

La Société Sercquaise

Founded in 1975 to study, preserve and enhance Sark's natural environment and cultural heritage



Summer News 2023

Sark Watch Group *by Lynda Higgins*



Sark Watch Group (the junior section of La Société Sercquaise) have been learning about biodiversity. A variety of subjects were covered including the main types of animals, plants and insects that make up a healthy ecosystem. The main threats to biodiversity and climate change were also discussed. The children were very enthusiastic and completely engaged by asking probing questions.

Practical lessons so that the children could learn

more about the Bailiwick Bat Survey and their first survey was carried out at La Seigneurie Gardens. A lesson was given on butterflies, moths and other pollinators and their importance in food production. The children created a Pollinator Patch in their school playground to encourage pollinators and were presented with a Bee Hotel on the last day of term. Sark School has now registered as an Eco-School having completed the first module on biodiversity.

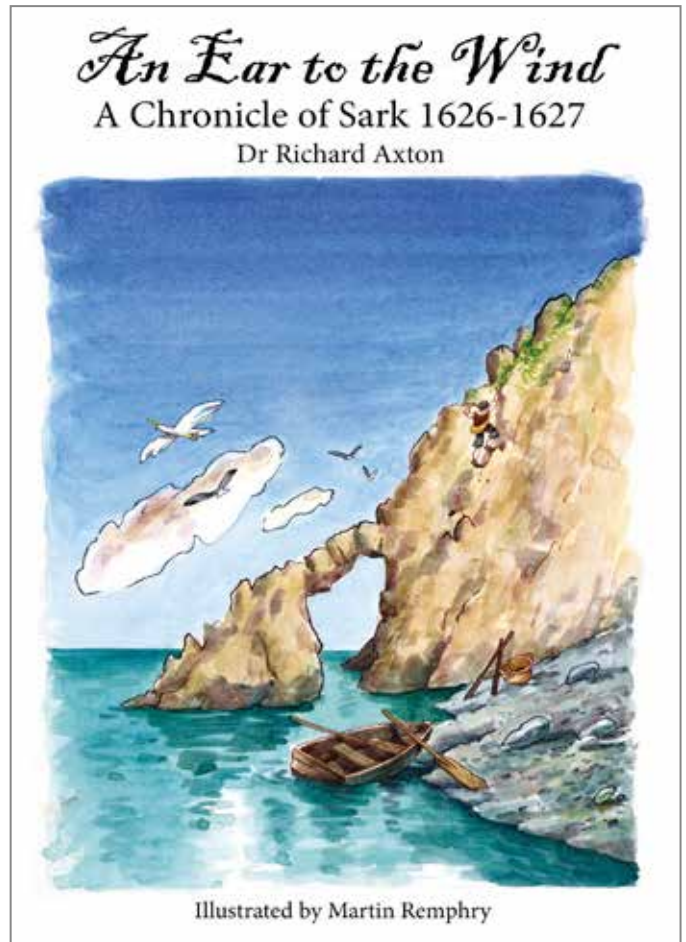


Publications

An Ear to the Wind by Richard Axton Report by Lucy Axton

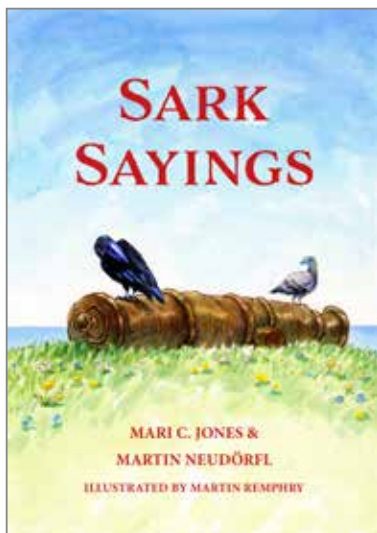
My brother and I decided to posthumously publish this book about 1626 and 1627 on Sark by our Dad, Richard Axton, after a nudge from Christopher Harris with whom he shared it and with some financial support from La Société. The book represents not only the time and work Richard spent crafting it into a cohesive story, but also the years he and Marie spent translating the original manuscripts from the Sark Archive. My Dad was still tinkering with it in April of his final year. He had been working on the 'links' between the translations for a long time and, for clarity, we took an earlier 2010 complete paper version as our template. It is an extraordinary window into the past, which I hope you will enjoy - although the story does get a little dark! It is illustrated by Martin Remphry and his pictures perfectly encapsulate the spirit of the text.

