

## Shore Walk at White Bay, Cumbrae on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2015

Mary Child

On Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May the weather was squally with sharp showers blowing in over White Bay on Cumbrae. Ten of us were heading for low water and despite the wind the spring tide went out a good way. The tide uncovered a classic succession of rocky shore brown seaweeds with *Pelvetia canaliculi*, channel wrack, on the upper shore, *Fucus vesiculosus*, bladder wrack in the middle and *Fucus serratus*, serrated wrack, on the lower shore. A belt of *Laminaria* was exposed at the lowest reach of the shore. The indefatigable Alison found a first for this site on Cumbrae, a red alga called *Polyides rotunda*.

As ever, on Cumbrae, there was a multitude of animals to see. Immediately, we found butterfish, *Pholis gunnellus* and a pipefish, *Nerophis ophidion* sheltering under rocks. Molluscs were there in abundance and included dog whelks, netted whelks, periwinkles and topshells. Even though smallish in size, edible, shore and broad clawed porcelain crabs tried to menace us. We unravelled long ribbon worms, *Lineus longissimus* and spotted thousands of whelk eggs attached to all available hard surfaces. Starfish and urchins featured strongly. There were many brittle stars mainly *Ophiothrix fragilis*, *Ophiopholis aculeate* and *Amphipholis squamata* and also a few black brittle stars, *Ophiocomina nigra*. The green sea urchin *Psammechinus miliaris* was cute as usual and one edible sea urchin, *Echinus eschilentus*, was found (they don't look very tasty to me). Morag also found some sea potatoes, *Echinocardium cordatum* in the sand to the west of the rocky area. I had fun squirting solitary ascidians and others found colonial ascidians. Strange green blobby eggs were identified as belonging to *Eulalia viridis*, a bright green polychaete worm.

Eventually the cold and rain got to us and the tide started coming back in. Even though we had had great fun exploring the shore and identifying some of the flora and fauna there were many animals and seaweeds that remained unidentified as we retreated to the Palmars' house in Millport for warming and welcome cups of tea.