed work-streams can be found in the annual Ramsar report (2019).

- **Enhancing local wildlife knowledge.**

This theme aims to investigate the island's important marine species and habitats through ecological assessments and citizen science projects, to enhance the limited knowledge of the island's marine environment.

For 2019, all marine species and habitat assessments selected for study were successfully completed (see Appendix 1 for assessment summaries).

- **Ensuring human activities is sustainable.**

This theme comprises of supporting works that ensure human activities (such as coastal development/planning, fishing, tourism and policy development) is sustainable for Alderney.

For 2019, this included AWT staff attending Alderney Marine Forum meetings, updating internal AWT fisheries statement/legislation reviews and assisting AWT formal responses regarding offshore development projects. These works were completed with the People and Wildlife Officer, Living Seas Officer and Ramsar Officer.

- **Inspiring people.**

This theme aims to inspire people through a range of marine based engagement activities and ecological citizen science projects (i.e. Alderney Seasearch Snorkel Group, Green Ormer/invasive assessments). This is heavily linked to the works associated with the People and Wildlife Officer.

For 2019, the AWT developed a new, temporary staff position; the Living Seas Outreach Officer to help fulfil this theme's aims and objectives. The Living Seas Outreach Officer responsibilities' included:

- Developing and running a marine species outreach education tank with Visit Alderney, for the public.
- Organising snorkel surveys through the AWT Alderney Snorkel Seasearch Group.
- Running marine based citizen science projects and public events i.e. Bioblitz/rockpooling.
- Supporting and managing a visiting marine university student.
- Linking with TWT Living Seas campaigns, marine events and press.

These were all successfully completed, with the Living Seas Outreach Officer position to be re-instated for the 2020 summer.

- **Eliminating pollution.**

This theme aims to help eliminate pollution on Alderney through engagement activities, implementing beach cleans and undertaking appropriate pollution assessments across Alderney (i.e.

water quality sampling as required within the Ramsar Site). It is primarily coordinated and undertaken by the People and Wildlife Officer.

For 2019, the People and Wildlife Officer ran numerous beach cleans, the Alderney Plastics Project and a variety of engagement activities with the local government, stakeholders and the public, regarding waste and recycling. In particular, this included aiding local business to reduce their plastic usage and waste (i.e. assisting the implementation of a milk glass bottle scheme at the Farm Shop and Jeans Stores) and the deployment of angling waste bins around the island.

Work-streams not completed during 2019:

- *Ramsar academic study*. This was not completed this year due to no students wishing to undertake the project. The project is, however, to be undertaken by an MSc student in 2020. A full description of this project can be found in the annual Ramsar report (2019).

Funding

During 2019, the Alderney Living Seas Programmes received no specific funds, with general survey equipment and survey boat costs funded from the AWT Ramsar budget. In addition, funds were donated by Seasearch, the States of Guernsey, University of Swansea and the AWT Ramsar budget, for staff to attend training courses in Guernsey.

Appendix 1. 2019 Ecological assessment and citizen science project information

The Alderney Living Seas Programme of works for 2019 is described below.

a) *Marine species 2019 ecological assessments/citizen science projects:*

I. Marine mammal species

Importance:

Marine mammals are key species within Alderney's waters and the marine environment as a whole.

Aim(s):

- To record the presence, abundance and distribution of marine mammal species within and beyond Alderney's territorial waters;
- To enhance the recording of marine mammal species by the general public, groups and key marine users.

Method(s):

This project is primarily linked with the *Sea Watch Foundation* and local groups (i.e. La Société Guernesiaise), marine users and participation with the general public. The project comprises of three methodologies:

- Recording opportunistic sightings of marine mammal species;
- Photographic identification catalogue of grey and common seals;
- Effort based marine mammal species surveys (both land and boat based).

Results:

A number of opportunistic sightings and photographs (for individual photographic identification) of grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*) were undertaken for 2019, throughout Alderney's territorial waters. In addition, several sightings of a small dolphin pod (potentially Bottlenose dolphins) were spotted occasionally at the East end of the island in the spring.

Effort land-based surveys were undertaken once a month, from March – September, based at the Alderney lighthouse. No sightings of marine mammals were recorded during these surveys.

During 2019, a number of effort boat-based surveys were completed to assess grey seal presence, abundance and population dynamics. Monthly surveys for a Channel Island/French grey seal project (spearheaded by the Groupe Mammalogique Normand - Antenne Ouest) was run from April – August, which aimed to assess grey seal abundance across the Channel Isles and France by appropriate groups. A total number of 40 sightings of grey seals were recorded from April – August on islets behind Burhou. A population dynamics assessment was then completed during the grey seal breeding season (October-November), as part of the Ramsar Site management action plan work-stream. This survey recorded 52 sightings of grey seals, ranging from small weaners, to large adults. A full description of the results can be found in the annual Ramsar report (2019).

Only 1 marine mammal stranding occurred this year. This comprised of a dead common dolphin, (*Delphinus delphis*), in February at Houmet Herbe.