La Société Sercquaise will be holding a book launch for Richard's book on 23rd September after which it will be sale for £15 in the Heritage Room and via our website at www.socserc.org.



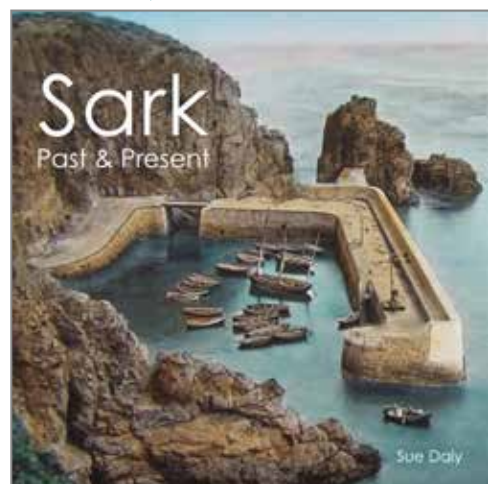
Sark Sayings

In March we hosted a launch for *Sark Sayings* a collection of sixty-five Sark sayings and proverbs from native speakers of Sercquiais (the Norman language spoken in the Channel Island of Sark) which appear for the first time in this book, together with their English translations and phonetic transcriptions.



Compiled by Mari C. Jones and Martin Neudörfel and beautifully illustrated by Martin Remphry, it also contains some riddles unique to Sark. The book is for sale, price £3.99, in our Heritage Room.

Sark, Past & Present



Another publication we have supported this year is Sue Daly's new book, *Sark Past and Present*. It tells the history of Sark based around old photographs from the Société's archive and from family albums, the Prialux library and other collections. The book will be published this autumn and details of how to buy it and the launch will be sent to members nearer the time.

Sark Archaeology 2023 by Sir Barry Cunliffe

This year's excavation, held in May, focussed on two outstanding questions – what was the nature of the large mound just north of L'Ecluse, and does the area of Tanquerel Field that floods every winter represent a water source that could have been used by the Bronze Age community that lived nearby?

The L'Ecluse Mound has been the subject of much discussion and various ideas have been put forward as to its date and function, the most popular being that it was a prehistoric burial, a Napoleonic signal station or a dump of rubble from building L'Ecluse. The trench put across it in May settled the question – it was a natural geological feature created by a 13 metre wide dyke of dolerite, which had intruded into the base rock of biotite gneiss. But it was much more interesting than that! The natural intrusion had been modified on more than one occasion in the past. Its western edge had been cut back to create a vertical face nearly 2 metres high with a shallow ditch dug in front of it deliberately filled with yellow gritty sand. This was probably done in the prehistoric period and represents a striking monumentalizing of the natural feature. The eastern edge was also modified by two distinct phases of quarrying, the earlier associated with the building of a timber structure, represented by 6 large post holes. It is possible that we may be able to get a radiocarbon date for this phase but it is most likely to be prehistoric. Understanding the nature and extent of the timber structure will require further excavation.

The discovery that the dolerite was quarried here raises the question of whether the mound could have been the source of stone used for the axes made on Sark in the Neolithic and Bronze Age. Samples have been sent to our geological consultant and we await the results. We now know of more than 120 stone axes found on the island and locating the quarries has been a major objective.

It is clear that the mound was a significant location

in the lives of the prehistoric community but it also attracted attention again in the nineteenth century when a series of holes 50 cms across were dug into the rock to be deliberately filled with loamy loess soil. The probability is that this was part of the programme of tree-planting carried out during the tenure of Seigneur William Thomas Collings. Some of the present trees may be successors of this latest attempt to monumentalize the mound!

