

Off the coast of Devon,
the home lives of
individual fish have just
been revealed – with a
novel technique.





Tompot
blenny

Tompot blennies (small coastal fish, 15cm long)
live on the rocky reefs in shallow water

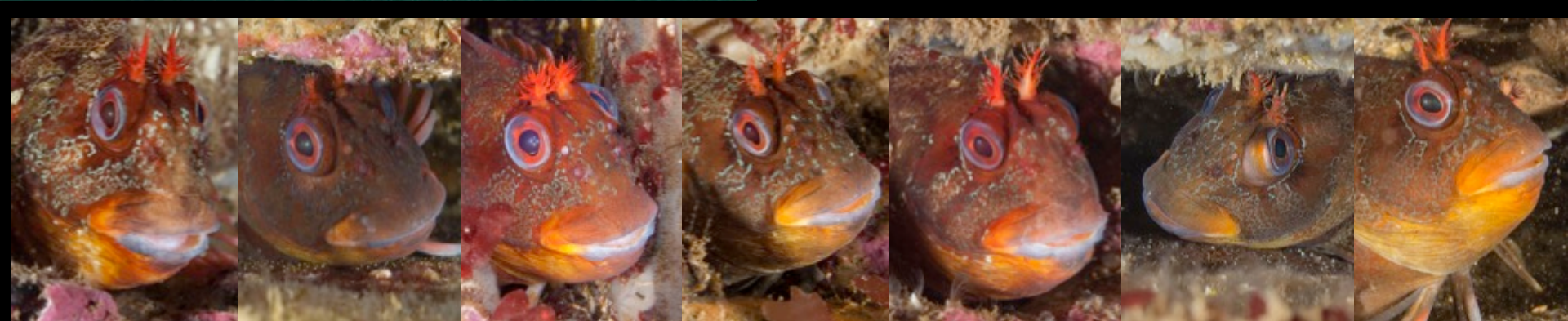




Underwater photographer Paul Naylor has studied the tompot blennies for many years and recently discovered that individual fish can be recognised.

Here are 7 of the individuals he observed on a particular local reef.

The observations have just been published in a new research paper by Paul and David Jacoby (Zoological Society).





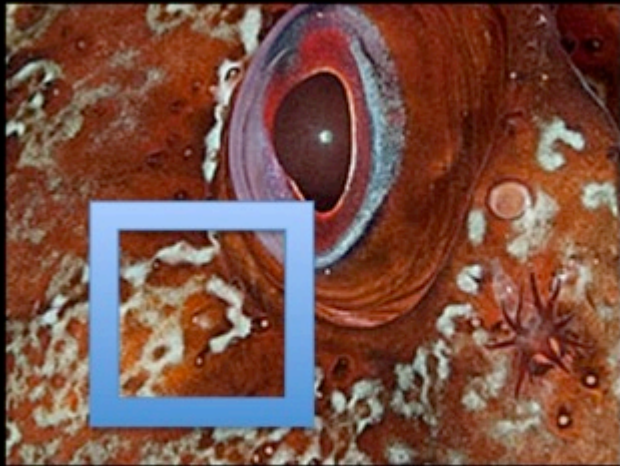
The territorial male tompot blennies live in crevices (locations) quite close to each other

If approached carefully, some tompot blennies can be quite bold, even inquisitive, and detailed photographs are possible

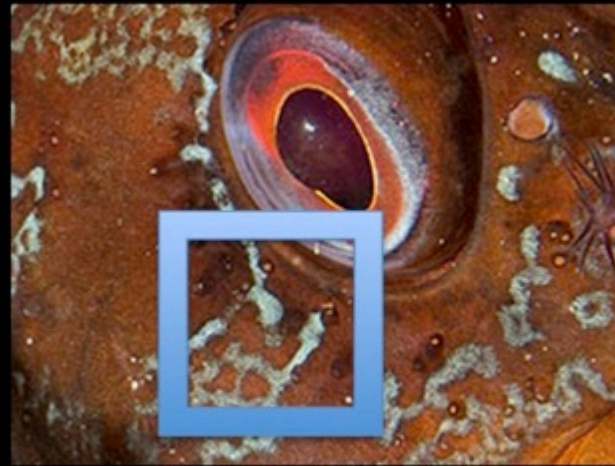


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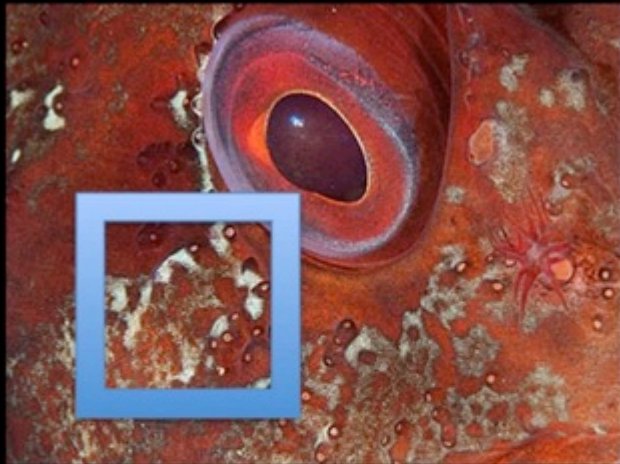
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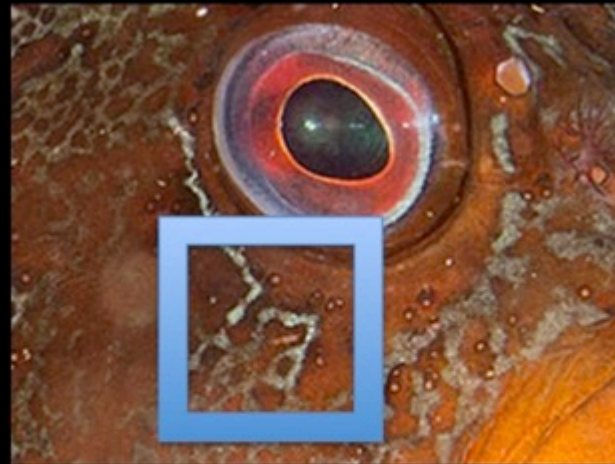
WB1



