

LUNDY WARDEN'S REPORT FOR 2003

It hardly seems as though a year has passed since my last annual report but here we are at the end of another busy year on Lundy. With my first season as Warden and the steepest part of the learning curve behind me, I was able to go into 2003 with a new confidence and enthusiasm. As reported last year, two major conservation programmes were underway in the form of the Seabird Recovery Project (or rat eradication) and the designation of a 8km² "No Take Zone" (NTZ) off the east coast. James Roberts provided excellent assistance as this year's Seasonal Warden from May to October and it is a shame for us (if not him) that he now has permanent employment with BTCV and won't be able to return for a second season. The momentum built up by Rod Diömond's work as Ranger (with a lot of help from volunteers) has continued, with an unprecedented area of rhododendron cleared and the footpaths and village area in better shape than ever.

The NTZ designation has brought an end to all potting activity off the east coast, providing important protection from accidental damage to the delicate life forms such as sea fans and other corals found in the lee of the Island. The zoning scheme for the Marine Nature Reserve has been updated in light of the NTZ designation but unfortunately resources for updating interpretative materials were not available this year. This meant that despite the efforts of the Wardens, some visitors were unaware of the new restrictions and a small amount of angling did occur in the area but regular patrols helped to keep this to a minimum. New display panels and leaflets are currently in production and should help raise awareness of the importance of the Marine Reserve and the associated restrictions in the forthcoming season.

2003 was another busy year for diving around Lundy. The majority of divers used local charter boats (or were from local clubs with their own boats) all of whom are familiar with the sites and rules of the reserve and indeed, provide valuable assistance in keeping an eye on the reserve. However, the trend of clubs from all over the country bringing their own RIBs has continued to increase. It is important to ensure that all divers are familiar with any safety information and conservation rules and I try to speak to all groups as they book. Unfortunately the patrol boat suffered a variety of technical problems throughout the summer and it was often impossible for me to get out on the water to patrol the reserve and speak to visiting boat owners on site. It is therefore my pleasure to be able to announce that the old "Lundy Warden" RIB is to be replaced by a younger, faster, cleaner and most importantly, more reliable model for the 2004 season. It is important that all visitors are aware of the rules of the reserve, so the new leaflets

and panels, updated dive guides and the Warden able to spend more time at sea in the forthcoming season should all add up to a better protected reserve.

The Appledore lifeboat had excellent sightings of a basking shark about 4 miles southeast of Lundy on 26 April, a very early record but no more were seen until one on 9 June. A further 5 sightings were reported in August and September - an exceptionally poor year for the species at Lundy. This was matched by an apparent reduction in the number of mackerel and herring, with a marked decrease (from last year) in the big shoals seen feeding at the surface in late summer, although the constant presence of gannets and many dolphin sightings would suggest otherwise. Indeed, 2003 was a bumper year for cetaceans at Lundy with a school of up to 50 common dolphins seen regularly through the summer and autumn as well as occasional harbour porpoises and two separate sightings of Risso's dolphins from the Oldenburg. Numerous sunfish were seen both from the Island and from boats through the summer.

The seals were as visible as ever with one count of over 50 animals at the North End alone and several individuals were regulars on the snorkel safaris. Pupping began in late August and continued through the autumn with one pup being successfully raised near Hell's Gates in the Devil's Kitchen in late October.

Other marine sightings include large numbers of jellyfish in late May and early June including vast shoals of the oceanic species *Pelagia noctiluca*, rarely seen from land but observed for several weeks all around the Island. This gave an unusual opportunity to observe this creature at close hand and several individuals seen whilst snorkelling appeared to be predating small compass jellyfish. As if in response to the NTZ, there have been sightings of crawfish off the east coast reported by divers, including one group of six animals, a very unusual record for this area of what is now a rare but much sought after species. A major study by English Nature into the actual effects of the No Take Zone is due to commence in 2004.

