

## WARDEN'S REPORT 1993

### WEATHER

I feel sure that the year will be remembered for what felt like an excess of rain. In fact the total rainfall was very near the average for the last twenty years. We had a constant, almost daily fall from September to the end of the year, but early months were much drier than average - February, March and August in particular. There was no time when we experienced drought conditions and the three boreholes were hardly used. Temperatures were low with less than usual sunshine. The wind was generally lighter with less easterlies than the previous three years. Overall we had few Oldenburg sailing's cancelled and most visitors were able to enjoy the scenery, even if sun-bathing was not the order of the day. Apart from one ten minute flurry there was no snow recorded and there was a frost on only twenty days.

### MARINE NATURE RESERVE

In its 'Campaign for a Living Coast', English Nature has highlighted Lundy as its flagship reserve and in this respect, the profile of the reserve is being steadily raised. The Chairman of English Nature, Lord Cranbrook, visited the island in October after unveiling a new display board in Ilfracombe - the design is bright, modern and eye catching. It has already achieved public interest, but some purists are not happy with its more sprightly approach. This spring there will be a new set of leaflets aimed at the day visitor and we hope to show a short underwater video on the Oldenburgs' new television equipment. Coupled with the leaflets, will be a new information board for the beach. This will act as a focal point, where I will be able to answer questions and direct visitors as they land.

A piece of equipment provided by English Nature, is a remote operated video camera. We hope to use the camera to show visitors underwater scenes and give them a better understanding of the marine environment. The vehicle is not easy to 'fly' and takes quite a lot of practice to drive it in a straight line. On the first occasion it was used, a seal spent some time playing with the umbilical - it was rolling itself up in the cable and made filming impossible.

Sports diving was popular and particularly at weekends there has been an increase in visits from non resident groups. I am concerned that some charter operators show little understanding of divers needs and some of their groups cannot fully appreciate the fine diving that Lundy offers. Plankton levels were generally lower than the last few years and this improved the visibility for much of the season. Divers are reporting less pollution and sites such as Gannets Rock Pinnacle have improved dramatically. There was one incident when islanders and rescue services had to turn out to help two divers, who were thought to have been down too long. In fact they had made a controlled ascent, but had not been seen by their boat crew. Both divers were picked up by Air Sea Rescue about half a mile from their control boat, after being on the surface for nearly one hour.

Now that the centre of operations for landing day visitors has moved to the Dive Beach, there have been occasions when resident divers have felt crowded, but on the whole the new arrangements have worked reasonably well. The situation was not helped by a problem with our diving compressor and for most of the season air had to be supplied from the village, as the hired compressor required a power supply.

My son Christopher has produced a new wreck map which will be available on the island soon.

A meeting is to take place between the marine archaeological and conservation interests. It is hoped that this will result in a better understanding by the various groups and that a code of practice aimed at both protection and education will be achieved. At present it is difficult to combine the different rulings to the benefit of the Marine Reserve.

The snorkel trail has proved a tremendous success. Over 230 people hired the equipment and for most of the season inshore visibility and wind conditions were good. At least half of the snorkelling was in the Devils Kitchen area, as this combined the best visibility with high interest. Several school groups used the facilities and the activity was popular with families. A National Trust 'Work and Play' group spent half their time working and during the rest of their stay had a number of snorkelling sessions - one of which was a snorkel to White Beach along the East side. For this year, we are hoping to consolidate the area used by snorkellers, so that we can provide a drying area for the wetsuits and a separate changing room from those used by the divers. We shall also be adding to our first aid and safety equipment on the beach.

The Management Plan is in its final stages of production and has incorporated a number of new ideas. One of these is the use of a zoning map for the Marine Reserve. The original map was difficult to understand and was almost wholly negative in its approach. The new map is far more positive, clearly showing what activities can take place in that area. The proposed scheme was widely circulated and has generated a great deal of good feedback. After an initially wary response from the commercial fishermen, they now support the idea and accept that it greatly improves the understanding of the Reserve.

### VOLUNTEERS

By using Old Light West, it was possible to have volunteers throughout the summer. This was a tremendous benefit and John Morgan is to be congratulated for his efforts in keeping an almost continuous supply of people to make use of the accommodation provided. It is still important to have bigger groups, as there are many jobs which require more hands. We were lucky to have the benefit of several larger work parties and their jobs included the moving of the redundant steps from Lametry, to be resited on Quarry Beach. An excellent start has been made to controlling the rhododendron in the quarries. We have had to spend far more time on maintaining the footpaths, since the reduction in the rabbit population and this accounted for a high proportion of summer volunteers' time. In the autumn several groups worked upon the tree guards in the plantations along the East side. All in all, it was a good year and we thank all those who gave us time to improve the island. There are many jobs still to complete and new ones are presenting themselves at an alarming rate, so we shall be relying upon Field Society volunteers for a long time to come. The effort to arrange helpers by John Morgan and Helen Cole is very much appreciated.

