

Huge colony of shellfish off Arran coast

A HUGE colony of a rare and brightly coloured shellfish species has been discovered by divers off the west coast of Scotland.

The extensive bed of elusive flame shells was found to the south of the Isle of Arran, and stretches across an area around the same size as 30 tennis courts.

Flame shell beds are scarce around the UK and are listed as a priority habitat under the UK's post-2010 Biodiversity Framework and a Priority Marine Feature in Scotland's seas.

The beds are protected in six locations around Scotland by a suite of Marine Protected Areas.

The scallop-like species has neon orange tentacles that emerge between two shells. Although each measures around 4cm long, when they group together in large numbers, they cover the sea bed like a reef which attracts other creatures.

Conservationists described the recent discovery as a "biodiversity powerhouse".

Lucy Kay, one of the divers who found the reef, only the second known flame shell bed remaining in the Clyde marine region, said: "Important discoveries like this are helping improve our collective knowledge of Scotland's seas."

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