Tanquerel field was also not without its surprises. Here we were able to identify two separate ponds, which would have been more than half a metre deep and are now filled by fine silt, buried deep below the medieval and later ploughsoil. Even in May they were partly waterlogged. Artefacts were few but included flakes of flint and a stone maul created from a lump of quartzite, similar to those found in the Bronze Age settlement 200 metres to the west. The presence of a permanent water supply here, to supply humans and animals, may well have been what attracted prehistoric settlers to this spot.

Why it was that a persistent water supply rose here, one of the highest places on the island, when most of the other sources around the island broke out at lower altitudes, was answered in one of our trenches that sectioned a linear anomaly shown on the magnetometer survey. The anomaly proved to be a natural, vertical-sided fissure 1.6 metres wide, filled with fine silt. Natural fissures of this kind provided a network in which rain water could accumulate and be transported. It is this complex that, in the winter, generates the water which floods across the road by the Methodist chapel and flows down the Port au Jument valley.

One final point worth mentioning is that we now have access to the LiDAR survey data that allows detailed contour maps of sites to be plotted. We have begun to look for other prehistoric mounds on the island. Expect some surprises!

LIDAR by Jane Norwich

As some of you will have heard we now have the LIDAR image of Sark added to the Digimap layers on the Société's laptop. The LIDAR layer was most helpful in this year's archaeology dig. A couple of evening presentations will be held later this summer/autumn to show what can be seen. The series of aerial images of Sark from 1996 to 2022 will also be included.

Sark Norman Language by Martin Neudörfel



Progress has continued to be made by Sark schoolchildren learning the Sark Norman language. As well as entering it in the Guernsey Eisteddford, their song made it into the Channel

Islands wide collection of poetry that was distributed in the form of a booklet given to visitors coming over for the Island Games, hosted this year by Guernsey.

There are also continuing weekly online classes on Tuesdays for adults and Sarkese is now represented at the monthly meetings of La FALE (Fédération des Associations pour la Langue normande) and the Departmental Archive of Normandy is supporting this project by donating their latest copy of ALEN.

Martin continues with his weekly recording sessions with Esther Perrée, aided by her son Phil, as they are tiring for her.

In early April a French journalist, Olivier Clerc, visited Sark to hear more about Sark Norman and Martin showed him the island. This resulted in the half-page article (seen left) published in Ouest-France, the widely-read French newspaper.

Our 2023 Exhibition by Jan Guy

Susan Synnott always gathers those who do Heritage Room duty together at the end of each season. Reserves, like me, are included. One of the topics is always what could be staged as an exhibition that would interest both visitors and locals. After a little 'um....and perhaps we could....' Caroline Robins came up with the brilliant suggestion of 'Royal Visits to Sark', so appropriate in coronation year too. From then on it became a real team effort, with emails and notices asking for memories and photographs (Jenny Baker seemed to know exactly who to badger!), a great deal of winter research through the Soc Sercq archive done mainly by Susan Synnott, Jenny Baker and Caroline Robins. Also, there was a great response from local residents who were happy to lend photographs, and share memories, some of them very amusing. Finally Caroline, Sue Daly and I sorted everything into a logical timeline and mounted it on the wall. There was too much to fit on the limited wall space so those with time to spare can look at folders, files and photograph albums. The timeline spreads from 1949 to 2022 with photographs moving from La Dame, Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip opening the Maseline Jetty in black and white to full colour professional shots of the Earl and Countess of Wessex in 2022. It is lovely to

see children, many of whom are now parents themselves, presenting bouquets and waving flags and carriage drivers, now deceased, dressed in their very best. The exhibition is bright and colourful and can be enjoyed either as a brief look at what is picture heavy and text light on the walls or an in-depth study examining all the folders and albums.



