

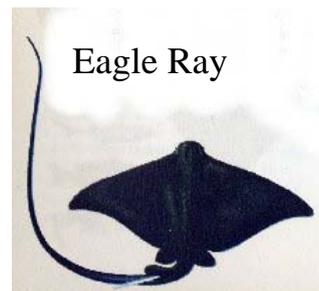
Penzance B.S.A.C. Conservation Officer's Report April 2008



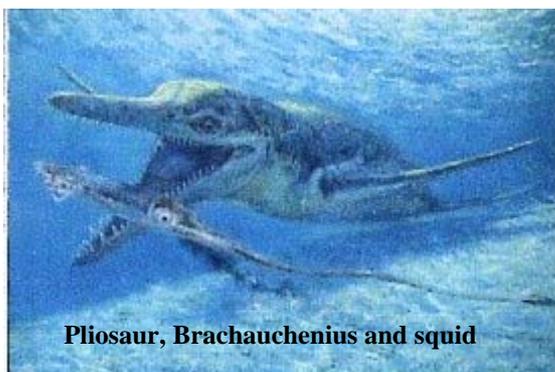
Photo
T. Flashman

On March 6th a photograph was taken of a mass stranding of Common Starfish, *Asterias rubens*, which had occurred over the past couple of days on the coast of east Kent. There were strandings along others areas of the Kent coast with an estimated number of starfish in the region of 10 million. The reason for this strange phenomenon is not known. There are often mass strandings of creatures which float at sea, when they are blown ashore by high winds, but why would a creature that spends its life on the seabed strand in such numbers? Adverse weather conditions and sudden changes in water salinity have been suggested, but that seems unlikely. A more likely explanation is that many echinoderms like starfish go through a "boom and bust" population cycle, some years they multiply to enormous numbers and then the population crashes. There have been reports of mass strandings in other regions of the British coast, including the coast of Lancashire and the British Marine Life Study Society would like to receive information of any other mass strandings found. If you come across a mass stranding please let me know and I will pass it on to the BMLSS. Include photos if possible.

A woman sunbathing on a boat in the Florida Keys was killed when struck by an Eagle Ray, *Myliobatis aquila*, which had jumped out of the water and struck her on the head or neck. They have a whip-like tail and a poison spine, large wing-like pectoral fins that can measure 5.2 metres across, a distinct head with lateral eyes, and weigh up to 227 kg. The Eagle Ray can jump well clear of the water and has flat, crushing teeth set in a powerful jaw with which it can crush even large, heavy-shelled clams, and is often a pest to shellfish fishermen.



Eagle Ray



Pliosaur, Brachauchenius and squid

A fossilised "sea monster" unearthed on an Arctic island is the largest marine reptile known to science. The 150 million year old specimen was found on Spitsbergen in the Arctic Island chain in 2006. The Jurassic-era leviathan is one of 40 sea reptiles from a fossil "treasure trove" uncovered on the island by Norwegian scientists. Nicknamed "The Monster", the immense creature would have measured 15 metres (50 ft) from nose to tail. A large pliosaur was big enough to pick up a small car in it's jaws and bite it in half.

There were only 24 reported sightings during March, 16 of which were of Harbour Porpoises, all of these were between Pendeen and Logan Rock except two sightings off The Lizard. There were 3 reports of Bottlenose Dolphins, 3 were seen off St Ives on the 27 and a pod of 8 or 9 were seen off Pendennis Point on the 28th and the 31st. Two dolphins seen off Charlestown on the 5th were probably also Bottlenose. A pod of 7 Pilot Whales were seen off Kingsand near Plymouth on the 25th and a Leatherback Turtle was seen off The Lizard on the 19th. A small group of about 25 Goose Barnacles were found at Godrevy on 7th March



Photo. Raymond Dennis

Goose Barnacles

See previous reports on our website www.penzancedivers.co.uk

Conservation Officer Raymond Dennis