### WILDLIFE

The combination of a wet growing season and a far lower grazing pressure from rabbits (there are still several hundred rabbits left - mostly at the North End), could be one of the reasons why both the goats and the Soay bred well. Goat numbers are over twenty and are about the maximum we can accommodate. There were 88 Soay lambs including nine sets of twins. The flock is in a healthy state and the small number of excess rams that have been culled, have shown very few parasites or health defects. The future of the Soay flock is now more secure and it is hoped that with the completion of Threequarter Wall, the flock will be kept above that wall. Once contained at the North End they will present a far great opportunity to provide study into their feral nature.

The Sika deer are holding their own. There are three adult stags and we have several young animals nearing breeding condition. One deer calf has an identity problem and for the whole winter, has remained in Brick Field with the sheep. It is quite capable of jumping the fence, but prefers to stay with the flock.

In September, we attempted to conduct a count of seal pups, but as in the last few years this was only partially successful because of the wind. The East side was checked completely, but the swell of the North End and along the West coast prevented snorkelling into the breeding caves. Seal Hole could not be entered for the same reason, as having got about 40 feet in, a large wave filled the cave and caused damage to my drysuit. Adult numbers are similar to those seen in 1989, but only a few pups were sighted. An early pup was reported in the last week of August and during September there were three occasions when pups were found on the Landing Beach - all were

successfully returned to the sea.

The bird report shows that there were a number of interesting birds seen during the spring and autumn passage - had the Brown Flycatcher been confirmed, no doubt, we would have been very popular with bird watchers. On the whole the breeding sea birds did well and conditions were good - large numbers of Sandeel were present throughout the season and this plentiful supply of food encouraged the Puffin to stay near the island until well into August. There were a large number of Ravens present and they gave the breeding birds a hard time, particularly in Jenny's Cove. During the winter all the islanders have co-operated in restricting the available food for the Ravens and there is a noticeable reduction in the number of non breeding birds along the South coast.

Rat baiting has been resumed during the winter months and while there was a high initial take of bait, by Christmas this had fallen to virtually no activity. One change in rat activity is the presence of Ship rats further up the island - there have been sightings as far as Threequarter Wall. In the past, Ship rats have been present only at the South End.

Several areas of the plateau have the bracken cut. Whilst it will need to be continued for several years, this cutting should help to stop the rapid increase that we have been experiencing. Hopefully, Middle Park will be totally controlled and the stands of Dwarf Adders Tongue Fern (*Ophioglossum azoricum*) protected - Middle Park contains 95% of the British Isles population of this plant and in this one area we could have as many as 100,000 plants. Seeds from both Lundy Cabbage (*Coincea wrightii*) and Balm leaved Figwort (*Scrophularia scorodonia*) have been lodged with the national Seed Bank at Kew.

Guided walks and talks have been given throughout the season and these have been well attended. The talks have benefited from the new blinds in the Church and it is now possible to see the slides on sunny evenings. Several members of the Field Society have also given walks and talks during their visits and these have been appreciated. The Society have also given a number of grants towards equipment which has helped to make the wardening more productive and easier. These grants have included the provision of a projector screen and table, and a 50% grant towards a chainsaw, saw bench and winch - these last items have made a dramatic difference to the way we treat the rhododendron and even make 'rhodi bashing' into an enjoyable activity. I am grateful for this support.

Two radio programmes were recorded for the Living World series on Radio 4. The first took the form of a terrestrial walk with Richard Camey and myself and the second was an 'underwater' radio programme from the Devils Kitchen. I stayed firmly in the inflatable, while Dan Laffoley from English Nature and the presenter Lionel Kellaway, perched on lilos. It is interesting, that although these programmes were broadcast very early in the morning, they generated more feedback and visitors than many television features.

In September, work was started on Pondsburry. The plan is to re-establish the waterway over a three year period, in order to protect its pond life. The first phase involved adding to the dam and digging out the deepest section adjacent to the dam. Looking at the silt which was extracted, this area had not been touched for many years and now represents a considerable increase in stored water. The dam will be finished off in the spring when the spoil has had time to dry out and a walkway can be made. Later in the year a permanent sluice will be installed and the first of the shallow sections dug.

Last year was far healthier from a financial standpoint and bookings for this year are already looking good. With continuing help from the Field Society, it should be possible to build upon the achievements of the past twelve months and make positive gains in research and conservation.

Andrew Gibson  
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