Prince's Foundation by Lynda Higgins, Shakira Christodoulou, Carol Cragoe, Jane Norwich, Martin Neudörfl

At the end of April the Société Sercquaise, by invitation, made a series of presentations in the Heritage Room to the Prince's Foundation, several other speakers and invited guests.

The presentations were required to address a series of requests for information on what makes Sark and demonstrate the resources available on island.

Lynda led the way on ornithology, Sark's position on the main migration route and our links with the UK and the other Channel Islands with our ringing and sightings. The work done in Sark school on our natural world was included in the presentation. Shakira continued as a 'Conservation Commando' explaining what we have in terms of botany, Dark Sky status, a RAMSAR site and the international obligations that we, through Chief Pleas, are signed up to. Carol moved the session on to archaeology, history and our built environment and how we might protect our older and more significant buildings. The lack of policies supporting our planning laws was raised as was the possibility of an application for World Heritage Site or Biosphere status. The topics of mapping over

the years, our very special colonial landscape largely unaltered since Helier's time and Sark's agricultural past and present were covered by Jane. Sark's demographics since the early 1800's to the present day raised the issue of a shortage of skilled workers. Analysis of housing numbers, occupancy rates and derelict building numbers was included. The geology issues affecting cliff stability and La Coupée were presented. Reference was made to climate change with rising sea levels and the change in weather affecting the availability of water. Our presentations were concluded by Martin on Sercquais and its value to the economy, more of which in his article.

The presentations were a good opportunity to demonstrate what the Société stands for, its resources and our passion for our island. The Société was also represented during the rest of the day including the walkabout and the discussions held during the afternoon. A large pack of hardcopy supporting documents and copies of the presentations were given to the Foundation Team for their report.

Our New Fireproof Cabinet by Jane Norwich

The Seigneurial Archive is one of our most important assets. Richard and Marie did sterling work in conserving and cataloguing some 30 years ago. Caring for paper artifacts requires humidity control and packaging in acid free materials. Fire is a risk too, maybe a small one, but a significant one, which can be solved by using a fireproof safe.

Continuing Richard and Marie's work a grant for a little over £2000 was applied for in January this year from the Social Investment Fund based in Guernsey. The Fund uses a collection of charitable funds including those raised from probate administration fees from across the Bailiwick and supports a variety of charities across the islands.

We were awarded our request in full, which includes the fireproof safe/cabinet and delivery charges all the way to the Heritage Room.

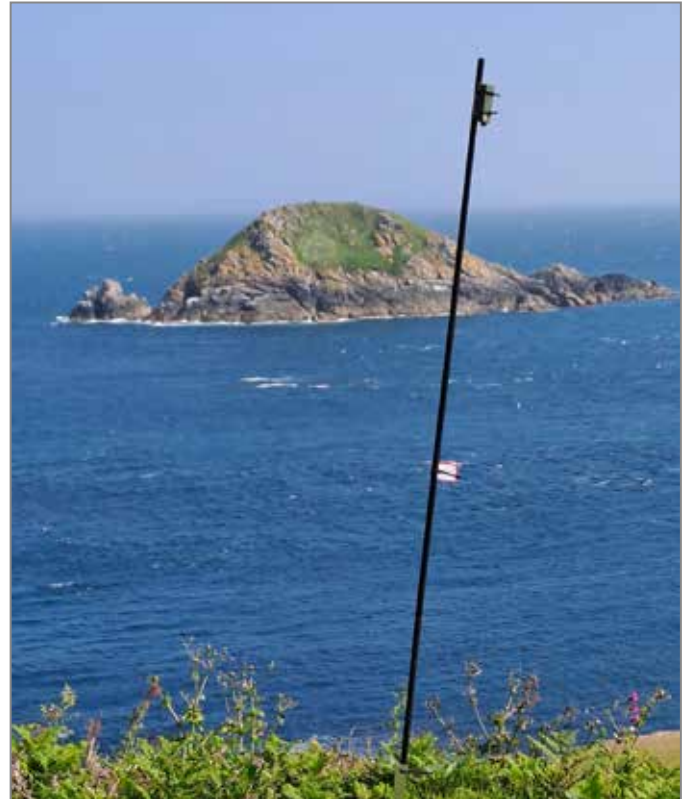
The cabinet is large enough to hold the entire boxed Seigneurial Archive and a few other paper artefacts. Installing the cabinet will mean significant rearranging of the lower part of the Heritage Room which will take place in October so as to give us plenty of time to get it right. In addition, the herbarium is now on wheels allowing it to move easily to a more useful position and aid the installing of the cabinet. The bookcases as requested by Richard will be put into position at the same time allowing the Newspaper Collection to be more easily accessed and in one place. Effectively emptying out the lower area for the reorganisation will enable us to paint the west wall prior to everything going back into its new position. This useful addition will help protect artefacts held on behalf of the island for future generations.