WB4



WB5



WB7

Paul used close-up photographs to identify individual tompot blennies from their unique face markings, such as on these 4 examples

Key distinguishing marks on male tompots

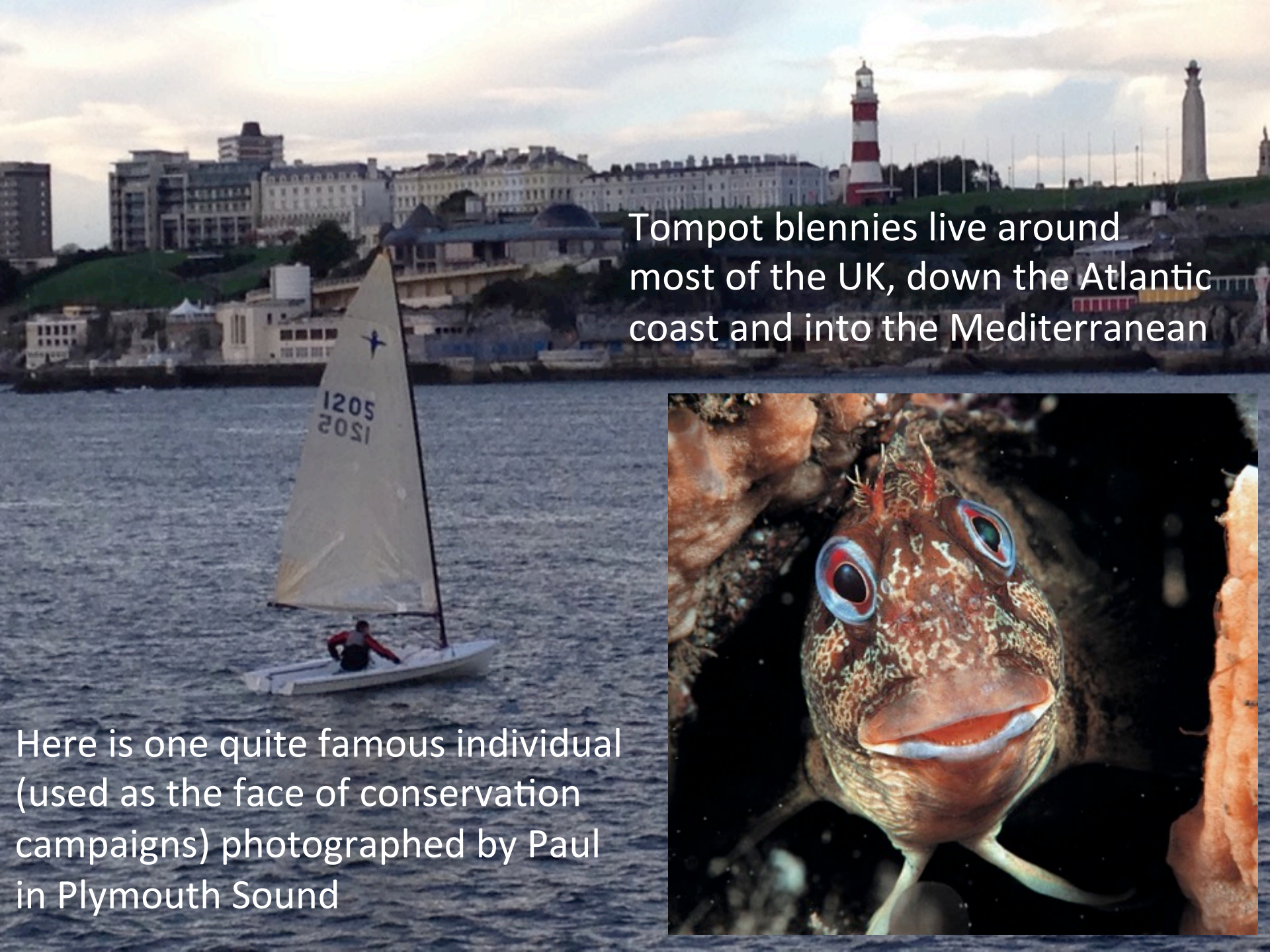
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WB1 (aka “Benny the blenny”) lived on the reef for at least 4 years. He bred successfully and guarded eggs for at least 2 of those years. He fought other males for his territory and received some nasty injuries but recovered each time.



Here, he is guarding eggs laid by at least two females. He looked after them carefully for several weeks until they hatched.



Tompot blennies live around most of the UK, down the Atlantic coast and into the Mediterranean

Here is one quite famous individual (used as the face of conservation campaigns) photographed by Paul in Plymouth Sound



This amazing behaviour under Swanage Pier involved a large male, who had just won a fight, moving a whelk shell around with his head while watched by two smaller tompots. Was he showing off?





The observations,
enabled by
photo-
identification
continue... and
we hope studies
like this help to
show what
amazing lives go
on in our seas,
and how
important it is we
look after them