

Press release, embargoed until 20:00, Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2023

## Inspired by Wild Isles? Help protect UK seas with the Marine Conservation Society

The fifth episode of the BBC's *Wild Isles* focuses on the wonders of the UK and Irish seas, highlighting highlight life beyond the shore and beneath the waves. The episode will feature Shetland, Pembrokeshire, the Scilly Isles, and the West coast of Ireland, and the creatures that call our shores home.

The [Marine Conservation Society](#), the UK's leading ocean charity, has been working for a cleaner, better protected and healthier ocean for almost 40 years.

**Sandy Luk, CEO of the Marine Conservation Society, said:** "We know our Wild Isles can remain a haven for an incredible array of wildlife far into the future, but we all need to do our bit to help. You could join us on a litter pick, head into the sea for a Seasearch snorkel, spot jellyfish from the shore, or join us as a member. Together we can achieve our vision for healthy seas for people and planet".

### Ocean pollution and marine mammals

Featured in *Wild Isles* are seals, one of the UK's most-spotted marine mammals, but they are increasingly under threat from pollution. The Marine Conservation Society is campaigning for cleaner seas to protect animals like seals, which rely on the UK coast.

By collecting [data on beach litter](#) with the help of volunteers across the UK, the charity pushes for laws like carrier bag charges, deposit return schemes and bans on avoidable single-use plastic products.

The charity's [Stop Ocean Poison](#) campaign is calling for action on chemical pollution, which has been shown to affect marine mammals like seals, whales, dolphins, otters and many more species highlighted in *Wild Isles*.

### Seahorses and seagrass meadows

Viewers also join seahorses in a [seagrass](#) meadow in the Scilly Isles. The UK's seagrass meadows are home to the two species of seahorse which live in UK waters - the spiny seahorse and the short snouted seahorse.

However, an estimated 92% of seagrass beds in the UK have been lost in the last century from pollution, disease and damage caused by people. The Marine Conservation Society is working to protect, restore and conserve seagrass habitats through numerous collaborative projects, including replacing traditional, damaging mooring systems, campaigning for improvements to water quality, and protecting seagrass from human activity.

### **Incredible adventures of sea slugs**

This Sunday's episode features sea slugs – tiny marine-dwelling creatures which are found in waters all over the world, including our own. From the depths of the open ocean to kelp forests and coral reefs, sea slugs can also be spotted with a keen eye in rockpools.

The Marine Conservation Society's [Seasearch](#) project brings volunteer divers and snorkellers together to survey the UK's underwater world. Seasearchvolunteer, Libby Keatley, spotted an unusual-looking sea slug on a dive at the Skerries off Portrush last summer. Further study proved it was an entirely new species. In honour of being the original spotter, the animal was named after Libby.

**Charlotte Bolton, National Seasearch Co-ordinator at the Marine Conservation Society, said,** "There is so much to discover right on our doorstep. Our volunteers have spotted rare sea slugs, new species of sea sponge and kept track of vital marine habitats. We hope this final episode of Wild Isles inspires people to join us and discover the huge array of incredible, colourful and charismatic wildlife that calls UK seas home."

However, all these amazing species need protecting. Marine Protected Areas should be like underwater national parks and act as sanctuaries for rare or threatened animals, plants and seascapes. However, at present in some of these areas, damaging activities, such as bottom towed fishing or developments for energy projects can still legally happen which can damage habitats and exclude wildlife.

The UK Government has committed to fully protecting 30% of our seas by 2030, yet only 10% of England's seabed is properly protected from fishing with bottom towed gear.

Current protection should be increased for these wonderful habitats, as they're a vital tool in safeguarding our ocean's future. The Marine Conservation Society works

in the UK to designate these areas and make sure these vulnerable habitats are being properly protected.

Within five years of protection from bottom trawling, animals in three UK and Isle of Man Marine Protected Areas were found to be larger and more diverse. And, when areas of sea around the world were fully protected, biodiversity was found to increase by an average of 21%.

The Marine Conservation Society is working to encourage the UK Government to provide better protection from damaging bottom trawling at other sensitive sites around the UK. The charity's research found that Marine Protected Area, Dogger Bank, experienced a 98% decrease in bottom towed fishing\* since a ban came into force in June 2022, showing how effective fully protecting sites can be.

An additional episode of Wild Isles can be watched on BBC iPlayer. For more information about the Marine Conservation Society's work for a cleaner, better protected and healthier ocean, please visit [www.mcsuk.org](http://www.mcsuk.org).

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#### Images

Please find a selection of [images here](#)

#### Notes to Editors

The **[Marine Conservation Society](#)** is the UK's leading ocean charity, fighting for cleaner, better-protected, healthier seas. The charity works to highlight the importance of our ocean, and the life within it, through working with government, industry and education, to take action to restore and protect the marine environment.

The Marine Conservation Society's [Seasearch](#) programme works with volunteer recreational divers and snorkelers in UK and Irish seas and offers an exciting way to learn about marine life whilst collecting information to help track the health of the ocean. Find out more at [www.seasearch.org.uk](http://www.seasearch.org.uk)

\*Between June and October, from 2015-2019, an average of 623 hours of bottom-towed fishing took place within the English Dogger Bank MPA. Located about 120 kilometres east of Hull, Dogger Bank has been heavily fished for decades. However, between June and October

2022, since the ban has been in place, fishing activity dropped to just 13 hours; a 98% decrease in seabed fishing.