

Pink Sea Fan Recording Project

Notes for recorders



Why record sea fans?

The pink sea fan, *Eunicella verrucosa*, is one of the two sea fans that grow in British waters. It is found in SW Britain, unlike the northern sea fan, *Swiftia pallida* which occurs in western Scotland. It is a slow growing and long lived species which is especially prone to damage by fishing gear or careless divers.

The sea fan is a protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act and has been included amongst the marine species for which a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) has been prepared. The aim of this recording project is to add to our knowledge of sea fan distribution, habitat and condition and to complement other research taking place to contribute to the action to protect them.



Where do sea fans occur?

Sea fans are filter feeders and you will find them in rocky areas with some current. They are oriented across the current and are sufficiently flexible to withstand some buffeting. They are normally deeper than any wave surge and thus are not usually seen shallower than 20 metres. The picture above shows a number of fans growing in a typical open rocky habitat amongst dead men's fingers and ross coral - a bryozoan.

The Pink sea fan is a south-westerly species in the British Isles but is also found around south-west Europe, the Mediterranean and north-west Africa. It occurs in the English Channel from Purbeck westwards around the whole of the SW Peninsular and up to Ilfracombe on the north Devon Coast. It is also found in the Channel Islands, the Scilly Isles and Lundy. In south Wales it can be found around the St David's and Skomer Peninsulars. In Ireland it occurs on the south and west coasts as far north as Donegal

How to take part

This project has been designed to be used by anybody diving in SW Britain, SW Ireland and the Channel Islands. We are particularly interested in records from poorly recorded areas.

Copies of this sheet and recording forms can be downloaded from the Seasearch Website.

www.seasearch.org.uk

The sea fan anemone

The sea fan anemone, *Amphianthus dohrnii*, is another Biodiversity Action Plan species. This little anemone, which rarely exceeds 1cm across, generally attaches to the branches of sea fans, though it may also occur on other tall features such as hydroids and worm tubes.



Because the anemone normally reproduces by basal laceration, where small fragments of tissue tear off from the anemone and regenerate into tiny anemones, its distribution can be patchy and changeable. Where one occurs there will often be others nearby as in the picture above.

The sea fan nudibranch

The sea fan nudibranch, *Tritonia nilsodhneri*, is found only on pink sea fans, or on rare occasions, travelling along the sea bed between them. The eggs are easily seen as coils around branches but the adults are very well camouflaged.

Numbers seem to vary from year to year and we are interested in recording

both distribution and numbers throughout the range of pink sea fans.



The false cowrie

One of two false cowries in our waters, *Simnia hiscocki*, can be found feeding on sea fan polyps. Numbers are small and you need to look closely to spot them.



How to complete the form

The first part of the form has your contact details so we can come back to you with any queries and keep you informed of Seasearch activities. Only your name will appear in any published data or on the National Biodiversity Network website.

A new form should be completed for each dive.

Site Name: Be as specific as you can.

Date and Time: This will enable us to relate your depth information to chart datum.

Position: Latitude and Longitude is essential and should be in decimal degrees.

Depth Range: Record the shallowest and deepest depth you see sea fans on your dive.

Habitat: Tick each of the habitats in which sea fans are growing. If one is predominant circle it. If you use the Other category explain in the additional notes box.

Density: Tick the box that describes the maximum density of sea fans at the site. *Forest* is a thick covering of sea fans where they almost touch each other (see picture on front page). *Common* is where there are a number of sea fans in different parts of the site and you see at least 20 over your dive. *Occasional* is from 5-20 seen. *Rare* is less than 5 seen during the dive.

Additional Notes: Put anything unusual or other information of interest in here.



Sea Fan details

Complete side two for as many fans as you can during your dive. If you can count more than there is space for on one card, complete another one and attach them together. If you are working as a pair, make sure you record different fans.

Height and width: Record the width and height of as many fans as you have time for. To get an idea of the size distribution it is better that you record all the fans in a small area rather than just the bigger ones over a wider area.

Feeding: Record for each fan if the polyps are expanded and feeding (Y) or retracted (N). In the picture above the small fan at the front has its polyps out whilst the larger one behind has them retracted.

Colour: Most sea fans are a light pink, though this often looks dull and buff unless you shine a torch on it. A few fans are bright white. Record all fans as pink (P) unless they are distinctly white (W). The picture below shows the two extremes.



(Photo: Keith Hiscock)

Condition: Fans may be either partially broken or partially or wholly overgrown with other plants and animals. Score each fan on a scale of 0-5 where 0 is totally fouled or broken with no living parts and 5 is intact with no parts obviously missing and completely unfouled. 4 would be 75% clean, 3 50%, 2 25% and 1 10%. You can use D (dead) instead of 0 if you prefer.

Make sure you don't confuse a living fan with its polyps retracted, with a dead one.

Fouling Species: If a fan has other things growing on it or fouled around it record what they are if you can. Typical examples will be algae, barnacles, mermaids purses and bryozoan turf

Fishing Debris: List any fishing line, weights, netting or other fishing debris around the fan.

Anemones, Nudibranchs and False Cowries:

record the numbers of each that you see on each fan you are recording. In the case of nudibranchs and false cowries you may find adults, eggs or both. record these in the format adults/eggs.

You will need to look very carefully to record any of these species. Taking a photograph of each sea fan you record may help identify their presence afterwards.

Returning the forms

It should only take a few minutes to transfer the information from your slate to the recording form. Please return the form either to the Dive Organiser or scan it and send to:

forms@seasearch.org.uk

Take special care when carrying out this survey. The pink sea fan is a protected species and you should make sure you do not damage any individual or their habitat. Watch your fins!