Marine Recorder's Report 2025 *Simon Taylor*

Unusually, perhaps the biggest marine mollusc news of the year concerned a cephalopod: *Octopus vulgaris* Cuvier, 1797 (Fig.1). When it comes to octopuses around the British Isles, one usually spends most time explaining to the public that *Eledone cirrhosa* (Lamarck, 1798), the so-called Curled Octopus, is the species generally encountered while *O. vulgaris*, despite having the vernacular name Common Octopus, is scarce and restricted to waters around the southwest and south. In the spring of 2025, however, reports began to emerge of regular sightings of *O. vulgaris* in that area. Soon the situation escalated and hit the wider media as crab and lobster fishermen in Devon complained of an unprecedented problem with octopuses raiding their pots (Jansen, 2025), although the resourceful fishermen soon found a market for the octopuses instead.

O. vulgaris (c. 1 metre across) is approximately twice the size of *E. cirrhosa* (≤ 50cm) and has two rows of suckers on its arms compared to a single row in *E. cirrhosa*. With the British Isles as the very northern limit of its distribution, *O. vulgaris* has been regarded as present here only when individual adults migrate from the south or planktonic larvae are swept here by currents and water temperatures enable them to survive. Quite sudden blooms in the species' population at the northern edge of its distribution are known and documented (Garstang, 1900)(Rees & Lumby, 1954), indeed they have been described to persist and become known as 'plagues' primarily due to the effects of the octopuses' voracious predatory appetites on local fisheries and food webs. The phenomenon and its history are excellently described in the November 2025 issue of Mollusc World by Paul Chambers (2025) and further articles are anticipated (Hiscock, in press); it will be interesting to see if the 2025 bloom escalates to a plague, winter sea temperatures evidently being the key factor.

