

## **LUNDY WARDENS REPORTS FOR 2000 & 2001**

### **2000**

The year 2000 started with excellent news, Ian Reach confirmed that he would indeed be returning to the Island to act as my Assistant Warden for a second year. This meant that he could pick up where he left off without me having to train up a new assistant. Plus, those who have met Ian will know that he has developed a knowledge and enthusiasm for the Island that makes him very good at his job.

January also saw a continuation of the project works down on the beach with work starting on the boat slipway running down from the end of the new jetty, alongside the old jetty, onto the dive beach. As the foundations had to be anchored into bedrock this involved digging a huge hole and so there was some resulting sediment movement in the Landing Bay. Once the slip was complete work started on the new beach building. Again, finding solid rock to anchor to involved some digging but soon the foundations were in place and the steel skeleton was erected. However, this is where things stopped as the contractors went bust so the building was not completed until the autumn. This obviously had several knock on effects on diving, snorkelling and access to Devil's Kitchen but anyone who has seen the end result will agree that it was worth the wait.

Alongside all these new developments within the MNR the usual activities were carrying on too. The usual potting continued in the reserve with only one or two incidents of pots being shot right on the boundary of exclusion zones on the East Side. In fact the zones on the East Side are rather woolly and so Devon Sea Fisheries Committee and English Nature started looking into the possibility of the whole of the reserve off the East Side becoming a No Take Zone (NTZ). This would afford protection to the fragile ecology found in this area as well as preventing overfishing. Where these have been implemented elsewhere in the world they have also acted as nursery areas for commercial stock so increasing the productivity of the fishery in surrounding areas.

Diving continued throughout the season between April and October with more and more people coming out to enjoy the superb diving around the Island. Increasing numbers of divers are coming out on their own RIBs (rigid hull inflatable boats). The worry with these is that they are not necessarily aware of the rules in the reserve and so there is more chance of them causing damage

even if inadvertently. Hence the Wardens are always looking for different ways to make divers aware of the existence of the MNR and the rules within it.

A lot of monitoring took place in the reserve this year. On three occasions archaeologists attempted to re-survey the *Iona II* (one of the two protected wrecks in the MNR) but the weather prevented more than very preliminary work being carried out. A group of volunteers from the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) came over to monitor various aspects of the reserve, this work will be reported on later in this journal. Then in the autumn, an English Nature littoral monitoring team came over to gather baseline data and set up transects at different points around the Island so that changes can be monitored over time.

Not actually in the MNR but very much connected with it are the breeding seabirds. From May onwards Ian carried out the annual puffin survey. Counts were low compared to 1999 with a maximum of 21 on one survey and an overall average of 11 (cf last year's average of 25). It was very apparent that numbers were low quite early on in the season, and on many occasions no puffins were seen on Seabird Walks. Then in June the Seabird Census 2000 team, led by David Price, came to the Island to carry out total counts of all the seabirds, repeating counts done periodically since 1981. Whilst David and his team were on the Island they also found time to try and ascertain if Manx shearwaters were breeding, and if so, where. They did this by playing recordings of shearwater calls at the entrance of burrows and listening for a reply. From the number of replies received it was apparent that shearwaters are at least attempting to breed and, through extrapolation, a tentative estimate of 300-400 nesting pairs was made.

Cetacean sightings were up this year with July being a particularly good month. Species seen were common dolphin, harbour porpoise and bottle-nosed dolphin. Also, a local skipper described what had to be two killer whales that he had seen off Clovelly, later that day the crew of the Oldenburg reported seeing them too. Interesting to know that they were in the vicinity! Then in September another skipper reported seeing a dead cetacean floating about 2 miles south of the Island. The description sounded like a minke whale.

Basking sharks arrived late this year with the first one being sighted towards the end of July. There was then a massive influx of sightings including a shoal of 28 beasts and a superb view of one breaching, twice (a first for me).

In total there were 80 sightings in July and then the numbers dwindled to 17 in August and 3 in September; so a year total of 104.

Other notable records within the MNR were five sightings of sunfish, an increased number of red band fish at the site south of the Knoll Pins, and two lesser octopudi. On the down side, the amount of *Sargassum muticum* (a non-native seaweed) in the Landing Bay has increased markedly since it was first seen last year.

The designation of the reserve as a candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) has precipitated revision of the Management Plan to encompass management implications brought about by the reserve's increased status. So the opportunity was taken to completely rewrite the document taking into account what has been achieved with the passage of time and to make it much more user friendly. The new plan will be in colour and ring bound to facilitate revision or addition of material in the future without having to completely reprint the whole document.