Bailiwick Bat Survey 2023 by Lynda Higgins

Societe Sercquaise is taking part in the Bailiwick Bat Survey again this Summer. This is the third year of a four year project which aims to confirm the status of species of bats found in Sark and their distribution. With the help of volunteers it is hoped that 22 out of the 24 mapped areas (500 metre squares) will have had at least one recording taken over 4 nights between April and October which will result in almost 92% coverage. The data will be analysed and a report issued early in 2024.

There are 18 species of bats found in Great Britain and the 2022 bat survey report confirmed the presence of 13 bat species in Guernsey. To date Sark only has 5 confirmed species being the Common Pipistrelle, Natterer's, Khul's/Nathusius pipistrelle and Grey long-eared bats. Spatial patterns of activity and distribution show that bats are evenly distributed throughout Sark, with a preference for woodland habitat. Small mammals such as rats and lesser white-toothed shrew also appear on the data, because they emit ultrasonic calls. The wood mouse, although present in Sark has not been recorded but this may be due to the fact that their call is not as loud compared to rats and shrews. By-catch data of three species of bush-crickets and two moths have also been recorded.

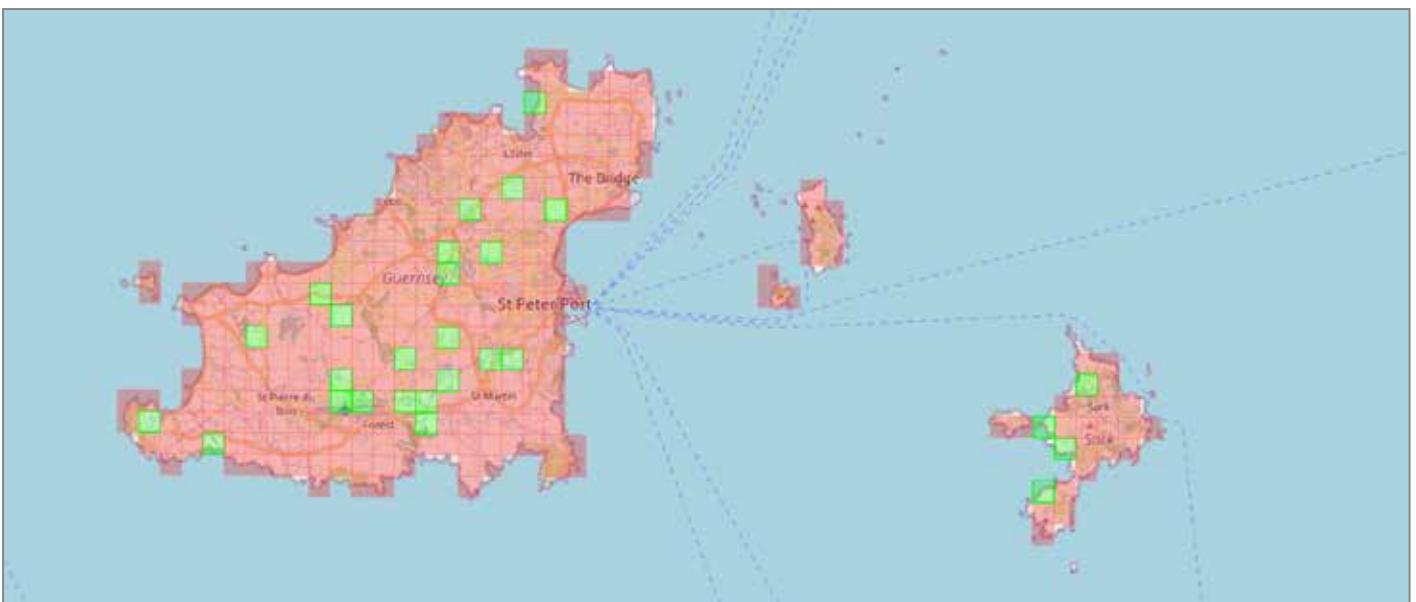
Surveys taken this year have included areas not covered in previous years, and it is hoped that this will increase the possibility of finding more species of bats. Very early surveys were



