

## LUNDY WARDEN'S REPORT FOR 2006

It has been an incredible year for me. So much has happened that it is hard to believe it is now a year ago since my last report.

Chris Flower joined the team as Ranger on 6 March and has done an excellent job over the last year. He works tirelessly with incredible enthusiasm and has an obvious love for the Island. In fact it is difficult to persuade him to take his days off! Sophie Wheatley joined us as Assistant Warden on 22 April and she has also proved to be an excellent addition to the team on Lundy. The conservation team has had a busy year with a number of projects, including tackling the rhododendron stands. The clearance of this invasive species has been helped by the generous donation of a chipping machine from Natural England and our ever-keen team of volunteers, to whom we are grateful. We were rewarded with an incredible display of Lundy cabbage, the second best year on record!

Over 1,700 visitors participated in Island events during 2006. As well as the usual walks and talks that are on offer all year round, Sophie began deer watches in the autumn which proved to be very successful, rockpool rambles ran from April through to the end of September and snorkel safaris were scheduled from May to September.

In April I began a monthly newsletter entitled 'Letter From Lundy' which is published in the North Devon Gazette and looks back on the wildlife events of the previous month. The article has proved to be a success and is something I am keen to continue.

The media interest this year has been unprecedented. This has included visits from five film crews, radio interviews and numerous journalists. TV programmes in which the Island has been featured have included Sea Watch, The One Show, Turning the Tide, a BBC Special News Report and Nature's Calendar. It looks as though the year 2007 will follow suit, as we already have five media bookings.

The interpretation plan review was completed during 2006 and specific projects have been highlighted for development after approval. Landmark Trust is reviewing the proposals and we wait to hear their response before we can offer it out for further consultation. The new 'Education Plan' is another project that Sophie and I have been working on over the winter. It is hugely important to inspire an interest in the environment and conservation at a young age. The local children are Lundy's future visitors and enthusiasts, and we have a fantastic opportunity to reach out to local schools and encourage environmental education and awareness. Unfortunately due to the logistics of getting to the island we have very few visiting school groups at present. With this in mind we planned two weeks of educational outreach visits during the year. I spent a week on the mainland in November and Sophie did the same in February. Between us we visited fourteen schools and saw over 800 children. Both of these trips were a big success and we received some great feedback. Following on from this I have put together a program of 'Education Days' on Lundy. We have set aside thirteen days during 2007 and we have programmed in Warden led events specifically for school groups. To date we have had four bookings and our first 'Education Day' will be in April.

A number of puffin surveys have been carried out this season. St. Phillip's Stone was the only location where active burrows were recorded. This site was checked regularly and puffin numbers and activity were recorded in order to determine the

number of burrows occupied. The surveys suggest that there were six active burrows at St. Phillip's Stone. Unfortunately no chicks were observed this season so we cannot report on the productivity of the puffin population.

Helen Booker, of the RSPB, visited Lundy in June and September to conduct surveys of the Manx Shearwaters. The survey indicated that there were between thirty and forty pairs at the Old Light colony and an estimated thirty chicks fledged. This shows that there was a high breeding success, which is excellent news and is promising for the future of the colony. There is huge potential for the expansion of these surveys and I am pleased to say that we will be recruiting a volunteer seabird warden to conduct more extensive surveys in 2007. Natural England and RSPB have funded the purchase of a caravan to accommodate a long-term volunteer and the interviews are due to take place this month.

I am sure that most of you are aware that 2006 saw an outbreak of myxomatosis in the rabbit population. This began in February and spread rapidly, gradually moving up the island towards the North End. April's mammal count estimated there was a population of just 5,000 rabbits, compared with 15,000 in 2005. The rabbiters came over to Lundy in October, as scheduled, to assess the population and they saw very few rabbits. The numbers are incredibly low and rabbits have become something of a Lundy rarity. I have not seen a rabbit since August and there have been just four lone sightings since October.

The mammal count in April produced estimates of the feral stock with 125 Soay, 58 Goats and 65 Sika. It is thought that as many as 8 - 10 kids were born after this date and the Sika have since calved. Peter Hamlyn began the annual cull towards the end of September and to date has culled 25 Soays, 30 goats and 15 Sika.

The year 2006 was not a fantastic year for Basking Shark sightings. Only fourteen were recorded this season between June and late August, which I believe is a relatively poor number compared with previous years. Sophie and I were lucky enough to have a close encounter with two sharks from the Warden's boat, the RIB. We were extremely excited by this, and relieved, as in spite of all our efforts this was our only sighting of the year! Cetacean sightings have been regular since April, with over 60 porpoises reported and more than 500 dolphins, both common and bottlenose. During 2007 we shall be staging two events for the National Whale and Dolphin Watch week. Hopefully, with all eyes on the water we should see an increase in the number of marine sightings.

We had hoped to conduct a full survey of the seal population around Lundy during this season. The intention of this survey was to investigate the pupping caves and to do a number of seal counts, but unfortunately, the weather was against us on the spring tides and we were not able to use the RIB. We did manage to conduct a seal count of the East Side of the island in August and counted a total of 120 seals between the Landing Beach and the North East Point. As a partial single count no results or estimation of populations can be made, but with a bit of luck next year's attempts will be more successful.

A young seal pup was found dead in Devil's Kitchen on the 6 October with an injury to it's left flipper. The sea conditions of the preceding days had been particularly harsh and this may have accounted for its demise. On a more positive note, we do have at the moment an unexpected arrival on Lundy. A seal pup was reported on Quarry

and this may have accounted for its demise. On a more positive note, we do have at the moment an unexpected arrival on Lundy. A seal pup was reported on Quarry Beach on 15 February and in spite of being a very late arrival, it appears to be doing well and is gaining weight steadily.

Fortnightly surveys of the activity within the Marine Nature Reserve and the No Take Zone have been conducted throughout the year. Sophie and I have devised a new method of recording the data and next year we shall hope to provide a full report on the activity. There has been no evidence or report of trawling or dredging within the restricted zones. However, there have been several infringements within the No Take Zone. In May a number of illegal pots were recorded within the No Take Zone and these were confiscated by Devon Sea Fisheries Committee. There have been some reports of angling activity within the No Take Zone, although this has only been a handful of incidents. The majority of these incidents have been visiting vessels that were unaware that they were in a No Take Zone, and they were genuinely apologetic once they were informed of the infringement. The Marine Nature Reserve surveys will be continued and are essential for monitoring the activity around the island, but Sophie and I can not have our eyes everywhere all of the time. It is important for the Island visitors and users of the Marine Nature Reserve to communicate any suspicious activity and to be our eyes and ears to ensure we can react to all incidents. In spite of the apparent increase in the number of incidents, I believe much of this can be attributed to an increase in patrols and RIB activity. I am pleased to say that after last year's technical problems with the RIB, it was launched on the 27 April and was in the water for the full season. The RIB was brought in for the final time in September.

The dive season was busy this year with 32 dive groups and over 230 divers between April and October, not including visiting day boats, and we have a healthy number of bookings for 2007 already.

I began this report by saying I had had an incredible year and it certainly has been a year with so many highlights that, in writing this report, I have had to rein myself in. You may be relieved to hear that this is a greatly edited version of the complete story. On this note I end by offering huge thanks to everyone for all their help and advice during my first year on Lundy, with a special mention to all our volunteers, who give their time so generously, and to Natural England for their donation of a weather station.

NICOLA SAUNDERS  
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