II. Intertidal species

Importance:

Intertidal species biodiversity and composition can provide key baseline information for natural and anthropogenic impact assessments, over time.

Aim(s):

- To record the presence, abundance and distribution of intertidal species;
- To enhance the recording of intertidal species by the general public.

Method(s):

This project is linked with local groups (i.e. La Société Guernesiaise) and participation with the general public. The assessment comprises of three methodologies:

- TWT's strandline survey (presence and composition of strandlines);
- Green Ormer (*Haliotis tuberculata*) population dynamics survey (presence, abundance, shell size/quality and tagging of green ormers);
- Invasive species surveys (presence and distribution of non-native species);

Results:

Intertidal strandline surveys were completed across all bays on Alderney. Results show that strandlines were fairly similar between each other, and consisted of algae debris, plastic litter, cuttlefish bones and feathers.

The green ormer, *H. tuberculata* surveys were completed within Longis, Clonque and Braye Bays, with AWT's Conservation Volunteers and the public. One ormer was found at Longis Bay, with five recorded at Clonque Bay and one at Braye Bay. All ormers found were tagged, as part of a Channel Island wide ormer tagging project.

The presence of intertidal invasive species (such as the pacific oyster *C. gigas* and slipper limpet *C. fornicata*) were assessed at key bays across Alderney. These surveys recorded no pacific oyster or slipper limpet individuals. However, for 2019, the Asian shore crab, (*Hemigrapsus sanguineus*) was recorded at Longis and Braye Bays, in abundance. In addition, during the IEM, a bioblitz of Clonque Bay recorded the presence of the invasive sea squirt, the orange-tipped sea squirt (*Corella eumyota*).

III. Subtidal species and habitats

Importance:

Subtidal species and habitats presence, distribution, biodiversity and composition can provide key baseline information for natural and anthropogenic environmental impact assessments, over time.

Aim(s):

- To record the presence, abundance and distribution of subtidal species;
- To enhance the recording of sub-tidal species by the general public.

Method(s):

Sub-tidal species and habitat surveys are primarily conducted using snorkelling survey strategies following Seasearch, JNCC, RSWT and academic studies.

Results:

The sub-tidal citizen science recording group, the Alderney Seasearch Snorkel Group successfully completed several snorkel surveys across Clonque, Braye, Longis and Catts Bays during the summer. This group recorded a variety of marine habitats and species, with data submitted to Seasearch (a full data set from Seasearch will be provided early 2020). A Seasearch Observers Course was also provided by Seasearch's project coordinator, Charlotte Bolton, for new members.

b) Marine habitats 2019 ecological assessments:

I. Eelgrass habitat

Importance:

Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) species are regarded as a key habitat within Alderney's waters and the marine environment as a whole. This habitat provides valuable food, refuge and nursery areas for a variety of intertidal and sub-tidal species, particularly fish.

Aim(s):

- To record the presence and distribution of intertidal and sub-tidal eelgrass habitat around Alderney.

Method(s):

Eelgrass habitat presence and distribution is conducted using a combination of intertidal biotope habitat survey methods and subtidal snorkelling survey strategies following Seasearch, JNCC, RSWT and academic studies.

Results:

For 2019, the AWT helped develop the Bailiwick Eelgrass Exploration Project. This new project aims to use citizen science to help record eelgrass presence, extent and ecology across the Bailiwick. The project ran a training course, with Seasearch, the Guernsey Biodiversity Records Centre and La Société Guernesiaise.

A small number of sub-tidal eelgrass surveys via snorkel/dive techniques were completed during 2019 by AWT staff and the Alderney Seasearch Snorkel Group. These recorded the presence and location of eelgrass at Braye, Saye, Longis and for the first time, Catts Bay. All records have been submitted to Seasearch, which will be also shared with the GBRC, for the Bailiwick Eelgrass Exploration Project.

The annual Intertidal eelgrass survey was completed at Longis Bay. This survey identified the presence and extent of eelgrass across the mouth of the lower shore (sandy) section of Longis Bay.

In 2019, the AWT also began assisting the University of Swansea collect eelgrass seeds to help develop a new eelgrass habitat in Dale, Wales. Training was provided by colleagues from the university, with seeds successfully collected by AWT staff, from the Longis eelgrass bed. This project received interest from local, regional and national press.

II. Cave habitat

Intertidal caves and overhangs

Importance:

Caves and overhangs are recognised as important, rare habitats, and are given conservation designation status at international (i.e. EU Annex I habitat) and regional (i.e. assisted the designation of SAC's in the UK) levels. In addition, they are known to support a range of important species, including EU Annex II species, such as bats.

Aim(s):

- To record the physical structure, habitat type, species biodiversity and composition within selected intertidal caves and overhangs.

Method(s):

Intertidal caves and overhangs are assessed using JNCC survey methods (both physical and ecological (habitats and species) surveys).

Results:

Two caves were surveyed in 2019, along the South Cliffs. Both caves were primarily sparse of life, with one, however, comprising of bat presence.

