

WARDEN'S REPORT FOR 1995

My first full year on the island has been busy and fascinating from start to finish. Perfect summer weather brought with it large numbers of day visitors, divers and yachts folk. After a very wet winter a long summer drought set in and we soon found ourselves short of water. These extreme weather conditions exacerbated problems on the farm which were already being caused by over grazing. During July and August all domestic stock had to be shipped off the island giving the land an overdue rest from heavy grazing. Future plans for the farm are much more in line with the conservation of the island, and stock numbers have been reduced. Overgrazing problems were added to by increases in both Soay and rabbit numbers. Soay were often observed nibbling at the heather at the North End making a reduction in their numbers necessary (see Parkes, this volume). This was carried out in October, reducing the population by approximately half to between 100 and 130 individuals.

Tree maintenance has continued with the help of several volunteer groups. Rabbits began to damage trees which have required extra rabbit proofing to protect them. Tree maintenance is of course a continuing job. We are now however at the stage when new planting can be undertaken early in 1996. Rhododendron work continues. The patch above Brazen Ward, cleared several years ago still required annual maintenance to pull up what seems like a never ending bank of seedlings, but we are winning! Patches at the Quarries and above St. Helens Copse have been cleared as well as many of the comparatively small patches in Millcombe Valley. Instead of pulling up root stumps we now spray re-growth with herbicide; this has proved effective in killing rhododendron and will hopefully reduce erosion and prevent damage to hidden archaeological features.

Over 560 days have been worked this year by volunteers from the LFS, National Trust, Hartland Heritage Coast and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers. Work carried out has included walling, pond repair, tree maintenance, path repair, help rounding up and counting Soay and of course rhododendron clearance. Small groups of LFS volunteers visit regularly staying in Old Light West. Larger work parties have also proved very successful, getting plenty of work done as well as being very good fun. We very much hope these weeks will continue in the future, as they are essential to practical conservation on the island. Two long term volunteers stayed over the summer; both worked very well. One, who first came to Lundy as an LFS volunteer, will be returning as a seasonal worker next year, employed in part to carry out conservation projects. We are again on the look-out for long term seasonal volunteers, with conservation experience, who would like the challenge of a summer on Lundy.

At the end of the very dry summer, conditions were ideal for working on the ponds and the area of open water at Pondsbyr has been deepened and extended. Quarter Wall Pond has been dug out and the drinking pond in South West Field repaired.

Several interesting survey projects have been undertaken this year, most notably a study of Lundy's lichens, which recorded over 300 species (see James *et al*, this volume). The Lundy cabbage has also been under continuing scrutiny and has gained some publicity. Annual surveys of both cabbage and rhododendron continue to be conducted by a Leeds University/English Nature team. Four new Lundy foals have arrived, the latest addition a colt known as Atlas is particularly striking. As you will see from the bird report, the year has had many ornithological highlights, the Baillon's Crake by the pond at Millcombe being one of the most memorable.

Both Marine Management and Advisory Groups meet bi-annually and are proving a very effective support system for the Marine Nature Reserve. The Management Group deals with the practicalities of everyday running and the Advisory Group with issues concerning the Reserve. The Reserve continues to enjoy publicity on TV and has growing support from local users. The zoning scheme has been widely distributed and continues to guide visitors to the Reserve. The difficulties of contacting visitors who do not come ashore will hopefully be alleviated next year with the arrival of an inflatable boat for the warden's use. Fishing activity has been considerable with pots put down right through the season and into the winter. We now have a system for recording the position of pots around the island which is regularly carried out. We hope that this will

help to pin-point any areas, particularly sensitive ones, which are subject to heavy levels of potting.

Increasing numbers of divers visit the island each year. Questionnaires are given out to each visiting group. We ask divers to record sites visited and make observations at each site. Involving visiting divers in surveying the reserve adds to our information gathering capacity and hopefully increases their enjoyment of each dive by giving people points to look out for. Two extensive marine monitoring projects have been undertaken in addition to annual intertidal monitoring and photography. A Marine Conservation Society group carried out several projects including a biological survey of the Gull Rock and Iona II sites, sea fan surveys along the east side and searches for Red Band Fish (see Irving, *et al*, this volume). English Nature are currently re-thinking marine monitoring around Lundy and will soon be producing a strategy for the future.

It has been a bumper year for Basking Sharks with over twenty sightings around the island. All confirmed sightings have been reported to the Marine Conservation Society's Basking Shark watch to add to their records. We hope to continue recording the movements of these illusive animals in the future. A survey of the Grey Seals was partially successful being restricted by weather to the east and south sides of the island (see Parkes, this volume). John Heath continues his work building up a photographic record of Lundy's seals and studying their behaviour. There have been three cetacean sightings throughout the year, the most notable being 25-30 Risso's dolphins which spent an October weekend in the Landing Bay.

There have been a few small pollution incidents: a Blue Shark and a Tope were washed up heavily entangled in drifting fishing net. Beach litter continues to be a periodic problem which peaked when a yacht became a complete wreck on the Landing Beach early in September! Luckily the bulk of the diesel on board was off-loaded when access was possible at a low spring tide. Late in November bird casualties from an offshore oil spill were picked up in numbers. With the help of a local bird hospital, four Guillemots were cleaned, rehabilitated and released to sea.

After a health and safety review the snorkel trail now continues with a few new rules, and continual supervision of groups in the water. It is as always very popular with summer visitors. The natural history display in the church has been added to with a small seashore aquarium, giving visitors an all year round look at rock pool creatures. Two new display panels, one marine and one geological, will hopefully be ready for early next season (1996).

The annual seabird survey was conducted in June with the aid of a new telescope and tripod for which thanks are owed to the LFS. A Puffin survey was also conducted (see Griffiths, this volume) but more worrying than continuing low Puffin numbers was an observed low breeding success in Kittiwakes, with nests being deserted at several sites. Kittiwakes and Manx Shearwaters are both earmarked for student research projects next year.

With the help of visiting survey teams, students conducting research projects, volunteer conservation groups and summer assistants, conservation work on and around Lundy is steadily progressing.

EMMA PARKES
February 1996