

UPDATE ON THE PRODUCTIVITY OF BREEDING ATLANTIC PUFFINS ON LUNDY IN 2009 & 2010

by

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Lundy was declared 'rat free' in 2004, at which time the numbers of Puffins seen on the island had dropped to its lowest ever recorded figure of just five birds. Although regular censuses of these birds have taken place for many years, rat eradication has resulted in a greater emphasis being placed on charting any increase in Puffin numbers (as well as those of Manx Shearwater).

The methodology is by standardised observations of behaviour and counting, and careful examination of the observations recorded by visitors in the sightings logbook kept in the Tavern. As well as an estimate of the numbers of inhabited burrows and hence presumed breeding, colony expansion and chick productivity have also been recorded and/or estimated.

These results from such methods require some judicious interpretation. For example, logbook sightings refer often to birds on the water, which provide encouraging signs but not definitive proof of burrow occupation. Therefore a critical period of a few days in early June is suggested as being key to determining which birds entering burrows are serious contenders for breeding. Following this notion, the numbers seen have shown a healthy increase from four birds in 2007 to 34 in 2010.

Collation of all observations, sightings and other data suggest that the breeding population of Puffins in 2010 was at least 16 pairs. The re-established colony at Jenny's Cove seems to be responsible for much of this, having increased from three pairs in 2009 to 13 in 2010.

Productivity of Puffins was studied at two sites. In 2009, six pairs attempted breeding, with a productivity of 0.5 young per breeding pair, and in 2010 an estimated 16 breeding pairs produced an overall productivity at 0.44. The low productivity may well be due to the influx of inexperienced birds nesting for the first time, although this is conjecture at this stage.

We will continue to devote as much time as possible to improving our knowledge of Puffin breeding on Lundy, and look forward to collecting the logbook data produced by LFS members and other visitors.

A full account on the population, distribution and productivity of Lundy's Puffins will be published in the forthcoming 'Journal of the Lundy Field Society'. Ed.