Those that have a long term involvement with Lundy will appreciate that the terrestrial management of the Island has been somewhat over-shadowed in recent years by the marine management due to the former's lower grade designation. This has meant that the condition of the SSSI has been slowly declining. However, as the marine and terrestrial environments are inextricably linked on a small oceanic island such as Lundy, it has been decided to take a holistic view of management of the Island. So in 2001, the condition of the SSSI will be reassessed and the management plan amended accordingly.

On the terrestrial side of things, the year 2000 saw 3059 Lundy cabbage plants in flower, which was not as many as was expected. This was mostly due to increased grazing pressure around Millcombe and below the Castle, in the form of both domestic sheep and a small group of feral goats. English Nature will be providing advice on the grazing policy on the Island as part of next year's management revision.

This year's launch of Lundy Lamb will have a knock on effect on the grazing pressure on the Island. It meant that lambs stayed on the Island for finishing this year which increased the grazing pressure in the short term but in the long term it will lead to the numbers of breeding ewes being reduced as the farm will be concentrating on quality rather than quantity. Another factor effecting the grazing pressure on the Island this year was the fact that there was no big cull of rabbits or feral mammals due to ill health on the part of our

usual cullers. Derek Oram, the farmer, and myself did manage to take out a small number of goats but not a significant number.

On a more positive note, the area of bracken controlled was doubled this year with 50 ha being controlled compared with 21 ha last year. This was mainly because this year we were using a roller to crush the bracken rather than a topper to cut it. A roller can be used by relatively inexperienced personnel (like myself and Ian) whereas a topper needs an expert (such as Derek). Also, a roller can be used on more undulating ground without the fear of damaging the machinery.

The battle has continued against our other invasive plant, rhododendron. About 1 ha was cleared by volunteers and an additional 0.1 ha by specialist rope access contractors. The work by the former prevented two large clumps joining into one even larger clump just north of White Beach and that of the latter has uncovered more terraces and opened up the aspect of the Lower East Side Path just south of this area.

There were two main grant aided projects being undertaken on the Island this year the infrastructure and the footpaths. The infrastructure project involved digging trenches in order to run new electric cables and water pipes to all the properties. Where the trenches crossed sites of archaeological interest care was taken and an archaeologist was on site in case anything of great interest was unearthed. The largest trench was through a non-scheduled but potentially very interesting site, Pig's Paradise (the camping field). Shirley Blaylock (National Trust Archaeologist) spent a week investigating finds in this area ably assisted by Tony Cutler who was on the Island volunteering for the LFS at the time.

Project work carried out on the footpaths involved re-surfacing and improving the drainage on the path down to Millcombe, completing the stone pitching on the Battery path and major drainage work on both the Upper and Lower East Side Paths.

LIZA COLE  
July 2001

## 2001

The year 2001 was the best year to date as far as Nature Conservation was concerned with an unprecedented number of staff and volunteers carrying out work on the Island. In addition to myself, Rod Dymond, who had been employed to carry out grant-aided footpath improvement works in 2000, was retained to act as a Ranger in 2001. He not only carried out vast amounts of practical work himself but also supervised the increased numbers of volunteers that visited the Island in 2001. In total over the year 170 volunteers visited the Island putting in a grand total of 717 volunteer days. This amazing total was actually less than hoped for as Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) quarantine prevented several large groups visiting in March and April. Tasks carried out included: footpath maintenance and clearance; rhododendron control; tree aftercare; dry stone walling; repairing the main track north of Quarter Wall; bracken cutting; fencing; ragwort pulling and feral mammal monitoring. Rod and the "extended volunteers programme" were funded by the Lundy Fund, which relies on donations as well as subscriptions from Friends on Lundy members.

In May, Ian Reach returned for his third year as seasonal Assistant Warden, slipping straight back into the routine and making his usual invaluable contribution to the Nature Conservation effort on the Island.

The outbreak of FMD on the mainland in February and the potential outcome if it reached the Island was of great concern to all the Island staff but especially myself and Derek Oram (the Farm Manager). The Island was immediately placed in self-imposed quarantine, but had to be opened to the public at the beginning of April for financial reasons. All the Lundy Company staff on the mainland, on the ship and on the Island worked unstintingly to instigate all possible precautions to prevent the disease being brought to the Island. Thank goodness, all their efforts paid off. However, FMD did have an indirect effect on the Island, as animal movement restrictions meant that stock remained on the Island longer than was intended. In addition rabbit numbers were high, even though Viral Haemorrhaging Disease (VHD) was still present, as were feral mammal numbers and rats.

