



Polzeath Marine Conservation Group

Annual Report

April 2020-April 2021

The Polzeath Marine Conservation Group (PMCG) is a strong and passionate local group made up of volunteers and related organisations from the area working towards the conservation and improvement of the local marine environment, as well as raising awareness with the wider public of the need for marine conservation in Polzeath. We also support a unique and special Marine Centre set in the heart of Polzeath village, the only independent Marine Centre in Cornwall.

The group primarily supports Polzeath's Voluntary Marine Conservation Area (VMCA) which was launched in 1995 by Cornwall Council. It includes the 'inter-tidal areas' (those exposed at low tide) between Pentire Point and Trebetherick Point, plus it also takes in the splash zone from north of Baby Bay to Pentire Point.

As a voluntary designation, the role of the VMCA is not to impose restrictions, but to engage communities and encourage sensible use of the natural resources in the area. In doing so, the marine environment will be protected for future generations to enjoy.

The VMCA aims are to:

- Protect and conserve
- Raise awareness and increase understanding of the marine environment
- Encourage education and research.

The large numbers of visitors to Polzeath combined with valuable and vulnerable wildlife make this form of education and marine conservation essential for the protection of such an important ecological and economic resource. To achieve our key aims, PMCG carries out a variety of activities including:

- An annual programme of public events and school education visits aimed to engage people of all ages and abilities in the marine environment and the importance of its protection.
- A varied volunteer programme, ranging from training sessions to surveys and socials, to guide volunteers in taking a larger role actively conserving Polzeath's coast and sea, and to support 1 volunteer student Beach ranger.
- An active role working with local community groups and conservation issues, such as Your Shore Beach Rangers, National Trust, Polzeath Area Residents' Association and Polzeath Voice, commenting on any planning and consultation applications that may arise, particularly those that require an environmental perspective.

Throughout the last year we have opened the marine centre as much as possible following the governments Coronavirus guidelines, and have continued to offer opportunities for the public to learn about marine wildlife and speak directly with family groups about the work that we do.



Summary of year 2020/21

In 2020 we engaged with more than **2878** people. We ran **24** published events plus many other ad hoc events, carried out **1** Shoresearch survey, funded **1** boat survey and we took part in **9** training sessions. We had 6 members on the committee, **41** family members, **10** single memberships and **2** business members. We have 60 email contacts on our mailing list and approximately **13** actively involved volunteers; PMCG volunteers also took part in **10** Beachcare beach cleans and we ran **1** Mega beach clean in September with National Trust and Keep Britain Tidy/Beachcare. More than 2500 volunteer hours were donated in 2020. This year we also independently supported **1** Summer Beach Ranger who joined us from July – September.

Marine Centre figures

The Marine Centre was open on **61** days, for a total of **379** hours, and was open for at least 6 hours a day, 7 days a week from 12th July and all of August and we welcomed **2878** visitors to the centre in a socially distanced way.

The Centre supports and is supported by **13 volunteers** of which **5** open the centre regularly and **1 volunteer ranger** who helped us throughout the summer.

PMCG Volunteers

A massive thank you to all the volunteers with their hugely different life experiences and skills, without whom the Polzeath Marine Conservation Group would not be able to function. They gave a total of more than 2500 voluntary hours in 2020/21 not only staffing the Marine Centre but attending training sessions, virtual conferences and volunteering fairs, maintaining the marine centre and its surroundings, preparing for the next year's events, securing a placement student and general admin.

Beach Rangers

We were so lucky in this strange year that the student who wanted to be our summer ranger was still able and extremely willing to volunteer with us. Laura was a ray of sunshine for us keeping everyone's spirits up and dealing with the huge amount of families wanting to visit the marine centre, either to see the aquarium or to paint plaques. Having university students is so important to the group as it not only encourages younger people to visit the centre but also increases the volunteer's knowledge and keeps the group up to date with social media, as well as providing an invaluable opportunity for the students.

Events and Activities

Rockpool Rambles/Bingo

Due to the pandemic we were unable to offer our usual rockpool rambles, but we devised an event which we called Rockpool Bingo. 3 bingo sheets of differing difficulty were drawn up, each having 10 pictures and descriptions of different creatures and plants that can be found in the Polzeath rockpools. We met our family groups down at the rockpools and each group had a volunteer with them rather than being in a very large group, and then worked through their bingo sheet seeing if they could find all the items on it.. We took a total 255 people over 20 days in single household groups so that all contacts could be traced if necessary which was an amazing feat for such a small group.

Get Crafty

Get Crafty sessions continued in their usual Wednesday morning slot with the outside area of the marine centre divided into 3 socially distanced pods for the budding artists to make creations out of marine litter . We also introduced a new activity which was to paint marine/conservation themed pictures on plaques of wood made from wood retrieved from builders skips and peoples sheds. This became hugely popular with over 250 being displayed on the fence outside the marine centre.

Talks

Both talks had to be cancelled but will be rebooked for the 2021 season.

Marine Discovery Day

The biggest day on our calendar is always our Marine Discovery Day which unfortunately had to be cancelled due to coronavirus restrictions and will have to be cancelled in 2021 as well. This event is always during the Whitsun half term and really would not work at any other time of year as it needs to be in the school holidays and also when the beach is not too busy. Hopefully it will be back in 2022 better than ever.

School visits

Unfortunately all the planned school visits had to be cancelled this year due to coronavirus restrictions, but we very much look forward to recommencing our growing link with the local schools when restrictions allow us to do this safely.

Publicity

After not printing the events leaflet for this season as a trial it was noted that no one asked for a copy of one so the decision has now been made not to print them anymore. More and more people are booking events using our Facebook and Instagram pages or by email and now we are able to take card bookings online this is the way forward. A massive thank you to Haley for helping us with the website and to Jules Didsbury and Laura Thornton for updating it (www.polzeathmarineconservation.com), to Mike Player for informing the press plus local publications of our events and to Laura, Tina and Vickie for imputing on our Facebook page (Polzeath Marine Conservation Group and Centre) which now has 1871 followers, and Instagram (polzeath.marine.group) with 1340 followers.

Donators of funds and time

Once again we have had a financially successful year which will enable us to continue with our work and support another placement student next summer. We would like to thank Cornwall Wildlife Trust and especially the Your Shore Beach Rangers team for their support throughout the year with advice, training courses and resources and funding. Your shore beach rangers were disbanded in March and we will really miss them. It is due to our continued support from annual membership, small public donations and sales of ReFill bottles, books etc. and the ever popular knitted octopuses that provide the funds for the everyday running of our centre.

Conclusion

Well what a year we've all been through, with lockdowns, masks, hand sanitiser and social distancing. We were able to open the marine Centre on July 4th and had one of our busiest summers ever of course abiding by the social distancing rules. We divided the outside area into 3 socially distanced pods where we set up painting stations so that visitors could paint marine themed plaques which were then displayed on the fence. The marine centre was open so single family groups could look at the aquarium whilst being distanced from our volunteer and our rockpool rambles were 1 household to a volunteer rather than a large group of 50. All of this worked extremely well and will be repeated this year. None of which would have been achievable without our volunteers who gave up literally 100s of hours of their free time whether it be helping with events, staffing the centre, knitting octopuses, making crafts to sell or generally helping out behind the scenes (I know we are always amazed at how many volunteering hours we give when we try to add it up at the end of the year). Every single one of you is fantastic and truly valued, between us we are a dynamic group of very different people with diverse life skills who can only not help in the education of marine conservation but also to help advise our students in their future careers.