

GREY SEAL SURVEYS AND PUP COUNTS 1995

By

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INTRODUCTION

The following observations were made throughout the pupping season. Boat surveys were conducted whenever weather allowed but were restricted by conditions to the east side of the island. Records were kept by John Heath and myself and by visitors to the island. John Heath has been observing Lundy's seal population throughout 1995 and compiling extensive photographic records.

OBSERVATIONS

- 26th August Seals Hole surveyed. One bull seal and two females present at the entrance; evidence of seals in chamber at rear of cave.
- 6th September Seals spending most of day hauled out on rocks, some getting stranded very high up. Bulls paying a lot of attention to females not in pup; some mating behaviour observed.
- 8th September Cow seal and pup in Devil's Kitchen. Pup high on beach, adult in shallow water.
- 13th September Boat survey - A total of twenty-six adult seals were counted from Brazen Ward to Gannets Rock; no pups were seen.
- 17th September Boat survey - Half moulted pup 300m out in Landing Bay, diving for short periods and lazing on surface.
- 19th September Dead seal pup in Landing Bay.
- 24th September Dead seal pup in Jenny's Cove.
- 25th September Seal pup on Dive Beach.
- 27th September Two pups on Half Way Wall Bay Beach. One at south and one at north end of the beach.
- 12th October Boat survey - A total of fifty adult seals were counted from Rat Island up the east side to Seal Rock, with the major concentration from Brazen Ward to Seal Rock. One pup on Half Way Wall Bay Beach at the north end; no sign of the other pup (recorded 27/9).
Caves - Caves 15-18 (Baillie and Clark 1974) south of Gull Rock and north of Half Way Wall Bay were surveyed revealing one sleeping adult in cave 14. An attempt was made to enter Seals Hole but conditions proved too rough.
- 16th October Boat survey - Ninety-three seals counted hauled out between Gannets Bay and Seal Rock. Two pups in Hell's Gates; one remained present for several days.
- 17-18th October One pup in Hell's Gates (not as 16th), apparently healthy but on closer observation its eyes were badly infected, with a copious pussy discharge.

It is obviously difficult to reach any conclusions from these few observations. A total of ten individual pups were seen during the survey period, two of these dead. The number of pups seen on the Dive Beach and in Hell's Gates (below high tide level) indicates that pups are able to swim and do take to the water considerably earlier than is reported in general literature. These areas are not birthing sites but pups from two weeks old were recorded on the Dive Beach shore. To make an accurate attempt at counting pups and an estimate of pupping success, at least 2-3 visits to each known

pupping site would have to be made during the breeding season (Duck 1995, pers comm). Carrying out 2-3 visits to caves would inevitably cause disturbance which should be kept to a minimum. Visitors to the reserve are of course asked to avoid sea caves and seal haul out sites during the breeding season.

It is important to initiate a survey that can realistically be repeated each season to give a picture of annual differences in pupping success. In future years a survey of known pupping caves and beaches as described by Willcox (1986) from Seals Hole up the east side to Puffin Gully would be a realistic aim, making 2-3 visits to these sites during the pupping season and recording all pups and adults seen. If conditions allowed, one survey of West Side and North End sites (Willcox 1986) could be made in addition to the East Side counts.

REFERENCES

Baillie, C.C. & Clark, N.A. 1974. Brief visits to the sea-caves on the east side of Lundy. *Annual Report of the Lundy Field Society* 25, 59-62.

Willcox, N. 1986. A review of Grey Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) pupping on Lundy, and some new observations. *Annual Report of the Lundy Field Society* 37, 32-34.