



for more information about water babies please contact head office on:  
 tel 01297 20757 email [info@waterbabies.co.uk](mailto:info@waterbabies.co.uk)

# Daily Record

## Why babes are SPLASH HAPPY

THEY CAN'T WALK OR TALK AND SOME CAN BARELY KEEP THEIR HEAD UP... BUT EVERY BABY, IT SEEMS, LOVES TO DIVE AND SWIM. IT'S THE MUMS WHO GET WORRIED WHEN THEY SEE JUNIOR BLOWING BUBBLES



WEE SPLASHER: Sebastian Ridgeway

**WITH a broad grin, six-month-old Muirinn O'Loan sits on the edge of the swimming pool eagerly awaiting her instructions.**

"Humpty Dumpty," encourages proud mum Kathryn. And, as if by magic, Muirinn topples forward and disappears under the water.

For most parents such a scenario would fill them with horror.

But Kathryn rests assured that it's a routine her gurgling baby knows and loves.

Muirinn is just one of many water babies enjoying the therapeutic benefits of the increasingly popular activity.

For a few seconds Muirinn stays under the water, before surfacing, turning herself around and swimming back to the side where she holds on tight.

Throughout this exercise, Kathryn, 34, a policy officer from Edinburgh, is within easy grabbing reach. Her eyes never leave her baby daughter for a second. As Muirinn wriggles through the water to reach the side, so do four other babies, their parents also by their sides.

This is a small class to teach babies to swim, run by fully-qualified Swimming Teacher Association (STA) teacher and fully-qualified life-saver Hugh Davidson, who is in the pool with parents and their babies.

This month Hugh, 37, a former electronics engineer, is setting up an Edinburgh branch of the Leeds-based company Water Babies, offering swimming lessons for new borns.

The idea of teaching tiny babies to swim independently underwater stems from 1960s Russia with Igor Tjarkovsky, but it is now well-established in Australia, America and Scandinavia.

Although babies lack the strength and co-ordination to swim on the surface, when carefully supervised they can enjoy the sensation of moving their arms and legs through the water within days of birth.

Hugh, from Edinburgh, explains: "Babies can be taken into the water at any age. The youngest baby to learn with Water Babies in Leeds was just three days old. As soon as the mum feels ready, the baby is ready. Babies don't need to be immunised before they go swimming."

For the past month, Hugh has been teaching his four-month-old baby daughter Beatrice, plus five of her equally-young pals, to



**GILLS ONLY ...** Little Muirinn and mum Kathryn are making some waves

swim using a number of warm-water pools in the city.

Beatrice was five weeks old when she was first taken swimming. Hugh's wife Ailsa, 37, a full-time mum, also joins them in the water.

In the interests of hygiene, babies wear a special double aqua-nappy, with a tight seal around the thigh.

The pools, which include some special hydrotherapy pools, are all heated to 30 degrees and above, but parents of babies who may lose heat quickly can hire little wet suits in bright colours.

Parents who cannot swim can still take their babies as the pools are shallow enough to stand in.

Hugh says: "It's hardly surprising that babies love water. After all, they've spent their first nine months in that environment."

From birth, babies have what is called a "mammalian dive reflex", which means they automatically hold their breath while under water.

This is strongest when they are a few days old, but if babies are not regularly taken into water at an early age, they gradually lose the reflex and by the time they are 10-15 months old, some may have developed a fear of water.

Hugh says: "We make use of the 'mammalian diving reflex', using word association and special games and songs to train the babies to use the reflex voluntarily."

As young as possible, we sit them on the edge of the pool, with Mum or Dad supporting them if necessary, but always right beside them. With my daughter, for instance, I will say, "Beatrice - Ready - Go!" and then take her under the water for a few seconds.



BY CATRIONA WROTTELEY

**DIVING BELLE:** Baby Ella Sutherland swims like a fish already

three. Water Babies wasn't around when he was tiny, which I'm sorry about because I can see how much more confident Muirinn is in the water. He wears armbands but Muirinn will never need to.

"I was nervous the first time Muirinn went under the water. Hugh held her under for a couple of seconds and moved her through the water to give her the feel of swimming."

"She was very relaxed in the water, but stimulated by all the games we played."

By six months, most babies can swim along in the water for 10-12 feet, guided by their parent. Many enjoy the game of swimming through a hoop.

Around the age of 18 months, children are ready for the transition from baby to toddler swimming classes. At that stage, Hugh will introduce games which include jumping into the water.

He says: "We'd teach them the beginnings of stroke development, so they can begin to doggy-paddle and stay on the surface. Those who have been to baby classes aren't at all worried when they go underwater."

Hugh believes the bonding between parent and baby, during a structured lesson which is fun for both, is one of the chief advantages of starting so young.

But coaching babies to become future Olympic swimming champions is not Hugh's ambition.

He says: "The main thing is they have learned to have lots of fun in the water and they have that for life."

Contact: Hugh Davidson on 0131 312 7520 or 07958 031220, email [hugh@waterbabies.co.uk](mailto:hugh@waterbabies.co.uk) or visit [www.waterbabies.co.uk](http://www.waterbabies.co.uk)



**MAKING WAVES ...** Hugh Davidson with wife Ailsa, son Fergus and baby Beatrice

It's hardly surprising babies love water .. they've spent nine months in it