

Chair's report, Coastwise North Devon AGM, Dec 2025

It is my pleasure to report on another year of Coastwise North Devon activities.

We had a full programme of engaging talks, and two outings, in the Spring term with talks on a variety of topics ranging from coastal monitoring to the local laver industry via West Africa and a bamboo bike.

This autumn term has also seen interesting sessions, starting off with an enjoyable visit to Ilfracombe Aquarium. Two sessions at Northam Burrows, connecting with nature with Oceans for Hope and more traditional bird watching. We've heard from other organisations on their work in our area, including DWT, DCC, the Biosphere, Earth Action, Algapelago and the Met Office. Thanks to Paula, Judith and Ruth for organising the talks; to those members who have given a talk; to Robert and others for setting up the tech side each week; and to Ian and Kate for support with membership, room bookings and refreshments.

However, as reported in previous years, despite interesting programmes, we have not recovered the numbers we used to get attending our meetings. This year again we've mostly had between 20-30 people at meetings.

Surveys and outdoor activities ran from 3rd March until the 9th October, with 4 INNShore surveys, 6 Shoresearch surveys, a couple of shore safaris and 2 walks. This year the programme included two species identification training days, with indoor and outdoor sessions, one at Westward Ho! looking at intertidal animals and one at Lee Bay focusing on algae. Both were great, with useful advice and tips on recognising the species we encounter on our surveys. Many thanks to Pip and Mark for running the training and to Glenis for booking the venues.

This year we ran two joint public rockpooling events with Finding Nature's Footprints, at Combe Martin in May and for World Ocean Day at Croyde. We also contributed to a number of public events run by other organisations including Biosphere Festival of Nature in Appledore, and individual Coastwise members helped at various shore events run by Earth Action, Finding Nature's Footprints, Northam Burrows and Braunton Countryside Centre.

Thanks to Pip and Nicola for organising the INNShore surveys and Debbie, Paula and Laura for the Shoresearch surveys, and Martin, Judith and Mark for the social walks and events.

Earlier this year we were able to buy new waterproof cameras, mini-tripods and hand lens for use on surveys and other shore activities, thanks to a grant from the National Landscape's Sustainable Development Fund. Many thanks to Laura for her work to help us

secure the grant and make the purchases – as well as producing a new Coastwise leaflet which we have been able to distribute at events and via visitor centres and libraries.

On the subject of publicity, we have a radio star – Debbie featured on Radio Devon in August talking about Coastwise surveys. And many thanks to Paula, Judith and Debbie for posting our programme and event info far and wide across social and traditional media.

Thanks to Robert for maintaining the Coastwise website and keeping it updated with blogs on our talks and other activities. Coastwise Facebook group continues to thrive with 779 members now, with active posting, and is a great forum for engaging with a wider audience. Thanks to Janice Manning and Paula for administrating the group and to the members who post regularly.

Coastwise continues to be represented on a number of important local partnerships and fora, including the Biosphere, National Landscape, Lundy MPA advisory group, the Taw Torridge Estuary Forum and new this year the North Devon World Surfing Reserve. In March a few Coastwise members participated in a national Marine Citizen Science event at Mount Batten, Plymouth with Robin attending the subsequent workshop organised by Natural England.

Through these and other consultations, including on relevant planning applications, we try to influence policies and practices for the benefit of the local marine and coastal environment and wildlife. Thanks to Robin and Paula for responding on behalf of Coastwise.

As last year we are fortunate to be working with the NL's Finding Nature's Footprints project through which Laura Carolan is able to support us particularly with surveys and public events. Through the Shoresearch survey, we are also working more closely with Devon Wildlife Trust with support from Coral Smith. And we now have a new sister organisation: Coastwise Somerset, set up by SWT volunteers to take forward the Shoresearch surveys on the Somerset coast, and look forward to working together.

Obviously, none of this would be possible without the great work done by the committee and others that organise our various activities. As always we would be delighted to welcome other members to get more involved in the running of Coastwise. This year specifically the work Debbie Frazer puts into the Shoresearch survey has been recognised with a DWT Volunteer Award, nominated by Coral Smith both for Shoresearch and Debbie's commitment to the DWT Local Group – well done Debbie!

Liesje Birchenough

11.12.25