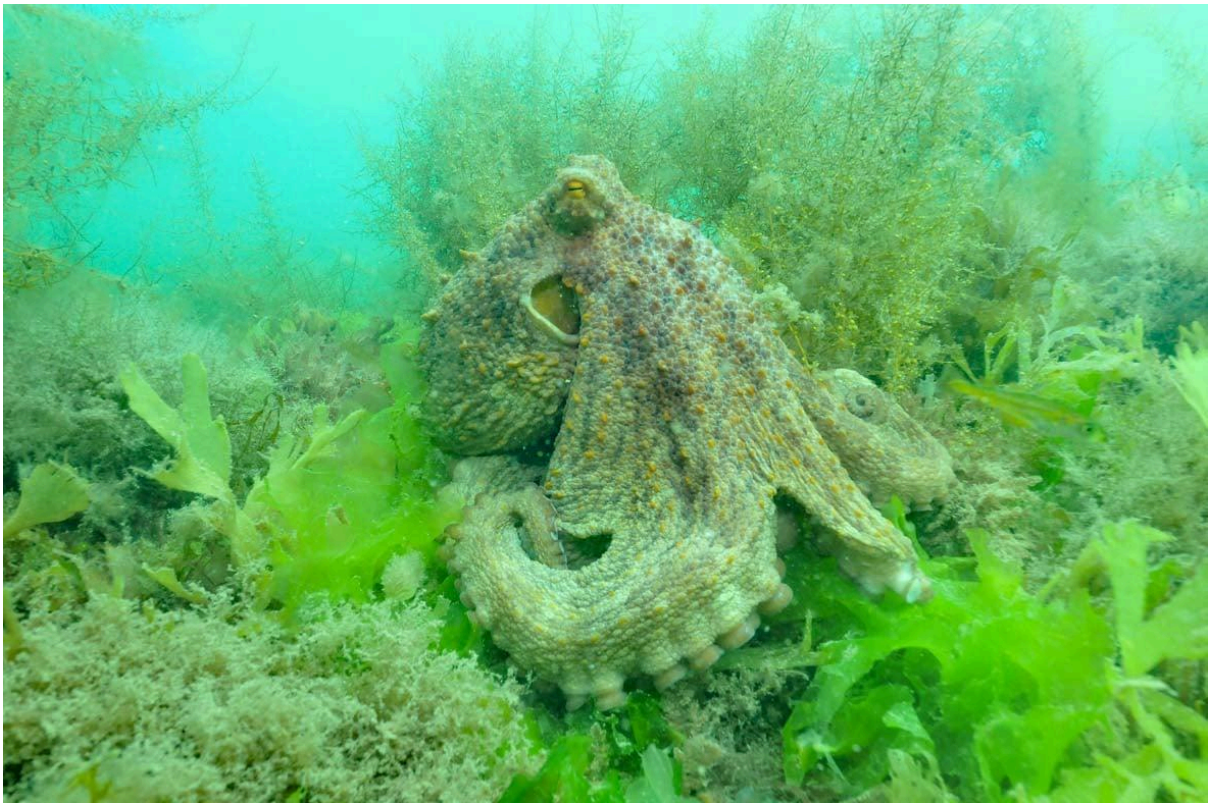

Fig.1. *Octopus vulgaris* Cuvier, 1797. Shoalstone, Torbay, South Devon (photograph by Keith Hiscock).

Another, more exotic, octopus species also made the news in 2025 when large fragments of what was initially thought to be a giant squid were stranded on the shore of NE Scotland at Forvie National Nature Reserve, Aberdeenshire at the end of November. The pieces, some well over a foot in length

and with suckers over 10mm in diameter (Fig.2), were subsequently identified as parts of *Haliphron atlanticus* Steenstrup, 1861, one of the largest known species of octopus. It has a variety of vernacular names such as the Giant Gelatinous Octopus and Blob Octopus but is also sometimes referred to as the Seven Arm Octopus or even Septopus because the species has evolved a very specialist reproductive arm, or hectocotylus, which is smaller than the remaining seven, fringed, and curled inside a sac in front of the right eye (Willassen, 1986). The species seems to have a circumglobal oceanic distribution, having also been found off New Zealand and Brazil, and is estimated to reach a size of at least 4 metres and a mass of over 75kg, with very gelatinous flesh (O'Shea, 2002)(Miller et al., 2018).

Fig.2. *Haliphron atlanticus* Steenstrup, 1861. Arm fragment beached at Forvie, Aberdeenshire (photograph by NatureScot).

In recent years the northern spread of various nudibranch species has caused great excitement as well as being used as evidence of climate change. 2025 was no exception, with the arrival in Cornwall of *Spurilla neapolitana* (Delle Chiaje, 1841) adding to the list of nudibranchs to colonise southern shores in recent years. The species was first reported in September when found by Charlotte Cumming while she was participating in a Cornwall Wildlife Trust Shoresearch event at Prisk Cove on the northern side of the mouth of the Helford River. The Wildlife Trusts' formidable PR machine kicked into gear and very soon the find was on the BBC website homepage (Silver, 2025) as well as featuring on radio and television news. This prompted a flurry of further reports, mostly centred on the Falmouth area on the long, rocky shoreline between Gylly Beach and Castle Beach, although it also turned up on the North Cornwall coast at Polzeath. Some of the records even pre-dated Charlotte's find, such that the earliest known report is now 14th May 2025. In total some 30 records

were made in 2025, the vast majority later in the year and from Falmouth. With nudibranchs already being among the 'pin-ups' of the marine world alongside the rising popularity of pan-species recording, Falmouth experienced the marine mollusc equivalent of a birdwatching twitch, with folk coming from far afield to hunt the 'new to Britain' species, with the added temptation that it was sometimes being seen close to the brightly coloured *Babakina anadoni (*Ortea, 1979), another nudibranch to recently colonise the south-west. Among those to successfully track down and record *S. neapolitana* were Jemima Giles, Holly Robertson, Rachel Edworthy, Finley Hutchinson, Graeme Lyons, Alexander Lydon, Cole Brautigam and Cody Buckland.

S. neapolitana is not hugely difficult to recognise (Fig.3), with an orange/pink body (though sometimes shaded with purple, particularly in young, smaller specimens), lamellate rhinophores and darker cerata with white tips. Crucially the cerata are quite flattened and strongly curved, resulting in the species being known as the 'Hair Curler Sea Slug'. The majority of records have been from intertidal pools, sometimes surprisingly high up the shore. As well as the usual aeolid nudibranch ability to retain stinging nematocysts from its prey and use them for its own defence, *S. neapolitana* is thought to be able to retain zooxanthellae in branches of the digestive gland too, and to benefit from their photosynthetic abilities. The species was considered to be distributed on both sides of the Atlantic but recent studies have, perhaps unsurprisingly, demonstrated that those on the American side are different, and that in fact there are several *Spurilla* species in the Atlantic (Carmona et al., 2013).

