

## WARDEN'S REPORT FOR 1997

My first full year as Warden on Lundy was exciting, challenging and thoroughly enjoyable from start to finish.

There was plenty going on in the Marine Nature Reserve. Potting activity was high. The first strings of pots were seen in April, numbers gradually increased to a peak of 32 strings (with about 25 pots to a string) in July and then tailed off with the last pots being seen in November. Diving was sporadically effected by adverse weather conditions but even so the total number of diver days reached 2265. Patrolling the reserve was made easier by the arrival of a Rigid Inflatable Boat enabling me to speak in person to the owners of boats visiting the reserve.

Unusual marine sightings started with the carcass of a pygmy sperm whale which was spotted floating off Lone Pine. It took some time to identify, but this was not surprising as it was only the fourth sighting in the British Isles since records began (none of them living unfortunately). The carcass was seen washed up on Ladies Beach some time later but was very decayed and close examination did not give rise to any new information. Later on in the year a small number of living cetaceans were seen off the Island: common dolphins, bottle-nosed dolphins and a small pod of Risso's dolphins. Basking sharks were plentiful this season with over 100 sightings, many of which were very close in to the shore. In July it seemed like never a day went by without somebody seeing one. On more than one occasion literally hundreds of day visitors got superb views of these magnificent creatures as they swam around the Landing Bay whilst the Oldenburg was being loaded. Grey seals were active throughout the year with sightings all around the Island. One particularly friendly and rather tactile youngster joined swimmers and snorkellers in the Landing Bay. Other marine sightings have included two Portuguese men o'war, hundreds of by-the-wind-sailors that were brought up by one tide on the Landing Beach, a sunfish and two separate sightings of turtles (unfortunately neither close enough to allow identification).

The wealth of marine life around Lundy was further recognised by the area being proposed as a Special Area of Conservation under the European Habitats Directive. This will necessitate revision of the Management Plan to include any additional management objectives.

There were three small pollution incidents around the Island. Large globules of oil started washing up on the beach in late March and continued to do so for about a month. The effects seemed to be aesthetic rather than ecological with only one razorbill turning up oiled. There was another oil spill in December where five oiled guillemots came ashore. The source of the oil in both cases has not been found but was, no doubt, due to the illegal washing out of tanks at sea. Renowned for its shipwrecks Lundy claimed another boat in June. A dive charter boat, the Jolly H, was wrecked on the Landing Beach after breaking her anchor lines in a north-easterly. All the fuel and engine oils were pumped out of the wreck as soon as it came ashore so the only pollution caused was litter in the bay when she broke up. She was made out of well seasoned mahogany so she has made a welcome addition to the Island's wood pile!

Marine monitoring continued both above and below low tide mark. This work was carried out by myself with assistance from a group of volunteers from the Marine Conservation Society and data gathered from questionnaires filled in by visiting divers.

Volunteers were invaluable on land also. In fact a vast majority of the practical conservation work carried out on Lundy is done by volunteers. 1997 saw volunteers from the

National Trust, Hartland Heritage Coast and Leeds University as well as the LFS. Altogether they donated a grand total of 567 days of their time for the good of conservation on Lundy (the equivalent of 2 full time staff!). Tasks carried out included dry stone walling, footpath clearance, tree maintenance, rhododendron control and soay, goat and deer counts. Many thanks to all the LFS volunteers for all their help and long may they return!

I received further assistance in the form of Liz Davey who was studying for an MSc in coastal zone management. She spent the three busiest months of the year on the Island acting as a voluntary assistant warden, as well as carrying out work for her dissertation. During her time on the Island Liz proved a valuable addition to the staff and greatly increased both the quality and quantity of conservation work carried out.

It was a good year for the Lundy cabbage with over 3,000 plants in flower, the second highest number ever recorded. This year saw the completion of a joint English Nature/Leeds University project to map the position of all the cabbage on the Island with relation to all the rhododendron. From this a management strategy for the rhododendron was produced, prioritising the areas where the cabbage is in most danger of being strangled out by the rhododendron. Unfortunately, these areas are not the sorts of places most volunteers can reach, being over the edge of the East Sidings. So specialist contractors were used to abseil over the cliffs, cut the offending rhododendrons and treat the remaining stumps (extremely carefully!) with herbicide. This attracted an enormous amount of media contact but the weather frustratingly closed in, preventing any journalists from getting to the Island.

The Lundy cabbage was not the only aspect of Lundy to attract media attention. In May the arrival of a veery on the Island caused a small flurry of excitement with the local press. In July the eruption of crossbills onto the Island prompted Radio 4 to interview me for the Natural History Programme. Then in August Westcountry TV came over to film documentaries on Lundy seals and Lundy cabbage.

An extremely dry winter prompted worries about a summer water shortage but these were soon calmed when we had above average rainfall between March and June. This, in combination with plenty of sunshine, prompted a superb growing season and the Island remained green and healthy-looking throughout the season with no signs of overgrazing. At the start of the year there were c. 640 domestic sheep with c. 170 soays, c. 45 goats and at least 40 deer as well as the estimated 5,000 rabbits. A selective cull was carried out on all the feral animals in order to maintain a sustainable level of grazing.

Guided walks and illustrated talks to look at the various aspects of Lundy's natural history continued to prove very popular with visitors as did the guided snorkelling sessions on the underwater nature trail. Also on the interpretive side, three new panels about the Marine Nature Reserve were erected on Ilfracombe and Bideford Quays and on the Oldenburg and a zoning scheme display put up in the church.

Easterly winds caused the usual havoc with sailings throughout this year but also just before Christmas a combination of an easterly and a very high tide was the last straw for the beach Road which collapsed in several places. Fortunately we received the go ahead from the Lottery Fund to start on some of the projects that they have grant aided, one of them being permanent repairs to the road. At the time of writing these works are well under way in order to have the road up and running for Easter.

All in all 1997 was a superb year for conservation on Lundy; here's to continuing this trend next year!

LISA COLE  
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