

LUNDY WARDEN'S REPORT FOR 1999

It was obvious from the start that 1999 was going to be very busy year, so I was especially pleased to receive additional funding from English Nature in order to employ an Assistant Warden to lighten the load in the summer months. In mid-May, Ian Reach came over to the Island to take up this post. He soon turned out to be an invaluable addition to the Island staff and made a great contribution to both the quality and quantity of conservation work taking place on the Island.

Work started on building the new jetty in late February and it was my job to maintain a watching brief to monitor the works for any potential damage to the Marine Nature Reserve (MNR). The main concern that was highlighted in the Environmental Impact Assessment was the possibility of the drilling fines being deposited onto the filter feeders in Devil's Kitchen, so blocking their feeding mechanisms. To try and minimise this migration of sediment, drilling was stopped 2 hours either side of high water. Never the less, some sediment did get deposited in Devil's Kitchen but this was soon removed by wave action and did not appear to cause any obvious damage. In April something unforeseen happened, one of the jack-up rigs used in the jetty construction collapsed. This resulted in the crane resting on top of a 250 gallon tank of diesel and the worry that if the rig collapsed further with the falling tide the crane might rupture the tank. Luckily this did not happen and only a small quantity leaked out into the sea. This was soon dispersed and had no apparent effects. By August the jetty was almost complete and my last task was to make sure that any debris that had been dropped on the seabed was removed by the commercial divers before they left the site. All in all, taking into account the fact that this was the most major work ever to take place in the MNR and the fact that construction work took longer than anticipated, the overall effects on the reserve appear to be short term and minimal. Plus, the piles started to become colonised as soon as they were in the water and it will be interesting to chart the development of the marine life on this new artificial reef.

Once the jetty was complete we no longer needed to launch the Shearn and Wendy. This meant that the gap we had left in the beach road for this purpose could be closed, a slip built and the old dive huts razed to the ground ready for the final project on the beach, the new beach building. This work was finished in December.

However, not everything in the MNR was about change, there was plenty of the usual activity taking place throughout the year also. As far as fishing was concerned potting activity was not so high as last year but there was more trawling going on in the vicinity. A marine reserve is always difficult to police, and trying to ascertain whether trawling had taken place in the wrong areas of the reserve proved very difficult. This is where the MNR Advisory Group proved its worth as a forum for discussing such activities.

It was a busy year for diving also, with divers coming from all over the country and even some from further afield. Most are from local dive clubs or come on the regular charter boats and these divers either know the rules of the reserve or are made aware of them by their skippers. However, with RIBs (rigid-hull inflatable boats) becoming more common

place there are more divers coming to the reserve who may not be aware of the rules and so cause damage, even if unwittingly. Indeed, there have been several unfortunate incidents in the reserve this year. On more than one occasion the Wardens received complaints that dive inflatables were disturbing breeding seabirds on the West Side and seals in Gannet's Bay during the time when the females were heavily pregnant. On another occasion a RIB was found anchored on the Knoll Pins by Keith Hiscock who moved the anchor and spoke to the party explaining the damage that can be caused by anchoring. Then in September, John Heath contacted me to tell me that the Gull Rock wreck (one of two protected wrecks in the reserve) had been vandalised and artefacts appeared to have been removed. This accentuates two things: how lucky we are to have so many people using the reserve who care and so help to police it, but also that we need to keep striving to raise awareness of the value of the reserve and the code of conduct within it. Hopefully, the interpretation in the new beach building will help to do this.

The designation of the MNR as a candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) brought about a review of consents for activities occurring within the area. There were two main activities that had to be reassessed during this process, these were sewage and rubbish disposal. As far as sewage was concerned, the existing system was licensed by the Environment Agency with only minor constraints. On the rubbish front the practice of burning the waste in the incinerator and tipping the non-burnable material over the cliff had to cease. Contrary to media opinion, it was not the tipping that was most damaging to the environment, rather the incineration that was the most polluting. In fact a superficial survey of the area under the rubbish tip showed that very little debris actually reached the sea and there was no discernible damage from that which did. Never the less, it was no longer to be allowed, and all the rubbish would have to be shipped off the Island. Paul Roberts and myself were actually quite pleased to have our hands forced in such a way as we were far from happy with the previous situation.

Amongst all this human activity within the MNR the marine life was thriving too. The first basking sharks arrived in June and by the end of the season 136 sharks had been seen around the Island with one sighting of 16 at once. As usual the grey seals were visible all year all around the Island and several individuals regularly joined in with snorkellers and divers. However, it is the first time that I know of that seals actually pupped on the Landing Beach, presumably because the jetty has reduced the level of disturbance there. One of the pups was deserted but the other one survived until weaning. 1999 seemed to be a year of wildlife firsts as on two occasions I found a lesser octopus in Devil's Kitchen, which had not been recorded there before, and it was the first year that *Sargassum muticum*, an invasive Japanese seaweed, had been seen in the reserve. Other unusual sightings in the reserve were a triggerfish, two sunfish and a porbeagle.

It appeared to be a good year for the seabirds too, especially puffins. Sightings were up all over the Island and even boat skippers who have been working around the Island for twenty years or more thought that there were more around than for a number of years. As you will read elsewhere in this journal, Ian and I put a lot of effort into assessing the status of this bird on Lundy and we were able to prove that although numbers are dan-

gerously low they are still breeding.

Apart from construction of the jetty and the infrastructure most of the grants money has gone towards keeping Lundy looking the way that we all like to see it. For instance, the road reparation work included filling in potholes and ruts in the main track in order to contain vehicle movements to the track and stop it spreading. This was especially important in Middle Park where vehicles have been straying further and further to the west. In addition to this we now have new low pressure tyres for one of the Landrovers which leave no mark on wet ground. The stone for the road works was excavated from a specially dug hole in the Tent Field which we then used to dispose of the rotting silage that has been littering the Island for several years. Early in 2000 work will start on repairing some of the badly eroded stretches of footpath around the Island, starting with the Battery.

Even though it was a very dry summer the Island stayed looking green all year, with no signs of overgrazing. This was, no doubt, partly due to the fact that the rabbits were hit by Viral Haemorrhaging Disease (VHD) which greatly reduced their numbers. In light of this we did not carry out a full cull of the feral mammals this year, but just took out a handful of deer and goats. Also this year we revised the Island's Countryside Stewardship Agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF): increasing the area of bracken to be cut each year; securing funding for re-treating cut rhododendrons for three consecutive years rather than just one year; and getting additional funding for footpath clearance. Much of this work will continue to be carried out by volunteers from the LFS so please keep on coming!

LIZA COLE
June 2000