Fig.3. *Spurilla neapolitana* (Delle Chiaje, 1841). Prisk Cove, Helford, Cornwall (photographs by Charlotte Cumming).

Another species which seemed to benefit from the warmer sea temperatures in 2025 was *Aplysia depilans* Gmelin, 1791, one of the larger sea hare species - along with *A. fasciata* Poiret, 1789 - which are occasionally recorded off our southern shores. *A. depilans* seems to be found intertidally more than *A. fasciata* and can be distinguished from it by checking the parapodia, which are fused

together posteriorly in *A. depilans* (Fig.4). There were noticeably more records of *A. depilans* reported than usual in 2025, mainly from the Channel Islands and Cornwall. Despite growing to considerable size, sometimes close to a foot in length, they can remain well camouflaged in rockpools. Like *Spurilla*, individuals were being reported into the winter.

During 2025 the Society worked alongside several other specialist groups in an exercise to identify high-priority horizon invasive species, those which are likely to arrive in UK waters via non-natural vectors and cause the greatest damage to natural biodiversity and/or commercial species. Concurrently, monitoring of those which have already arrived continues:

- Robin Sones reported that further dredging in Southampton Water had again produced *Yoldia limatula* (Say, 1831) this time around 150 specimens, mainly alive and including adults, so they would seem to now be well established.
- The presence of the notorious invasive *Crepidula fornicata* (L., 1758) in north-east Scotland was first recounted in the 2023 Report (Taylor, 2024) with the rider that it was unlikely to be the first time the species had occurred there and it had not previously survived. Indications now are that it is persisting, with live adults and plenty of dead shells being reported throughout Moray Firth, Cromarty Firth and Dornoch Firth.
- *Ensis leei* Huber, 2015 has for some time been known to be established in the Edinburgh area of the Firth of Forth but it too is now appearing further north and the author found specimens at Avoch on the Black Isle in the Moray Firth. Paul Dansey has also found it spreading in the opposite direction, with specimens seen at Bellhaven Bay near Dunbar in June. It is also now definitely confirmed from Northern Ireland with voucher specimens provided by Libby Keatley from Strangford Lough and Belfast Lough (Fig.5).

Fig.4. *Aplysia depilans* Gmelin, 1791. Falmouth, Cornwall (photographs by Finley Hutchinson).

Fig.5. *Ensis leei* Huber, 2015. Top, L & R, Belfast Lough (photographs by Libby Keatley). Bottom, L & R, Avoch, Black Isle, Moray Firth (photographs by the author).

Fieldwork highlights.

The Society's marine week was held immediately subsequent to the Regional Meeting in Dungarvan, Republic of Ireland. The author would like to congratulate the President Ben Rowson, Treasurer Andrew Wright, Secretary Rosemary Hill and all others involved in organising an excellent Regional Meeting which had a distinctly marine flavour amongst the very enjoyable presentations. The field meeting is reported elsewhere; it was wonderful to be working in Ireland again and we shall definitely be heading back there frequently in years to come. This trip had the added benefit of covering a poorly recorded stretch of coast and so generated a large volume of new data, including some from offshore after a dredging trip out of Ardmore, Co. Waterford.

The author also spent a week working spring low tides on the shores of Wester Ross with David McKay, again generating lots of up-to-date data for the area. Some sites on the east coast were also surveyed (hence the *E. leei* record from Avoch). A weekend was also spent with Bas Payne, working the shores around Paignton and taking in a morning's dredging, specifically aimed at surveying the *Acanthocardia* in the area but, of course, also recording everything else which was found, including *Tritia varicosa* (Turton, 1825), a species not often recorded.

The author also facilitated a one-day workshop on marine gastropods for the Sussex Wildlife Trust. While partly aimed at raising awareness of the horizon muricid species *Ocinebrellus inornatus* (Récluz, 1851) it proved very popular with a broad cross-section of marine surveyors. Many commented on how helpful it had been to help improve their confidence in species determination , particularly after the shoreline afternoon session on a reasonable tide at Rottingdean.