Reording equipment above Venus Pool on Little Sark

also taken to identify winter roosts but the bad weather limited the number of surveys which could be taken. Further work will be carried out over the winter 2023/2024. The research is being run by Professor Philip Atkinson (Head of International Research at BTO) in conjunction with States of Guernsey. A copy of the 2021 and 2022 reports can be found at <https://bats.org.gg/bbs/reports/>

Bat survey coverage 2023



Subscription Information by Caroline Robins, Membership Secretary

Thank you to all those who have paid their subscriptions for 2023. These are due on the 1st March each year with payment requested by 30th April. There are still a considerable number of subscriptions unpaid for 2023 and we would be grateful to receive these as soon as possible. This will enable us to keep an accurate register of members - and avoidance of holding personal data that is not required. Those who do not pay the current year's subscription will be removed from the membership list.

Currently subscription rates are £15 for single membership and £20 for family membership. Please note that family membership is for cohabiting couples and not for the extended family.

Cash and cheques in payment are acceptable and can be sent/given to the Membership Secretary, Caroline Robins, The Barn, La Genetiere, Sark GY10 1SH.

Standing Orders can also be arranged through your Bank. Our Account details are:-

Natwest Bank, Guernsey, Sort Code 60-09-20

Account No. 74012363 Name: La Société Sercquaise.

May we please ask that those with existing standing orders ensure that the payment date is between 1st March and 30th April - thus enabling us to keep the register of members accurate and up to date.

Electronic Bank Transfers are the best way to pay – IBAN: GB08 NWBK 6009 2074 0123 63

The BIC is RBOSGGSX (Natwest Bank, Guernsey, UK)

Account name is La Société Sercquaise. Please add your name in the reference field.

Your membership and support for La Société Sercquaise is very much appreciated and will help to ensure that Sark's past and present is recorded and collated and the environment and fauna of the island protected for future generations. Please encourage your friends to become members too.

Australians enjoy a day on Sark by Jan Guy

Many of us have inherited tasks that Richard just did. Mine was one of the more pleasurable. During the winter Beth Lloyd, a Jersey woman who arranges specialist travel experiences in the Channel Islands, got in touch to say that, pre Covid, Richard used to give a talk to groups of Australians that she brought to Sark for a day, and would I be able to do this? The remit was rather wide: the history of Sark from about 4500 BC to the present day...in 40 minutes! We, twenty Australians, Beth and I, gathered in the Cider Barn on the 6th of June for a mini lecture (grand title... it was a chat). With such a receptive and intelligent group, it was easy to talk more about particular issues that interested them: dolmens, World War two, water supply and taxation and gloss over other points which they had already heard about on their carriage ride. Their questions were quite perceptive, I thought.

No charge was made to the group for this experience, but it was agreed that a donation would be appropriate, and I am pleased that the Dairy Trust and La Société Sercquaise each received £50. I think that Richard would have approved, and it is good to see yet another use for the Cider Barn, seen below.



