

## Unusual jellyfish bloom

Reports started coming in from local fishing boats and residents of a strange jellyfish appearing in the waters west of Mull in early November. Local fishermen, who are used to seeing jellyfish, were convinced they had never seen this one before, especially this late in the year. We were all intrigued so we sent some photos to jellyfish expert, Steve Hay at the Fisheries Research Services in Aberdeen.

Steve identified the species as *Pelagia noctiluca*. This species of jellyfish, commonly known as the **mauve stinger**, is widely distributed in all warm and temperate waters such as the Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea and Atlantic Ocean. According to Steve Hay, whilst being very common further south, this species is occasionally common this far north in the Atlantic.

This species is similar to the lion's mane and moon jellyfish, but unlike these two common UK coastal species, *Pelagia noctiluca* is an oceanic species. Its presence indicates that there has been an influx of oceanic Atlantic water mixing into the coastal waters around Mull, not an unusual event at this time of year. As an oceanic species it has direct development rather than a polyp phase on the seabed. Thus the populations can reproduce rapidly when their plankton food is in plentiful supply, as it can be in coastal seas, which tend to be more productive than oceanic waters.

This was really interesting to know, but it wasn't the end of the story. Steve also told us that these jellyfish, because of their nasty sting, have caused very considerable and expensive harm to the tourist industry in the Mediterranean. More importantly, Steve mentioned that this species, if in large enough blooms can also be harmful to salmon in fish farm pens. Local fish farmers were therefore informed about the problem, and sure enough it was a race against time to limit the damage done by these stingers.

Thanks to everyone who informed us about this unusual event. It is always useful to record what species have been seen where and when in the local area as all such data adds considerably to our awareness.



In Greek *Pelagia* means "of the sea", *nocti* stands for night and *luca* means light thus *Pelagia noctiluca* can be described as a marine organism with the ability to glow in the dark.

## END ##