

THE NATIONAL LOBSTER HATCHERY

Text and photographs by David Marshall



The lovely Cornwall harbour town of Padstow (a mini-Whitby) plays host to The National Lobster Hatchery.

Background

Situated on the South Quay, and next to the main car and coach park, The National Lobster Hatchery, a registered charity which heavily relies on visitors to fund its work, was established in 2000 with a quoted aim of 'promoting the concept of sustainability in fisheries and aquaculture and to improve the long term productivity of the lobster fishery for all, through an active stock enhancement programme'.



To provide an ongoing 'kick start' for their programme the Hatchery relies on the wonderful co-operation received from local fishermen, who bring along female lobsters they describe as 'in a state of pregnancy'. In the safe surroundings of the hatchery these females are given the chance to release their delicate offspring without the fear of natural predators lurking in wait.

Once they have reared, using various microorganisms and huge amounts of brine shrimp, the young from larvae to miniature adults the Hatchery staff, after adjudging that the young lobsters can fend for themselves, then release the youngsters into the sea around both Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Since the project began, well over 50,000 young lobsters have already undergone such releases.

The Visitor Centre

Built around the working area the Visitor Centre hosts 7 large aquaria that are home to various species of lobsters (including a '1 in 10 million' pure orange lobster) and crabs plus a 'living display' of recently hatched young lobsters.

Glass panels allow visitors a fascinating glimpse into the hatchery area.



Amid ceramic tunnels are large female lobsters waiting to produce the next generation of young. With the use of special mirrors, fixed to the ceiling, you can view baby lobsters, in various stages of growth, all in what are best described as individual ice cube trays.

The filtration mechanics are interesting to view but what had me transfixed, as you will see from the photograph below, was the huge brine shrimp tumbler. Knowing the value of such eggs, I was amazed at the number rolling around and it gave a full appreciation of just how much funding it must take to keep the Hatchery up-and-running.



To go with the living displays are some excellent information panels (did you know that lobsters can taste with their feet?) and audio-visual displays. The little gift shop caters for visitors of all ages.



If you are in the Padstow area then The National Lobster Hatchery is well worth a visit.

Open all year, 7 days a week, the Visitor Centre opens at 10.00a.m. with a closing time that varies as to the season.

As of September 2008 the cost of admission is single adult £3, OAP £2, Family £7 and child £1.50.



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