

# CONSERVATION TEAM REPORT

Dreich would be the word of choice if I were asked to define the island during my first few weeks. Prolonged thick fog, mist and squalls swathed the isle during this unforgettable period, conditions which vetoed Zoë and my plans of exploration and the chance to kick off my Lundy bird list. Even though the wet and windy weather prevailed throughout the winter months and the first part of spring, all-in-all, 2017 was a rather dry year compared to most: 69.95ml below the island average to be precise (1971–2017). Great news for the sandal-clad day-tripper but not so good for some of the island's wildlife and the often pungent staff members when water levels became worryingly low by midsummer.

As the first Skylark erupted into the heavens to signal the start of spring, all plans and preparations were set for what became a very busy season indeed. Thankfully I had some extra heads arrive in early April to accompany me on my road of Wardenship. This came in the form of Nick Herbert who took over the helms of the island strimmer, spray-pack and spade as the island's new Ranger. A short while later the wonderful Vicky Edwards joined us as the year's Assistant Ranger, after she was won over by the island during the February LFS work party. Then, last but not means least, the little but loud Siân Scott from the Valleys arrived in late April as the Lundy's new Assistant Warden.

The Conservation Team does not stop there however! I would like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to everyone and anyone who helped the team out in anyway throughout the year. This includes team *Fratacula* which was composed of the delightful duo of Bethany Pihama and Jack Daniels, who both helped out with the island's biosecurity and seabird surveys during the summer months. Likewise, a massive thank you to all the Ranger cronies (Callum Girvan, Natalie Harrison, Joe Reynolds and Ian Davidson), all of the boat, island and shore office staff for their endless support and devotion to the isle – in particular Emily Trapnell, Zoë Barton and Chloë Lofthouse for keeping our lovely Landing Bay beach clean of plastic waste. Then we have all of the bird ringers, researchers, students, visitors and all the lovely folk who entered data into the LFS logbook to acknowledge, all of which have helped us understand our island and its wildlife that little bit more. Lundy thanks you all!

Lest we not forget the delightful LFS and National Trust work party volunteers, whose enthusiasm and dedication to the island always exceeds our expectations. A total of three LFS work parties occurred throughout 2017, in June, October and February, the latter of which was unfortunately cut short by four days due to prolonged foggy weather. The parties helped out with a huge variety of tasks, including annual bracken surveys, Rhododendron searches, the clearing of Millcombe pond, and fixing up the allotments, as well as that spontaneous 'day-of-hay' clearance, a gift left scattered throughout the village by the unyielding storm Ophelia. Two National Trust work parties also joined us in March and October for a week at a time. During their stay the team also helped out with Rhododendron seedling searches, some tree planting and the upkeep of the island's allotments.

## Monitoring

I was lucky enough to join Katie Arnold from the Environment Agency and the Severn Guardian team on a day of grab sampling within Lundy's Marine Conservation Zone. The team also carried out drop-down video surveys to accompany these samples, with the goal of finding out how Lundy's surrounding marine habitats and species composition has changed within the MCZ since the last survey in 2012 (as well as the data from previous surveys), if at all. Fingers crossed we'll start receiving some of the results from this very exciting project at some point in 2018.

The quadrennial cliff-nesting seabird census work and Manx Shearwater playback surveys were also carried out in 2017. Although there were some complications with equipment and weather conditions throughout the study period, the surveyors did extremely well regardless and the



*Warden Dean Jones and Assistant Warden Siân Scott pictured in the Devil's Kitchen, where a series of Rockpool Rambles were held through the year. Image: Keith Hiscock.*

preliminary results look promising for the majority of the island's marine avifauna. A huge thank you to Peter Slader, David Price, AJ, Helen Booker and the rest of the RSPB and Natural England teams for battling through the downpours and harassment from the midges!

Annual productivity monitoring was carried out as usual, ending with good results for our Puffins and Guillemots but not so good for our Kittiwakes, particularly within the Threequarter Wall buttress site. Results can be found in the bird section of this report.

Our hugely important monthly biosecurity checks were carried out as usual, thankfully with no signs of any rats or mice being recorded in 2017. We did however have one scare from a couple staying in Brambles West, who were adamant that they had seen a big furry rat rustling within the undergrowth outside the building. Luckily for us this sighting was more than likely a young rabbit, but a poison grid and camera traps were put in place just to be safe. A huge thank you to Helen Booker (RSPB) for her continued support and for all her hard work producing the island's Biosecurity Plan, and to Karen Varnham (RSPB) for taking the time to look at all the problem poo sent via the Lundy postal service.

