

# MaCCOLL

(Marine & Coastal Conservation of Loch Linnhe)

## Winter Newsletter

January 2026

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## Welcome!

In the first edition of our newsletter in 2026, we'll be looking back at some of the highlights from 2025, as well as looking forward to 2026.

## 2025 Highlights

2025 has been a significant year of progress for MaCCOLL. Here's some of the highlights:

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- The Otter project lead, Jennifer, has been busy with the weekly 'Otter Club', recently renamed the 'Duror Nature Club', in partnership with Duror Primary School, educating local children on nature and conservation 🦦
  - Our Flapper Skate project lead, Campbell, visited the Orkney Skate Trust to learn about the vital role of citizen science in protecting this endangered species 🐟
  - Our survey in May revealed the lower section of the River Duror to be a potential exceptional salmon habitat. Our salmon project is collaborating with Lochaber Fisheries Trust for various surveys to be carried out in 2026 – including habitat surveys and to establish the current stocks of the Rivers Duror and Salachan Burn. The results will inform measures to improve the habitat and the viability of a restocking programme 🐟
  - MaCCOLL has completed two snorkel surveys, two SCUBA surveys and ten BRUV (Baited Remote Underwater Video) deployments. In addition, the acoustic recorder has been deployed off Balnagowan. In the final BRUV drop of the year, we captured footage of two Spurdog sharks. They used to be common but there was a big population crash due to overfishing and are now a Priority Marine Species 🐟
  - Karen, Lea & Richard qualified as BSAC snorkel guides under the instruction of BSAC instructor Sarah Fanet, former councillor 🤿
  - In the summer, our recently formed Seabirds & More Group took a trip to Balnagowan to check out how the gull chicks were faring and to ring some birds on the island 🐦
  - We held a successful Riverwoods screening in partnership with Loch Abar Mor 🐟🌳
  - The race night was enjoyed by all who attended and helped to raise much needed funds to support our work, along with the ongoing success of the '100' club 🐎
  - Securing funding from HIEF (Highlands and Islands Environment Foundation) to enable appointment of Biodiversity Baseline Project Coordinator & Community Engagement Worker 🙌
  - Jennifer attended the CCN (Coastal Communities Network) conference in November in Lochaline, where community groups came together to connect and share knowledge 🧠
  - Also in November, Richard joined Jane Dodd from NatureScot to survey the flapper skate in Loch Linnhe 🐟
  - Campbell, Jonathan and Jonathan recovered and donated 73 creels from Kentallen bay to help create Oban's creel Christmas tree 🌲🦀



## Strengthening partnerships and networks

MaCCOLL has continued to strengthen its collaborative working this year by deepening links with the Coastal Communities Network (CCN).

CCN is a community-led network comprising local groups committed to the preservation and safeguarding of Scotland's coastal and marine environments. Its purpose is to connect and strengthen community-driven initiatives that protect, restore and promote the sustainable use of Scotland's coastal and marine resources. Through peer-to-peer exchange and shared learning, CCN enables community groups to build capacity and exert coordinated, strategic influence on key marine issues.

As part of this engagement, MaCCOLL has joined CCN's Aquaculture and Marine Litter forums and attended a recent CCN mini-gathering in Lochaline. The weekend brought together representatives from coastal communities across Scotland to explore how arts, culture and heritage can support marine conservation, helping to engage new audiences and foster stronger connections with the marine environment.

MaCCOLL has also joined the Scottish Seagrass Collaborative, a newly established national network connecting communities, practitioners and organisations to advance seagrass conservation and restoration across Scotland. The Collaborative focuses on sharing knowledge



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and skills, expanding citizen science monitoring, supporting restoration projects and strengthening the community voice in marine policy and decision-making.

MaCCOLL continues to work closely with Loch Abar Mòr a nature restoration partnership working to enable communities across Lochaber to restore and reconnect a thriving network of natural habitats and create new social and economic opportunities for local communities. MaCCOLL is particularly grateful for their support with our recent funding application to the Nature Restoration Fund.

