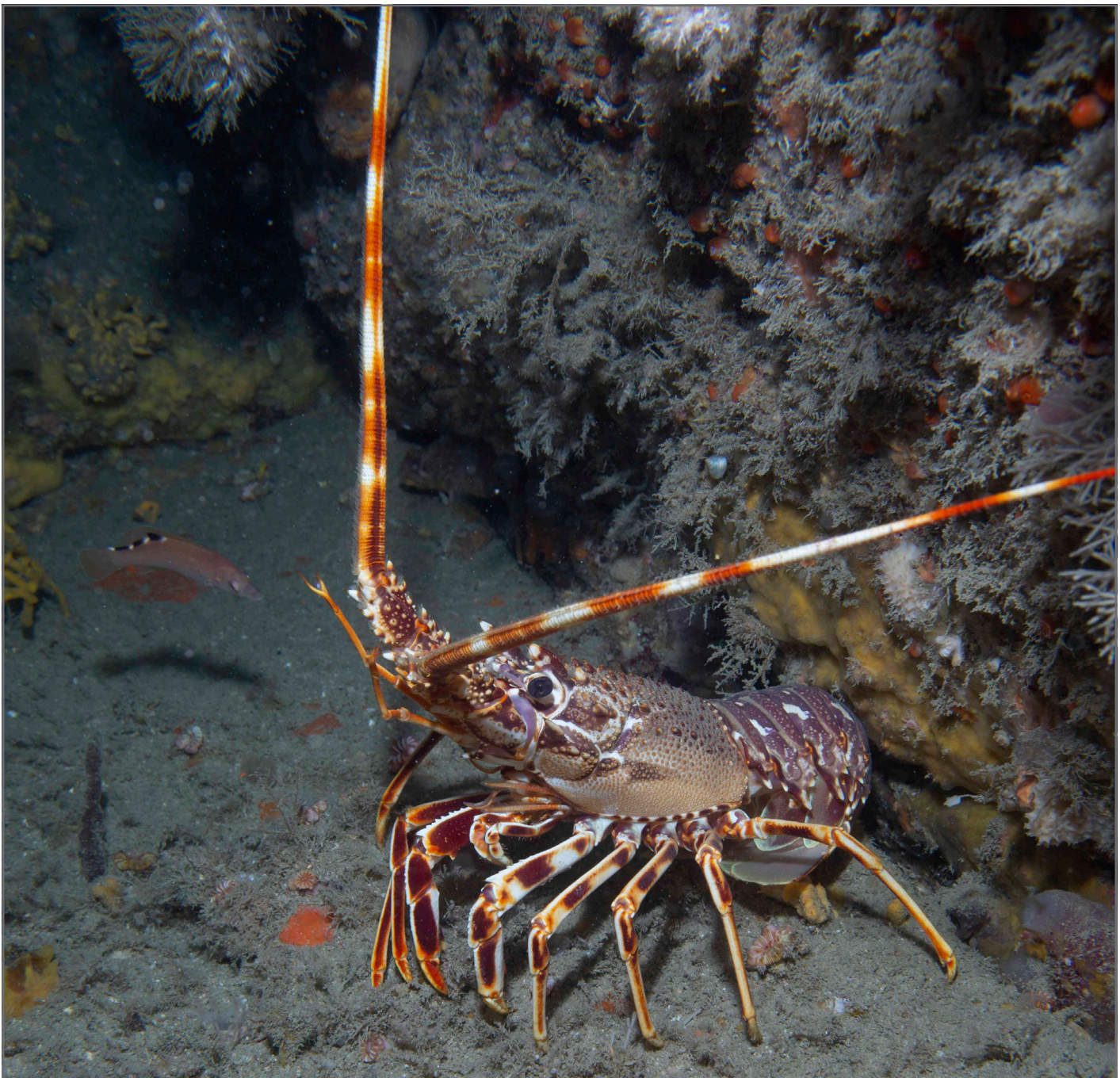


# *Crawfish Conservation Report 2020*

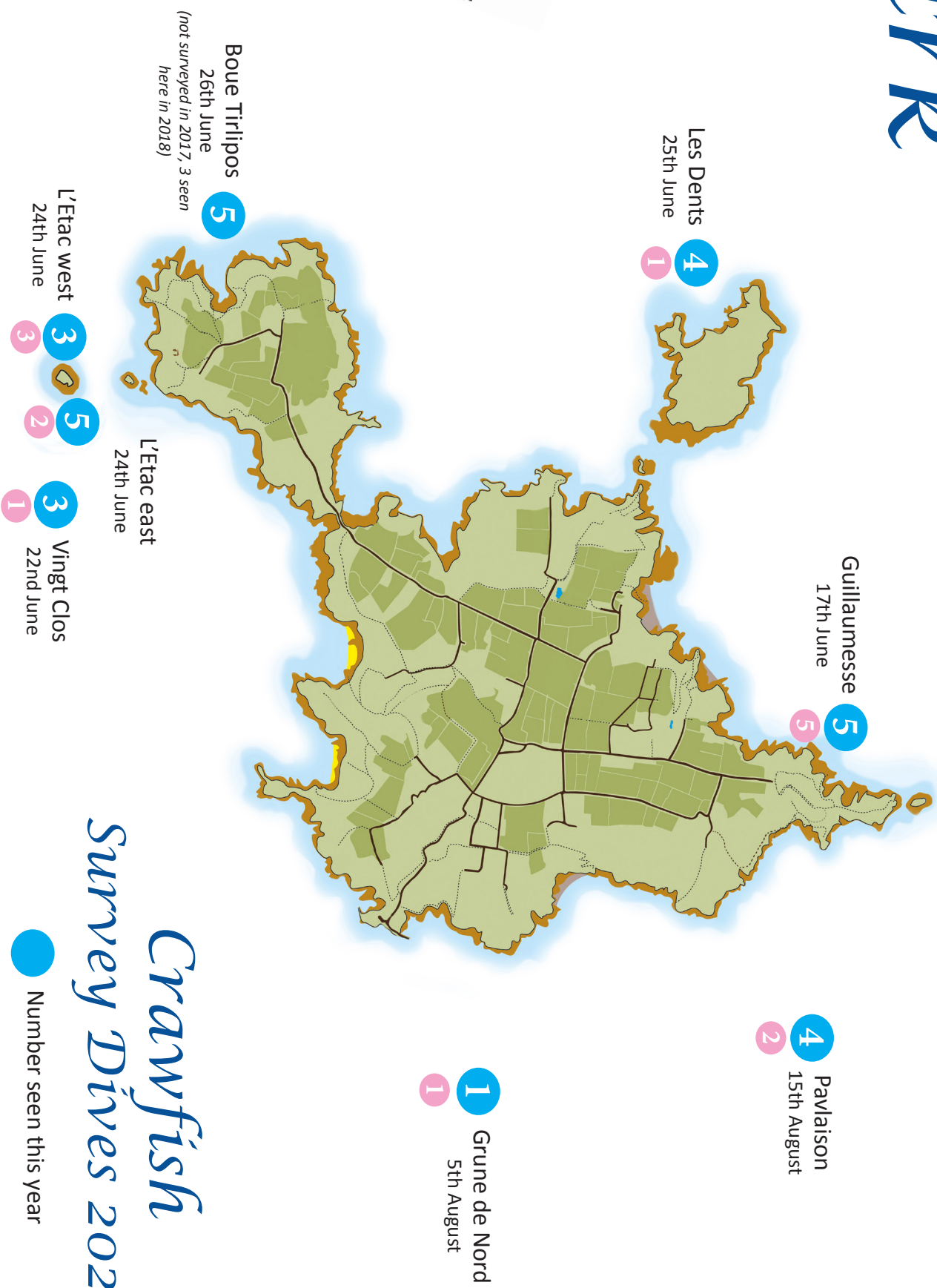
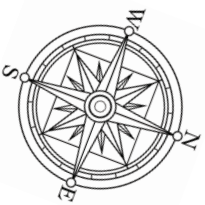
In 2017 I carried out a snapshot survey of the crawfish population around Sark with the recommendation that this species be fully protected within our three-mile limit. In January 2018, following a proposition by the Agriculture, Sea Fisheries and Environment Committee to Chief Pleas, an amendment of the Fishing (Sark) Ordinance was made to protect crawfish for three years.

This summer I repeated the survey and have enclosed the results. As you can see, while the numbers at some sites remain the same they have increased at most sites. Significantly, while I have seen more crawfish this summer they are all several years old and I haven't recorded any juveniles, as in my previous survey. This suggests that our current population hasn't yet bred (or if they have the young crawfish are still too small to be seen) and that the new recruitment of young crawfish that occurred in 2013/14 hasn't so far been repeated. While I didn't measure any of the crawfish I saw I did photograph many of them and estimate that some are now at or above the legal landing size defined as 23cm when measured from the tip of the beak to the extreme end of the tail when held as flat as possible.



An adult crawfish *Palinurus elephas*, approximately five years old, recorded at L'Etac this summer

# SARK



## Crawfish Survey Dives 2020

● Number seen this year

● Number seen in 2017

## *Background information*

The crawfish occurs in the Eastern Atlantic from Norway to Morocco as well as in the Mediterranean. It feeds by night on a wide variety of small animals and carrion but lacks the large front claws of lobsters and crabs. Like all crustaceans it sheds its shell to grow, reaching maturity at between