The domestic stock was eventually removed when restrictions were lifted and a cull of rabbits and feral mammals was carried out over the winter. Rat control continued throughout the year. Rod, with the assistance of volunteers, renewed the Quarter Wall Fence and repaired various lengths of dry-stone walls to enable better stock control. In the spring of 2002 a team from the National Trust, led by a NT Nature Conservation Advisor, will be coming to

the Island to carry out a concerted mammal count and advise on an all encompassing grazing and culling regime.

It was not a good year for the Lundy Cabbage compared to previous years with only 1388 plants in flower. This was partly due to overgrazing but the fact that even in areas free of grazers the population was down 30% suggests that there were other factor(s) involved.

Rope-access contractors visited the Island in November and December to continue their sterling efforts cutting back the rhododendrons that are of the greatest threat to the Lundy Cabbage, those growing on the cliff edge and the cliffs themselves. They continued to clear from the Lower East Side Path down, working north from the Sugar Loaf. Although the Island was very wet during this time they did have a problem with a fire getting out of control due to an unexpected shift in wind direction and speed. Encroaching darkness and the proximity to the cliff edge meant that the fire had to be left to burn itself out, but fortunately no excessive damage occurred. It will be interesting to see the effects that this has had on the vegetation in the area, the Lundy Cabbage in particular.

In fact, 2001 saw huge advances in rhododendron control on all fronts with Rod and his band of volunteers making major inroads into several clumps. Rod was also on hand to carry out the all-important follow up spraying with herbicide whenever the weather was suitable. It is starting to look like we are winning wars if not the whole battle!

Bracken control also reached new heights in 2001 with the Wardens crushing using a roller and the Farm Manager cutting using a topper. Derek's expertise with the latter meant that he was able to cut huge swathes into the bracken north of Threequarter Wall (the gate is not big enough to get the roller through!) taking great care not to damage the remains of Widow's Tenement. Some hand cutting of the bracken on the walls of Widow's Tenement itself was also carried out by volunteers.

The final terrestrial management task involved repairing the worst potholes in the main track north of Quarter Wall. In places the main track was getting so rough that vehicles had to drive around the most badly eroded areas and were causing damage to the maritime heathland. Repairs were affected up to Threequarter Wall, and it is hoped to reach the North End next year. The idea is not to have a "motorway" up the Island, just to keep vehicles to one track.

With so much activity on land it might be thought that there was little of mention occurring in the Marine Nature Reserve (MNR), but not so. Of the larger marine animals the grey seals provided year round interest as usual. Of note was the adolescent male that was brought all the way to Lundy from St Ives where he was causing concern by hauling himself out on a popular beach and stealing fish off long-lining boats. After being given a clean bill of health he was brought to Bideford by road and then released from the Oldenburg into Jenny's Cove, only to be next seen at St Ives 2 weeks later! More "normal" behaviour was shown by the resident seals. The first pups were spotted at the end of August and plenty of courtship and mating behaviour was observed soon afterwards. Perhaps my most bizarre seal experience was when a pair was mating in the Landing Bay, apparently unaware that I was leading a group of snorkellers not 20m away from them!

As usual, not many cetaceans were spotted from the Island this year (but plenty from the Oldenburg), but what was lacking in quantity was made up for in quality. In August a pod of 25-30 common dolphins, including 7 or 8 juvenile, swam along the East Side and into the Landing Bay where they breached and porpoised and then rode the bow wave of the Datchet which happened to be carrying the film crew who were filming the new video for the MNR.

Basking sharks arrived very late, with the first sighting in August, and were relatively few in number, with only 76 being seen from the Island. However, one or two sightings were incredibly close with the beasts swimming right along the edge of the jetty.

2001 was an interesting year as far as monitoring of seabirds was concerned. In May a team led by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) carried out a comprehensive survey for breeding Manx shearwaters based on the preliminary work carried out in 2000. The method used was to play tape recordings of calls down every burrow that could be found to see if it elicited an answering call. By this method the breeding population was estimated at 150 occupied burrows, the first time a definitive count had been carried out.