Together, these partnerships underline MaCCOLL's commitment to collaborative, community-led approaches to marine and coastal conservation.

## Advancing Our Understanding of Local Benthic Habitats

MaCCOLL has been very active this year in delivering baseline benthic surveys across the area. This year, the team has completed two snorkel surveys, two SCUBA surveys and ten BRUV (Baited Remote Underwater Video) deployments. In addition, the acoustic recorder has been deployed off Balnagowan.

Reports from seven of the surveys have been logged with Seasearch - a well-established citizen science programme that enables volunteer divers and snorkellers to record marine species and seabed habitats, contributing valuable data to habitat mapping and the identification of areas of importance for marine conservation.

All reports recorded a diverse range of species. Reflecting their names, the most frequently observed species on the snorkel and dive surveys were the common starfish and the common sea urchin, which together with sea squirts and sugar kelp (*saccharina latissima*) were encountered on all four surveys.

Horse mussels (*modiolus modiolus*), keelworms (*spirobranchus spp.*), brittle stars and encrusting pink algae were also regularly encountered.

The notable highlights, however, were the sighting of a firework anemone (*pachycerianthus multiplicatus*) and a thornback ray (*raja clavata*). The firework anemone is one of the largest sea anemones found in British waters and has a very restricted distribution in Scotland. Its vulnerability to disturbance, particularly from dredging, has led to its designation as a Scottish Priority Marine Feature. Named from the numerous thorn-like spines covering its back and tail,

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thornback rays are similarly listed as a Priority Marine Feature as part of efforts to understand and protect Scotland's seas. Despite being a common species in UK waters, it is listed as 'near threatened' globally and is subject to commercial fishing necessitating careful management.

The BRUV surveys were dominated by long-clawed squat lobsters (*munida rugosa*), which were the most commonly encountered species. Encouragingly, tall sea pens (*funiculina quadrangularis*) were also recorded on each BRUV survey. This species, the largest of the British sea pens, can reach up to two metres in length. Although this species has a very wide distribution, their populations are thought to have been severely reduced by trawling. Slow growth rates, long life spans and patchy recruitment contribute to lengthy recovery times of their colonies, underpinning its status as another Priority Marine Feature.

Together, these surveys provide an increasingly robust baseline for understanding local benthic habitats and underline the ecological importance of the area. Alongside the fieldwork, significant effort has also been dedicated to streamlining data recording and improving the submission processes, helping to ensure greater efficiency and consistency in the future.



Photo credit: Richard Wilkie



## Seabirds & More Group

Our recently formed Seabirds & More Group had their first open meet up at the end of December in Cuil Bay to identify and record the birds in this area.

There was a real variation of experience amongst the group and it's safe to say that everyone learned something. It was a wonderful get together of like minded people, passionate about birds, the ocean, and community!

The group will be having regular monthly meet ups, the next one being on Sunday 1st February, so if you're interested in coming along, do get in touch as the group would love for you to join them. Whether you're a seasoned birder or don't know your Mallard from your Merganser, everyone is welcome! 🦆



## MaCCOLL Moving Forward

Our salmon project lead, Karen, submitted a response to the Scottish Government consultation on fish and shellfish farm deposits on behalf of MaCCOLL incorporating concerns on environmental impacts and monitoring requirements. We await a response to this submission.

We hope to bring our community some more events this year, including film nights, beach cleans, birding group meet ups and more. These will be advertised through our social media channels and posters displayed around the village, so do keep your eyes peeled for details of those 🎬🏖️🦢

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There is still so much that can be done and lots we hope to achieve in 2026, and we couldn't do it without our members and support from people like you! So thank you to everyone who's helped us achieve all we have in 2025 and we look forward to working with you in 2026 to conserve and protect the wildlife in and around Loch Linnhe and to continuing to build our community 💪🏠🌊🏔️

Follow us on Instagram: @maccoll\_lochlinnhe