The Seabird Recovery Project baiting programme started as planned in January 2003 and within two months most rats had been killed. There were small numbers surviving by late spring and with the seasonal increase in natural food making it unlikely that further bait would be taken, it was decided to call a temporary break. The Wardens continued to monitor for rat signs at several long term lines of bait stations, fighting through bracken well over six feet high much of the way. It was clear that there were still some rats on the Island although they did not appear to have bred over the summer. However, to ensure the future of the burrow nesting seabirds it was essential to ensure that no rats remained, so the team returned at the end of October with a more palatable bait type. Once the main baiting phase

of the project is complete, the Wardens will continue monitoring for sign of any remaining rats as well as developing quarantine and contingency measures to minimise the chance of predators re-invading in the future. Much of the work was undertaken by volunteers and the project would have never been started, let alone finished without the amazing effort of so many people.

With so few (probably less than 10) rats around during the 2003 breeding season, and those well away from nesting colonies, Manx shearwaters appeared to have successfully fledged chicks. This is the first apparent record of fledging for many years. Although the young were not actually seen, adults were still flying in at night in early September suggesting that they were still feeding young. At the same time birds, presumably fledglings could be heard exercising their wings in dense bracken on the slope below Tibbetts. With much of the Wardens' effort put into monitoring for rat signs, there were no full puffin counts but observation of burrows suggested that there were up to 6 breeding pairs near St Phillip's Stone and none at Jenny's Cove.

On the terrestrial side, Lundy cabbage has had another poor year with an estimated 1603 flowering plants, but there were some encouraging signs for the future. The 50% decrease in flowering plants annually since the peak in 1998 has ended with a slight increase from last year's all time low. Domestic sheep have been kept almost entirely from one stronghold of the cabbage in Millcombe Valley by new fencing erected in March. Early signs are hopeful with a noticeable increase in seedlings in the area behind the fence but increasing numbers of goats are being seen across the Island including this area. The number of rabbits across the Island continues to be very high with an apparent increase in their range up the west coast and centre of the Island. The cabbage species recovery programme team has now resumed rabbit surveys because it appears likely that cabbage success is tied in with rabbit numbers.

A second classified count of the feral mammals in the spring concluded that soays and goats had increased in number from last year (147-220 and 43-59 animals respectively) while the deer population appears to be fairly steady (62-69). No cull was conducted this year, allowing a third consecutive classified count in 2004. This will give a much better understanding of the population dynamics on the Island but with significant damage to the vegetation in some areas, especially by the goats, a full cull is anticipated for autumn 2004.

The dry, hot summer took its toll on the heather and although there were large healthy patches especially around the coastal areas, much was badly browned and failed to flower. This situation was probably not helped by the presence of

heather beetles and increased grazing pressure with the boom in the rabbit population.

Visitors arriving since March have had the chance of discovering more about the history and archaeology of Lundy with the opening of an excellent little museum in the Rocket Shed, opposite the shop. The information panels, designed and produced by the National Trust describe life on the Island from the Bronze Age through to the present day and some of the more robust artefacts ranging from flint tools to a stuffed Victorian gannet are displayed alongside.

Another bumper year for volunteers saw some 160 'vollies' complete a massive 880 workdays on the Island with rhododendrons, footpaths and walls seeing the bulk of the effort as usual. In addition, three new rabbit / sheep exclosures were erected, stock fencing was put up between Millcombe pond and Bramble Villas, saplings were cared for, bracken bashed, sack loads of plastic collected from the Landing Beach and countless other repairs and improvements were carried out. Many thanks to all whom came over to lend a hand through the year.

There is more good news with the old incinerator site finally being razed to the ground and the surrounding dry stone walls put back to their former state, the symbolic end to the old system. All rubbish is now sent off the Island, with a separation / recycling area set up in the farmyard to minimise the amount that has to go to landfill. This is a huge step in the right direction (and only the start of a much larger integrated waste management policy). However, it does take a lot more effort than simply setting fire to unsorted rubbish sacks before pushing them off the cliff and needs the help of everyone coming to the Island to be a real success.

BEN SAMPSON
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