

PORCUPINE NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 1. NUMBER 1.

November, 1976.

Porcupine is a Society to promote interest in the ecology and distribution of marine fauna and flora in the N.E. Atlantic. Its name is derived from the surveying vessel "Porcupine" engaged in 1869 and 1870 on scientific expeditions in the N.E. Atlantic and Mediterranean, and which gave its name to the Porcupine Bank west of Ireland.

The chief aims of PORCUPINE are:

1. To promote interest in aspects of marine biology involved in the distribution and recording of marine organisms.
2. To be a forum for discussion of progress and problems at all levels, especially on a personal basis at meetings.
3. To publish a Newsletter soon after each meeting.

It is envisaged that meetings will occur three times a year and be held at various venues in Scotland, Ireland, and the north of England. These will normally last two days and take the form of discussion or field work centred on a particular theme.

The Newsletter will include a report of the meeting and additional articles on a wide range of subjects. Contributions, comprising reviews, notices of forthcoming events, news of personal and joint research projects, requests for information, etc., should be sent to the Hon. Editor of PORCUPINE, Mr. F.R. Woodward, South Shields Museum, Ocean Road, South Shields, Tyne and Wear, or to the Hon. Secretary of PORCUPINE, Dr. Shelagh M. Smith, Royal Scottish Museum, Chambers Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1JF.

You are cordially invited to join PORCUPINE and to attend the inaugural meeting.

COMMITTEE

The Steering Committee is comprised as follows and it is proposed that it should serve until full elections are held.

Office-bearers

Hon. Secretary Dr. Shelagh M. Smith, Royal Scottish Museum, Chambers Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1JF.

Hon. Treasurer Mr. David Heppell, Royal Scottish Museum, Chambers Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1JF.

Hon. Editor Mr. F.R. Woodward, South Shields Museum, Ocean Road, South Shields, Tyne and Wear.

Hon. Records Convenor Mr. David W. McKay, Airyhillock Cottage, Bourtie, Inverurie, Aberdeenshire.

Council members

Dr. John Gordon, S.M.B.A., Dunstaffnage, Oban, Argyll.

Dr. Michael Hudson, Nature Conservancy Council, 12 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh.

Dr. Trevor Norton, Botany Department, The University, Glasgow.

Dr. J. Douglas Peacock, Flat 40, Queen's Park Court, Lilyhill Terrace, Edinburgh.

Dr. Geoffrey Smaldon, Royal Scottish Museum, Chambers Street, Edinburgh.

Dr. Alastair Sommerville, Scottish Wildlife Trust, 8 Dublin Street, Edinburgh.

Dr. Geoffrey N. Swinney, Royal Scottish Museum Chambers Street, Edinburgh.

A start has been made

In the course of my attendance at the 11th European Symposium on Marine Biology at Galway (Ireland), 5th - 11th October, 1976 I was able to publicise PORCUPINE. There was an informal discussion meeting on the evening of Sunday, 9th October at which I spoke, describing the origins of PORCUPINE (a personal appraisal) and its present scope and aims.

For 10 years I have been involved in biological recording of marine and non-marine British mollusca. I have been mostly concerned with the marine side and in 1974 became Marine Recorder for the Conchological Society of Great Britain and Ireland. In that capacity in April 1975 I went to Dundee to BIOREC 75 which was a conference on biological recording in Scotland. Out of about 100 delegates there were only three, Stewart Angus, David W. McKay and myself who were interested in or who had much knowledge of marine matters. This fact spoke for itself.

Since then, recording of marine mollusca, despite a superficial appearance to the contrary, was starting to stagnate through lack of a workable framework of data input and retrieval, lack of support from the Biological Records Centre, Monkswood, or from the council of the Conchological Society. Last but not least there was no agreed grid system as a basis for data mapping. My efforts to improve matters despite an increasing body of opinion behind me got nowhere and ended in my being obliged to resign as Marine Recorder at the beginning of the year.

By this time the seeds of PORCUPINE had been sown and in March 1976 during the symposium on Sea-slugs and Land-slugs held in the Royal Scottish Museum a small group of us now instantly recognisable as the provisional office-bearers of PORCUPINE discussed the basic ideas, most of the impetus coming from David McKay and myself. The name was thought up by David Heppell. From the start the necessity for PORCUPINE to be widely based covering all phyla, particularly those for which there were recording schemes, was paramount.