Dataset news.

The Society continues to complete the verification process for all marine mollusc records submitted to iRecord and also verifies a number of those which have gained 'Research Grade' on iNaturalist. Huge gratitude as always is offered to Ian Smith who handles the bulk of the verification work. In March of 2025 some 885 species observations from iRecord and 3230 from iNaturalist were added to the Society's marine dataset and shared with the National Biodiversity Network Atlas. The Society's dataset now contains 235,385 species observations of which 209.639 are currently shared openly with the NBN Atlas.

Thanks are also offered to those individuals who periodically share their own marine surveying data with the Society, mainly in the form of a straightforward spreadsheet. Anybody else keen to do so can please contact the author for a spreadsheet template.

Social media presence.

The British Marine Mollusca Facebook group, of which the author is principal admin, continues to provide a popular forum "for discussion, sharing of information and networking for people who are rather obsessed with British Marine Mollusca" as it says on its home page. Membership is moderated and tends to be restricted to those who are actually resident in or near to the north-eastern Atlantic region, and currently stands at over 1,800. Activity levels fluctuate but there is generally at least one thread active on any given day, often several more, and it provides a very useful source of data. Some new Society members were first introduced to us via this Facebook group.

There are several other active and relevant Facebook groups to which Society members, particularly the author and Ian Smith, contribute regularly. With the notorious Meta algorithms at work in the background, this has the fringe benefit of highlighting the BMM group to many others to whom it may be of potential interest.

Adventives.

As ever there were intriguing reports of shells of foreign species being found around the British Isles. While these may be of fringe interest biologically, they neatly demonstrate just how easily foreign objects can be transferred from one place to another, often inadvertently, as well as prompting people to contact the Society to discuss their finds. A log is kept of all adventives reported to the Society.

In early January, Mark Painter reported finding a shell of *Angaria delphinus* (L., 1758) on the shore at Bournemouth (Fig.6A). Then, in July, Bas Payne found what was clearly a dumped group of exotic shells on a small muddy beach at Topsham on the Exe Estuary, South Devon (Fig.6B). They are of

Indo-Pacific origin, possibly Queensland, Australia though there is no evidence to prove they are all from the same original location. They contain *Patelloida* sp., *Lunella cinerea* (Born, 1778), *Bractechlamys vexillum* (Reeve, 1853) and *Gafrarium menkei* (Jonas, 1846) among several others. All were found within a patch of approximately 1m^2, so undoubtedly discarded as a batch.

Fig.6. A: Angaria delphinus (L., 1758) found on the beach at Bournemouth (photograph by Mark Painter); **B**: Indo-Pacific shell dump, Topsham, Exe Estuary, South Devon (photograph by Bas Payne).

STOP PRESS: report received on New Year's Eve.

Just as the year was drawing to a close, a potentially very significant report was made via Facebook. An apparently live specimen of the muricid *Rapana venosa* (Valenciennes, 1846) was reported as having been caught in a net in the Solent. Details of the find were scant, but a photograph showed an operculum in place suggesting a live animal (Fig.7).

Fig.7. *Rapana venosa* (Valenciennes, 1846) netted in the Solent, December 2025. (photograph courtesy of David Rolfe).

R. venosa is native to the north-west Pacific but since the middle of the 20th century has proved a highly accomplished colonist with established populations in the Mediterranean and the eastern coasts of North and South America. A small population is known from the North Sea (Kerckhof et al., 2006) but has been considered to be limited to areas of deeper water there and may even have died out. The dispersal vector is thought to be via hull fouling and as larvae in ballast water in shipping, although young specimens have been observed attached to Loggerhead Turtles. *R. venosa* is a very effective predator and has been shown to have significant detrimental impact on oyster and mussel populations in areas it has colonised. It can also outcompete native whelk species, becoming so successful that in some colonised areas a *R. venosa* fishery has proved viable. An empty shell was found in 2021 at Kilchoan on the Ardnamurchan peninsula, but these isolated, unsubstantiated reports (in neither case has the actual specimen been handled) could just be red herrings.

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