

Balloons and beach litter.

Thursday 19th of July 2007 saw the 'Ugly' group (Beach Litter Surveyors for Berwick Wildlife Group) back in action for the second survey for the Marine Conservation Society in the 'Adopt a Beach Scheme'. Little Beach and the Pier Road Beach were again examined along a 100m stretch. It was a typical summer's day - overcast with an easterly wind blowing. It was freezing!

Interestingly a member of the group had reported a clump of balloons washed up on Little Beach a few days earlier. What happens to balloons after they are released? They float up into the air and out of our minds. During the litter survey the group found several balloon valves. These never biodegrade. There are two kinds of balloons, latex or rubber and foil or mylar. Eventually latex balloons will biodegrade over a period of years, but foil balloons may never fully degrade. Balloons filled with air and accidentally released are much easier to recover than those filled with helium. The latter float off into the wide blue yonder and may well come down into the sea. Living close to the sea as people in Berwick do balloon races pose a major threat to the wildlife. The balloons are often mistaken for jellyfish by all sorts of marine life, and as such are swallowed. They block the digestive tract of the animal which then starves to death. Of course you can still enjoy balloons without harming wildlife. How? Just don't let go of them! Lobby our council not to support mass balloon releases. Knot the balloon necks or hand tie with string and not plastic ribbon or valves. Fill balloons with air and not helium. For more ideas on how to use balloons in a wildlife friendly way visit www.mcsuk.org.

And remember 'Don't let Go' of balloons and you will be protecting our seas, shores and wildlife now and for future generations.

Elizabeth.Summer 2007