Following this work an international expert on conservation of endangered species on islands carried out a survey of the rats. He discovered that both species of rats were abundant all over the Island, and that there was some evidence of bird predation. He was also asked to carry out a feasibility study to ascertain whether it would be possible to eradicate rats from the Island if it

was deemed necessary to do so. His conclusion was that although it would be difficult to do so, but it would be possible.

In addition to the Manx shearwater study, Ian carried out the annual puffin monitoring using the same fixed observation points that have been used for the last 4 years. The maximum number of birds counted in one day was 26 with an average of 18 over the season. This was higher than 2000 but lower than 1999.

2001 also saw the setting up of littoral monitoring sites on the various aspects of the Island. Baseline data was gathered and these sites will be monitored annually to record any changes.

This year also saw the recording of a second non-native, invasive seaweed in the MNR, *Asparagopsis armata*, which was spotted under the jetty. This joins the *Sargassum muticum*, which has now spread northwards in the Landing Bay. Both Appledore and Ilfracombe sub-aqua clubs kept an eye out for the latter all around the Island to see if it has spread further afield. The group of Marine Conservation Society (MCS) volunteers also looked out for *Sargassum* whilst carrying out their monitoring work as well as investigating the cause of many moribund sea fans that had been recorded this year (see Robert Irving's report for more details).

A lot of work was carried to raise visitors' awareness of the marine environment in 2001. The usual walks, talks and "snorks" were as popular as ever and Ian and I accompanied boat trips around the Island to commentate on what was seen as often as time would allow. There was also plenty of media interest with coverage on regional and national TV and radio as well as a lot of coverage in various diving and other publications.

In addition, English Nature provided substantial funding for a variety of more "concrete" interpretation. The project that had the greatest impact on providing visitors with information was the interpretation area in the new Beach Building. The panels and displays were installed towards the end of May, and even before the workmen had finished visitors waiting to get back on the Oldenburg were reading the panels and trying out the interactive displays. It continued to be a great success throughout the season with the 2m aquarium being the favourite attraction. When weather conditions were clement the front doors were left open to make the building more welcoming for visitors to enjoy whenever they wanted to.



Further interpretation boards were produced for the Shore Offices and the Oldenburg. These were to provide a hierarchy of information about the MNR, and the rest of the Island's ecology, building up from the Shore Offices, to the Oldenburg and then leading onto the more detailed information in the Beach Building.

Another exciting project was the production of a new MNR video to be played on the Oldenburg and in the Shore Offices. The film crew visited the Island in August and enjoyed fantastic weather and sea conditions and managed to get footage of everything they were hoping for as well as a few bonuses like a free swimming red-band fish and bow-riding dolphins. The final result was very pleasing, and as it was all filmed in digital format, it is hoped to get some of the images on the internet in the future.

Whilst all of these projects were aimed at all visitors to the Island there were two projects that were aimed at more specialist markets: a dive guide and an education pack. The aim of the dive guide was to provide divers with the information that they wanted (dive sites, tidal stream information, a basic ID guide) as well as information that we wanted them to have (information on sensitivity, conservation and the zoning scheme). The education pack, (or to be correct packs as one was produced for primary schools and one for secondary) were aimed at encouraging school groups to visit the Island either for the day, or for longer, to study all aspects of the Island. It was decided to expand the remit from just marine studies in order to attract schools that might feel that it was not worth the time, money and effort just to study one environment.

Finally, negotiations and discussions have been underway this year to implement a No Take Zone (NTZ) off the East Coast of the Island in order to protect both commercial fish stocks and sensitive species of ecological importance.

So, all in all, the year 2001 was an excellent final year for both Ian and myself. I have been lucky enough to have been the Warden during a five year period of great change; from all the grant aided projects like the jetty construction to exciting interpretation projects as mentioned above. Nevertheless, I know that I have left the new Warden many exciting new projects to sink his teeth into. A new Countryside Stewardship Agreement has been entered into with DEFRA and a Wildlife Enhancement Scheme with English Nature to grant aid future terrestrial management; initial discussions augur well for assistance

with waste management; and funding has been secured to provide interpretation panels to support the 3 Lundy MNR tanks in the new Ilfracombe Aquarium. On meeting Ben it is very apparent that he has fallen under Lundy's spell and I only hope that Ben gets as much out of being the Lundy Warden as I did. Many thanks to all the LFS members who helped and advised me during my term, and I look forward to meeting many of you on the Island in the future as a fellow "grockle"!

LIZA COLE  
November 2002