FishIntel Project Update

FishIntel is a cross-channel partnership run by Plymouth University using innovative underwater acoustic tracking technology to identify the environmental conditions a range of important marine species need in order to thrive. FishIntel acoustic receivers paired with CPOD (marine mammal listening stations) have been deployed around the Channel Islands since 13/04/2022. (See the map below for locations. The Sark receiver was deployed in April 2022 just south of Baleine, near La Coupée. It is being funded for the three-year duration of the project equally by La Société Sercquaise and the Agriculture, Environment and Sea Fisheries Committee of Chief Pleas) Since then, these receivers have downloaded and stored thousands of data points such as sea temperature and noise. Only one fish has been detected on the Channel Island array so far (a Bass tagged of the Brittany coastline) but we hope for more tag detections as the study progresses.

Interestingly, the sea temperature data (seen on the next page) has highlighted the difference between Channel Islands during the summer and winter. Jersey waters are rising to higher temperatures in summer but also colder in the winter due to the shallower seas. This was previously known for sea surface temperature but had not been researched for seabed temperature



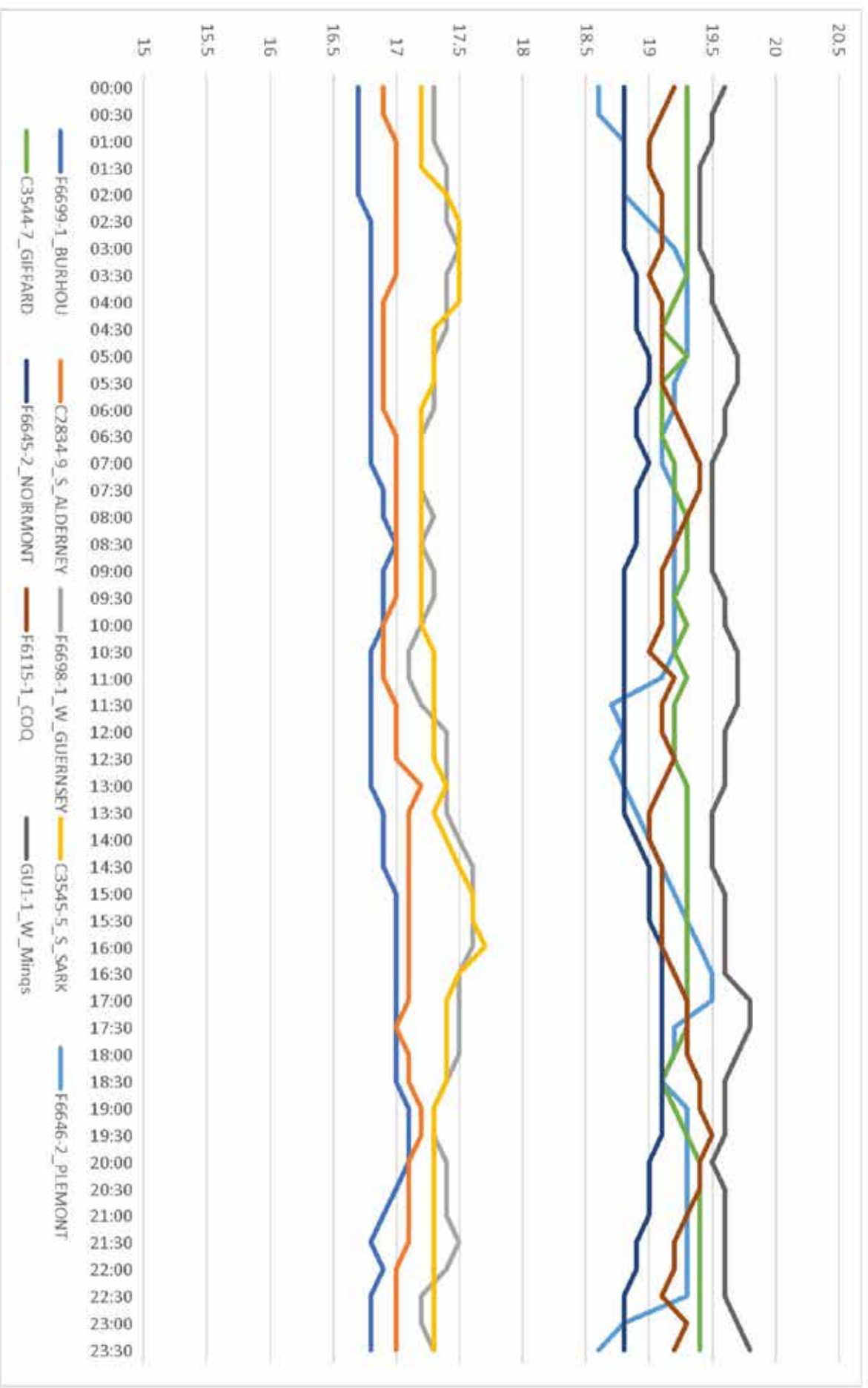
until now. This thermocline is apparent to the NW of Jersey running from SW to NE. Knowing that sea surface and seabed temperatures are highly correlated has biological implications - for example, a very cold snap could place some seabed animals (starfish, lobsters, etc.) into a torpor, causing them to wash up on the shore (we saw this happen during the snow of a few years ago). Similarly, the extreme heat of this summer may have placed animals and plants in Jersey waters under more stress than those protected by the thermocline in Guernsey.