I went on to outline the aims of PORCUPINE as set out elsewhere in this Newsletter. In the discussion which followed there was much sympathy for my problems with BRC, although the lack of commitment by BRC to marine recording is well understood. There was enthusiasm for the setting up of a unified grid system based on the ICES (Lat. Long.) and for a unified method of processing data so that information should be easy to enter and interchange. It was admitted that there are several bodies already in existence who should be able to cover the work required but they were becoming conspicuous by their lack of published or publicised effort. Discussion might have continued all evening but was brought to a close as there were other items upon which people wished to speak. Fifty people added their names to a list of those who wished to hear more about PORCUPINE.

SHELAGH M. SMITH.

A DAY'S SHELLING ON A SEINE NET FISHING BOAT

On the morning of 27th April, 1976, the time is 0300 hrs. the seine net vessel Gleaners II WK164 slips her mooring ropes and glides quietly out of Scrabster Harbour. The only audible noise is the steady rhythmic throb of her 114 H.P. Gardner diesel engine. She is heading for a day's fishing on local grounds.

The crew of the Gleaners II consists of four. The Skipper is Jim Bremner from Keiss, a native of this village; the Leading Hand is Rab Robertson, a Stroma man now living in Keiss; Charlie Farquhar is the Sorter and hails from the fair Town of Buckie; while last but not least the Cook, Johnnie Henderson, a Wicker, all together a stalwart team of Northern sea fishers.

The Gleaners is steaming for the Stormy Bank some 20 miles N.W. by Holborn Head. This fishing bank is aptly named - it is the meeting place of tides from the east, north and west, which converge during Winter and Spring to form a swelling, squalling maelstrom. Rich in most types of demersal fish and renowned throughout the North of Scotland for its haddock.

After some 2½ - 3 hours steaming the Gleaners has arrived on mark and is ready to shoot her net. This is done by dropping her marker buoy and steaming for about 1 mile in the direction the tide favours, then turning in arc and dropping her 46 fathom net, completing the arc and steaming back to pick up her marker buoy. The large pear shaped manner in which her net has been shot has now to be towed along the bottom slowly until closed and then swiftly hauled up and landed on board. Once the net is on board and the bag has been emptied into the fish pond, a conchologist can come into his own, seaweeds, stones, sponges, polyps etc., provide molluscan homes larger species can be found lying around, and when once again the net has been shot, the aft deck on which it has been lying is a very good shelling spot.

On average, a seine net boat on the Stormy Bank will shoot nets 5 - 6 times in a 16 hour day if all goes well, and providing a conchologist makes himself useful in helping the crew between shots, he will be welcome to search round during the favourable periods and even be assisted in his quest.

There follows a list of Molluscs obtained on 27th April, 1976 by the Gleaners II. Latitudes and Longitudes are not quoted as a Skipper's "Mark" is valuable commercial information.

I wish to thank the crew of the Gleaners II for their undying enthusiasm in assisting me with my shell collecting and also Dr. Shelagh Smith for her determinations and assistance with the Marine Mollusca of Northern Scottish Waters.

R.G. MEIKLEJOHN.
MAY 1976.

On the list there appears some 22 Mollusca species. Some days are favourable to the conchologist on board a seine net fishing boat, others are not. This list is the proceeds of what could be called an Average Day.

Sandy Bottom. 65 Metres depth. Stormy Bank. 27.4.76.

Clathrus trevelyanus (Johnston, 1841)
Aporrhais pespelecari (L., 1758)
Lunatia alderi (Forbes, 1838)
L. catena (da Costa, 1778)
Erato voluta (Montagu, 1803)
Colus gracilis (da Costa, 1778)
Buccinum undatum (L., 1758)
Neptunea antiqua (L., 1758)
Lora turricula (Montagu, 1803) dead shell only
Musculus discors (L., 1767)
Aequipecten opercularis (L., 1758)
Falliolium tigrinum (Muller, 1776)
Pecten maximus (L., 1758)
Lucinoma borealis (L., 1767)
Montacuta substriata (Montagu, 1803)
Acanthocardia echinata (L., 1758)
Arctica islandica (L., 1758)
Abra prismatica (Montagu, 1803)
Dosinia lupinus (L., 1758)
Timoclea ovata (Pennant, 1777)
Loligo forbesii Steenstrup, 1856
Eledone cirrhosa (Lamarck, 1798)

YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED

Personnel from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and the Forestry Commission, are investigating the Porcupine introduction. It is not presently known how many of these animals are at large in the area. Intensive surveys will be carried out this winter with live trapping when any animals are located. The field evidence suggests that numbers are very low. It is hoped that the remaining animals will be trapped over the next few months, before their range is extended.

