Endangered marine life under the radar at Tayvallich Village Hall

Twenty-four hours after it had resounded to the stramash of fervent ceilidh dancers, Tayvallich Village Hall was full once again on Sunday evening but for a very different kind of event.

Friends of the Sound of Jura (FOSOJ), who seek to protect the Sound and the River Add and their local users from threats to the area's wildlife and sustainable economy, hosted a talk by US marine biologist Tierney Thys on the ocean sunfish.

Tierney entertained and informed an enthralled audience about this gentle giant that can weigh more than two tonnes but eats only jellyfish.

Like Tierney, ocean sunfish occasionally visit Scotland; they have even been seen in the Firth of Clyde. Their name comes from their habit of lying on the surface of the ocean seeming to sunbathe as they recharge their energy to dive to depths in search of food.

These tailless fish have evolved to occupy a particular niche in the marine environment. Tierney showed a clip

Tierney Thys talking about the ocean sunfish.

of a sunfish coolly gobbling up a Portuguese man o' war that made the swimmers in the audience wonder if it could do the same to lion's manes.

The evening was rounded off by an update from Argyll-based wildlife film-maker John Aitchison of FOSOJ about the Argyll Coast and Islands Hope Spot.

Hope Spots are ecologically unique areas of the ocean designated for protection under a global conservation campaign overseen by Mission Blue, a non-profit organisation founded by another US marine biologist, Sylvia Earle. The recently awarded Argyll Coast and Islands Hope Spot is the first of its kind in the mainland UK and deserves to be celebrated as well as protected.

John showed a short film highlighting the huge diversity of marine wildlife in the Hope Spot, such as rare sea fans (a beautiful colonial animal related to coral), flapper skate (more endangered than the giant panda), dolphins, whales, otters, puffins and sea eagles.

The strong message from both talks was the importance of conserving marine diversity for the survival not only of those species but of all living things – humans included.