four and five years old. (Research by the UK's Marine Biological Association shows that in British waters crawfish reach breeding condition at five years old or later.) Males are generally larger and can grow up to 60 cm long and weigh over 8 kilos. Both sexes can live for more than 15 years.

Crawfish are classified as 'Vulnerable' on the International Union of Conservation for Nature's red list of endangered species with a decreasing population trend and in the UK they are a Biodiversity Action Plan species.

Fifty years ago crawfish were plentiful here in the Channel Islands and were an important commercial species but over-fishing by both divers and fishermen led to the point where the stock was virtually wiped out and the species became commercially extinct.

In 2014 good numbers of juvenile crawfish began appearing in Channel Island waters as well as around the adjacent coasts of France and southwest England, and around Wales and Scotland – all areas where they had been common in the 1960s. The reason for this unusually large increase in the breeding success of this previously rare species is unknown.

## *Continued Protection Around Sark*

I would like to suggest that the protection in Sark waters is continued for the following reasons.

1 Our crawfish population has only just reached breeding age and, if it is ever going to abundant enough to be a commercially viable species, it needs several more years to properly establish itself.

2 Sark remains the only place in the British Isles where crawfish are completely protected and there fore we could play an important role in creating a haven for this species in the future – a positive marine conservation message that fits well with the good fisheries management practices already in place here.



Two crawfish seen in a crevice covered in jewel anemones at Les Dents this summer