- Extracted from CSLP Annual Report, 1976.

D.H.

PORCUPINE INAUGURAL MEETING

This meeting will be held in the Royal Scottish Museum, Chambers Street, Edinburgh on 12th and 13th February, 1977 commencing at 10.00 hours.

Title : Forum on Marine Recording

Provisional Programme

Saturday, 12th February, 1977

10.00 Welcome by Norman Tebble, Director, Royal Scottish Museum
Introduction by David Heppell.

10.30 Coffee

Chairman - A. Rodger Waterston.

11.00 Brendan F. Keegan: Galway Bay Survey

11.30 Louis Cabiach: Macroenthos Survey in the English Channel

12.00 David Erwin: Strangford Lough Survey

12.30 Lunch

Chairman - Norman A. Holme

14.00 Alan Jones: Scapa Flow

14.30 Harry Powell: U.K. Intertidal Zone Survey

15.00 Trevor Norton: Algal Recording

15.30 Tea

16.00 Eve Southward: Echinoderm Recording Scheme

16.30 G.A. Robinson: The Continuous Plankton Recorder Survey

Sunday, 13th February, 1977

Chairman - David Heppell

10.00 Business meeting

10.45 "Coffee" as coffee may not be available this will include wine

Chairman - Shelagh M. Smith

11.15 David McKay; Mollusc Recording and the need for a unified grid system

11.45 Chaired discussion on a variety of topics

What people want from recording

Are voucher collections really necessary?

Are baseline surveys any use?

Design of marine record cards

Setting up of a Marine Biological Records Centre

Etc., etc.

It is expected that this discussion will adjourn for lunch and continue into the afternoon.

The meeting will close at about 15.30 hours.

There will be a demonstration of work in progress in marine recording schemes, together with displays of cards.

Facilities of Edinburgh University Staff Club will be available for participants. A fee of £1. will be charged to non-members of PORCUPINE to cover the cost of refreshments and use of the Staff Club.

If anybody has an item which they would like to be included in the chaired discussion, please would they inform Shelagh Smith as soon as possible. She would also be grateful to receive names of people hoping to attend this meeting.

Notice of further meetings

4th and 5th June, 1977 at Cullercoats. Theme "Photography". Organiser Mr. F.R. Woodward, South Shields Museum, Ocean Road, South Shields.

27th August - 3rd September, 1977 at Orkney Field and Arts Centre, Birsay. Supplementary meeting in the form of a field course on littoral fauna and flora particularly on rocky shores (also diving). Organised under the auspices of BRISC (Biological Recording in Scotland Committee) by David Heppell, Royal Scottish Museum, Chambers Street, Edinburgh, from whom further details are available.

October, 1977 (firm date to be arranged) at Belfast and Portaferry. Theme "Interstitial organisms". Organiser Elizabeth Platts, Tiverton, Quarry Road, Belfast.

The date of this is a bit dicey. Pat. Boaden wants it before Queen's University term starts, but we have to avoid the date of the NCC/Roy. Soc. Edin. symposium on the Outer Hebrides and the 12th MBS at Kiel.

- - - - -

This newsletter is the first of what we hope will be a useful publication for many years to come. The publication times will be soon after each meeting.

We cannot hope to make a success of this venture if members of the group do not co-operate, that is by sending in items for future publication. We have only two short articles in this newsletter but in future we hope that there will be a great many more. We hope in future editions to include as a regular feature, members requirements, exchanges and requests for information together with the reviews of latest publications and other items of interest.

This publication will, we trust, help to further the aims of the group and stimulate the interests of the members. Any items for inclusion should be sent to the Hon. Editor, Mr. F.R. Woodward, South Shields Museum and Art Gallery, Ocean Road, South Shields, Tyne and Wear.

F.R. WOODWARD.
Hon. Editor.