

GREY SEALS (*Halichoerus grypus*) AT LUNDY Bristol Channel, 1954 to 1957

On the accompanying graph the number of grey seals hauled out on the coast of Lundy in the four years, 1954 to 1957, as recorded by the Lundy Field Society in their Reports (some of these records were supplied by the writer), are plotted in an attempt to determine the seasonal movements of all age-groups.

Unfortunately in most cases the figures do not give the ages of the seals counted. Sometimes wind direction is given, and occasionally it is stated on which coastline of the Island the count is made. In the graph only total numbers have been plotted. No records are available for the months of December, January and February.

It would appear from the plottings that from March to the end of July, in these four years, there is a trend for the haulouts to consist of increasing numbers of seals, until by the 1st of August a maximum number is reached. Thereafter the numbers fall off steeply, seeming to indicate (if one can assume that haulout numbers are directly related to total numbers of seals present at any time) that at the beginning of August there is a partial exodus of seals (sexes and ages not available) to other waters.

At this point it is tempting to assume that the outgoing seals probably consist of breeding cows and bulls that have departed to the known breeding colonies situated not so far off. Ramsey, 60 m.; Skomer, 45m.; Cardigan Bay, 100 m. to the northward; North Coast of Cornwall, 40 to 75 m.; Scilly Isles, 100 m. to the southward; Great Saltee, 100 m. to the westward.

It is also convenient to assume that the seals that remain on Lundy during the months of August, September and October are those that have not yet reached breeding age, namely from one to four years of age in females, and up to six (or seven) years in bulls. Lundy has always seemed to me to be essentially a maturing ground for grey seals but occasionally an odd pup or two is born there.

During the four years under review eight pups have been found, all in Seals Hole, and two of them have been ringed. Of these births two are on the same day in successive years (1956 and 1957), and it would appear that these are pups of the same cow both born on 6th July, a very early date for this region. It is not unknown for occasional pups to be born on outlying sites, such as Lundy, but it would seem that the Island does produce one or two pups each year, and probably has done so for a long time. In an attempt to discover other breeding sites on the Island the writer organised an inspection of the coastline from a motor boat on 10th September, 1955, but other than Seals Hole no caves or small beaches appeared to be likely, as far as could be seen under difficult circumstances.

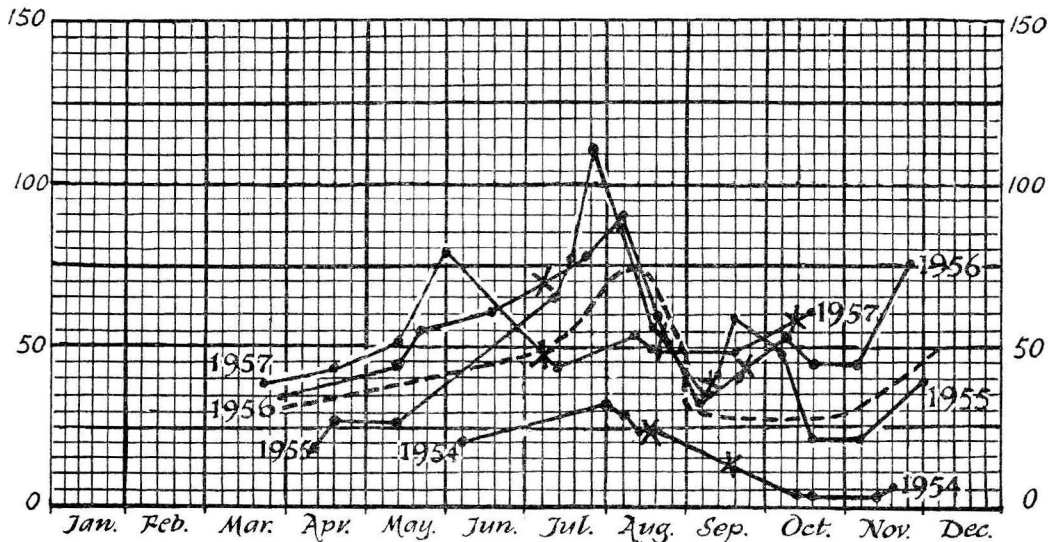
Referring again to the graph, it will be seen that a sharp increase in numbers occurs during November, suggesting that there is a return of seals possibly from the surrounding breeding colonies above mentioned, and it is possible that these individuals remain on the Island coastline all the winter.

Whether or not the seals below breeding age leave the Island at any time of the year is not known, but there seems no good reason why they should do so. If pellets containing a fast dye could be fired from a large-bore airgun at hauled-out adult seals in early August, it would be intriguing to watch at surrounding breeding colonies for these marked animals to appear. If the correct equipment could be developed it should not be difficult to score some hits on hauled-out seals on Lundy.

OLIVER HOOK.

Numbers of
Seals counted

Numbers of Grey Seals counted on Lundy (hauled out). by Lundy Field Society



--- = Mean.

X Pups. (Birth dates) Seal's Hole
 19/8/1954. 6/9/1955- 6/7/1956 ♀. 6/7/1957 ♂
 20/9/1954. (Ringed) 25/8/1956 ♀. 4/10/1957.
 23/9/1956.
 (Ringed)