Seagrass Survey

Sark is also contributing to an ongoing study that will provide information on the environmental health of seagrass meadows around the Channel Islands. This study will investigate seagrass morphology alongside biochemistry of the seagrass blades (Carbon, Nitrogen, Phosphorus (CNP) analysis). Tissue nitrogen levels are an indicator of seagrass health and this will be assessed in relation to the carbon and phosphorus levels within the blades. The data collected will be compared to that collected from the same beds in 2017. Changes in elemental nutrient ratios and morphology can be used as an indicator of environmental conditions surrounding the seagrass beds. Previous results indicated that seagrass health in the Channel Islands was greater than that in the UK. As our seagrass beds have been expanding steadily, it will be interesting to understand if this relates back to seagrass health.

I collected samples from our seagrass bed in Les Laches in June.



Temperature data analysis 2022

Asian Hornet - Spring Queening *by Peter Cunneen*

The objective of spring queening is to catch queen hornets migrating from France or Jersey during April and May. A combination of alert residents and 20 trappers across the island - but predominantly on the east side - and with a total of 30 traps, accounted for 23 queens. With Guernsey catching 35 queens, both islands broke their record this year.

Six of Sark's total weren't trapped, but were caught inside houses or offices - two in the west, two in the southeast, one in the northeast and one in the south.

The trapped specimens were caught along the east side from le Vallon d'Or up as far as la Ville. 14 were caught in one location, at Percy's Cottage, which suggests that la Grève de la Ville is a natural landfall for hornets flying in from France.

The first hornet was caught on the 21st April, when there was a warm easterly wind, and the last was caught on the 17th June. Some trappers continued trapping to the end of the second week of June because of the northeast wind and slow start to spring which had limited the numbers of by-catch. The continual northeast wind during

May can partially explain the numbers caught this year. In 2022, there were no nests and only one hornet was caught; in the Maitlands' house. The numbers might also suggest that the Asian hornet problem in France is very serious. Despite the growing Asian hornet problem in Jersey, there is nothing yet to conclude that we are seeing migrating queens from that island, but a spell of southerlies might create the conditions for that to happen in the future.

Worker hornets were seen at Percy's Cottage on the 13th June, but a search for the primary nest was unproductive. Once they establish their secondary nest, bait stations will be set-up and workers tracked back to the nest. With a queen sighting on the 15th June and the sheer numbers of hornets being caught, we would expect there to be several nests on Sark this year. Apart from the dangers posed to humans, one nest can consume 11kgs of pollinators during one summer, so we rely on people reporting sightings immediately and preferably with a photograph so that identification can be verified.

**Contacts: Peter Cunneen 07781 121714
Jo Birch 07781 467920**

How to identify an Asian hornet