A biosecurity workshop was also carried out on the island, fronted by Karen who used some of the left-over funding from the Shiant's LIFE project to run a series of workshops for various island/reserve managers and conservation staff from around the country. The course had a lot of interest and included members of staff from Brownsea, Skomer, the Shiant's, the Scilly isles and the Farnes. The workshop involved working through a number of presentations and exercises in the comfort of Millcombe House, as well as a rather blustery day in the field with myself.

After a slow start to the season due to Nick Herbert having to go off to obtain his pesticide ticket, things picked up in the summer regarding our Rhododendron eradication project. A total of 3,772 plants were treated in 2017, most of which were found within section 12 (just south of the Terrace on the east coast) – unsurprising as this was the last area to be cleared of mature regrowth. Only nine flowering plants were found in 2017, all removed before seeding stage. Angus Tillotson and the ropeworks team also visited the island on two dates to treat plants on the East Side cliffs.

Following the existing bracken management plan, Nick tackled the bracken across South West field, Ackland's moor and Middle Park in late summer. This is the second consecutive year this has occurred in these areas so fingers crossed we will start seeing reduced coverage of bracken during 2018 survey.

A huge thank you to Roger & Rosy Key and Steve Compton for again carrying out the annual Lundy Cabbage surveys and for their dedication and enthusiasm towards this long-running project. The total number of Lundy Cabbage in flower in early June 2017 was about 6,800 plants, a 57% increase since 2016, with by far the greatest increases in the sub-populations at the extremes of the plant's range in the south and north of the island. The estimated total is 30% higher than the running average figure over the last 24 years. The team's very rough estimate of the overall number of plants, including those not in flower, was around 50,000 plants. The endemic Lundy Weevil *Ceutorhynchus pallipes* was found in abundance, but unfortunately the team was probably too early to see more than a single individual of the often elusive Lundy Cabbage Flea Beetle *Psylliodes luridipennis*.

Lundy's rabbit population was nearly completely wiped out quite early in the season, including the South Light warrens which were thought to be isolated enough to avoid infection of what we believe was Myxomatosis. By the early summer you would have been very lucky to have seen a rabbit at all unless you were out at night with a torch. Some animals held on around Quarter

Wall, Threequarter Wall and below the North Light and by the end of the year were seemingly starting to recuperate, with increased sightings towards the end of 2017.

Peter Hamlyn and his team were over for a total of three weeks during 2017 in order to count and cull our semi-wild stock. The very poor weather at times prevented the group from getting out but they still managed to take a good number of animals. Results can be found in the Mammal section of this report.

### **Education, interpretation and events**

A total of ten groups from six different primary schools visited throughout the season, along with students from five different universities. The kids, students and accompanying staff were all wonderful and both Siân and I had a superb time getting to know everybody and to have the opportunity to teach them all about the wonders of Lundy. Special thanks to all the volunteers from the LFS for helping with the school visits in September, in particular Frances Stuart.

With the support of the LFS (namely Simon Dell, Frances Stuart and Grant Sherman), guided walks occurred on most boat days, mainly around the south end of the island. On longer days/non-boat days, walks to Jenny's Cove to see the Puffins, or along the east coast on days of westerly gales, took place. The 'Above and Below the Waves' illustrated talk had a re-vamp and, similar to the walks, were given on every Ilfracombe boat day.

A few special talks throughout the season included Simon Dell's delightful 'Lundy through time', Grant Sherman's Guillemot surveys and results, André Coutanche's 'The History of Lundy in 30 minutes' and 'A Little Kingdom: The Harman family's Lundy', and finally Ben Brownless did a superb talk on the Battle of Kohima. If you would like to do an educational talk yourself, please get in touch.

We had a number of Rockpool Rambles at the start of the season, followed by 28 hugely popular snorkel safaris days. A huge thank you to all who helped out with shore support on busy days and to receptionist Shelly Sherman for helping with bookings.

We also had some very popular special events, including 'World Seabird Day' which was aimed at raising awareness of the current problems our seabirds and the marine environment are facing. This involved taking visitors on a guided walk to see the Puffins in Jenny's Cove, as well as a Manx Shearwater night walk! In the autumn we also held two highly successful fungi forays led by John Hedger and Mandy Dee.

Siân has set up an Instagram page which we are updating frequently with photographs of the island, its wildlife and staff – an easy and enjoyable way to get your Lundy fix! Why not give us a follow?

With my Lundy bird list sitting at 118 species for the year, a cloak of trepidation and excitement for the upcoming season looms overhead. What wondrous wildlife encounters await me come the turn of the year? Only time will tell!

Hope to see you all at some point through the season!

All the very best,

DEAN WOODFIN JONES  
Lundy Warden  
June 2018