

# BIRD RINGING ON LUNDY IN 2017

by

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The 2017 ringing total of 3254 birds was much higher than in 2016, with improved coverage and better weather conditions in spring helping to boost numbers. Ringers targeted migrants during three weeks in spring and six weeks in autumn. Three weeks in May and early June were spent continuing the long-term study of breeding Wheatears, with some night work on Manx Shearwaters also at this time. Shearwaters were targeted during two and a half weeks in August and September.

In all, 44 different species were caught, with seven reaching three-figure totals: Blackcap (668), Goldcrest (479), Willow Warbler (463), Manx Shearwater (363), Swallow (323), Chiffchaff (222) and Chaffinch (100). The rise in Blackcap numbers has been remarkable, with the 2017 total bettered only in 2012 and the average for the last ten years being higher than any year in the 20th century. Goldfinches have also been doing very well in recent years, with an average of 48 birds ringed annually over the last 20 years but just seven per year in the preceding 20. In contrast, Greenfinch annual averages have dropped from 23 in 1998-2007 to two in 2008-17. Both of these changes could relate to the popularity of feeding garden birds in the UK, which has probably improved Goldfinch survival rates while contributing to the spread of the disease Trichomonosis in Greenfinches. In most other species, changing ringing totals are probably largely explained by variations in ringing effort and short-term population fluctuations caused by factors such as winter weather conditions.

The main highlights among the unexpected species were three Hawfinches that were part of the exceptional influx of these impressive birds into Britain from the Continent in autumn 2017, and a Nightingale. A Water Rail, 16 Firecrests, 6 Long-tailed Tits, 4 Yellow-browed Warblers and a Ring Ouzel were also noteworthy. Nineteen Storm Petrels were caught, in circumstances that tie in with an apparent increase in the newly established breeding population on Lundy. A complete list of the year's ringing totals is shown in the table below.

The Society has begun a partnership with Imperial College, London, in which students analyse Lundy ringing data as a project for their Masters degree. In 2017, a student started work on the records of almost 10,000 Chaffinch captures from 1972 onwards, comparing Lundy's resident birds with migrants.

## **Manx Shearwaters**

During an early check of the main colony at the end of March, four new and five retrap adults were found. In late May and early June, 91 new adults and 91 previously ringed birds were caught, then a further 147 new and 63 retrapped adults in late August and September. Two recently fledged young and 119 chicks were also ringed in the autumn.

Of the recaptured birds, 16 had originally been ringed as chicks, and their ages ranged from two to twelve years old, with four- and five-year-olds being the most numerous. This fits with the ages at which most shearwaters are thought to pair and start breeding.

One of the birds originally caught as adults was ringed as far back as 2004, and there were others from every year since 2006. Several of the older rings were difficult to decipher after years

spent in sea water, so it was useful to have an opportunity to replace them with more modern rings, made of a harder alloy.

In May a pair of shearwaters were found to have laid in one of the nest-boxes installed for the species in 2016. They went on to rear their chick successfully, and all three birds were ringed during the season, with the prospect of following their life stories very closely.

Four shearwaters, all ringed as adults, were found dead. One was predated by a Peregrine on Lundy and one by a Great Black-backed Gull on Skokholm Island, Pembrokeshire. The other two were also found on Skokholm but it was not possible to tell how they had died. They were ringed as long ago as 1996 and 1987. In those days any shearwaters attempting to breed on Lundy would have encountered problems with rats. So they would tend to move elsewhere to breed successfully, and Skokholm is the large colony nearest to Lundy.

### **Wheatears**

The Wheatear RAS project continued, with three weeks of ringing and observation in late May and early June. Fiftyone breeding birds were newly colour-ringed, and 48 birds colour-ringed in previous years were re-sighted. One was from 2012, one from 2013, two from 2014, thirteen from 2015 and 31 from 2016.

Since some colour-ringed Wheatears have been missed in one year but seen in the next, past survival estimates need to be re-calculated. They currently stand at 62% from 2013 to 2014, 56% from 2014 to 2015, and 44% from 2015 to 2016. The figure for 2016 to 2017 is already 61% and this will probably need upward revision in the future. This suggests that conditions for migration and wintering in Africa were better than usual.

The minimum number of breeding females present in the study area was 53. This indicates the highest number of pairs recorded there to date, and was used to produce an estimate for the whole island of 121 pairs.

For the first time, a colour-ringed Wheatear was reported away from Lundy. A male ringed in 2015 was seen on Guernsey in the Channel Islands on 13th March. He had completed the last leg of his northward migration to Lundy by 24th March, when he was seen back on his breeding territory. Two other males were noteworthy because they had been ringed as nestlings on Lundy in 2016 and returned to breed in the study area.

Many thanks to all observers who reported colour-ringed birds before and after the main study period, adding to our knowledge of the birds' life histories. Any 2018 records will be much appreciated.

### **Recoveries and Controls**

As well as the Manx Shearwaters and Wheatear described above, ten other ringed birds showed movements to or from Lundy in 2017.

Other seabird movements included a Storm Petrel, caught at night near North Light, which had been ringed at The Lizard in 2016; and the Lesser Black-backed Gull, colour-ringed as a chick on Lundy in 1995, was seen again at the site where it winters regularly on the southwest coast of France.

There were some rapid movements shown by Passerines in spring, with a Chiffchaff arriving from Land's End in five days, a Reed Warbler arriving from the Isles of Scilly in two days and a

Sedge Warbler moving to Gloucestershire in two days. Two other Sedge Warblers caught on Lundy in spring had originally been ringed in Dorset and France. In autumn, a Swallow reached the Channel Islands in two days.

A record involving a Long-tailed Tit was remarkable for several reasons. It was ringed on Lundy, where very few have ever been seen or caught, in spring 2016. The ring was found in a Peregrine pellet on Lundy's west coast. The habitats, sizes and behaviour of these two species are so different that an encounter between them would seem to be highly unlikely. Perhaps the Long-tailed Tit was attempting to return to the mainland and was therefore particularly exposed to predation but, even so, Peregrines usually target much larger prey.

Full details of all these ringing recoveries are listed below.

**Manx Shearwater** EX17685 – ringed as an adult on Lundy, 27.4.11. Found freshly dead (predated by Great Black-backed Gull) on Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, 12.8.17. (2,299 days; 74 km; 325°).

**Manx Shearwater** EX74128 – ringed as an adult on Lundy, 29.8.11 and retrapped on 30.7.13 and 1.9.16. Found freshly dead on Lundy, predated by Peregrine, 12.7.17.

**Manx Shearwater** FC93323 – ringed as an adult on Lundy, 27.6.1996. Found dead (ring and leg only) on Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, 16.4.17. (7,598 days; 74 km; 325°).

**Manx Shearwater** FR86417 – ringed as an adult on Lundy, 20.5.1987. Found dead (ring only) on Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, 21.6.17. (10,990 days; 74 km; 325°).

**Storm Petrel** 2726021 – ringed as an adult at Hot Point, The Lizard, Cornwall, 6.7.16. Controlled on Lundy, 24.8.17. (414 days; 139 km; 16°).

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** colour-ring: blue, with white L, on left leg; metal on right – ringed as a pullus on Lundy, 25-29.6.95. Seen at Courant de Mimizan, Landes, FRANCE, 27 & 28.1.17. (7884-7888 days; 814 km; 162°).

**Long-tailed Tit** HRC365 – ringed as an adult on Lundy, 3.4.16. Ring found in a Peregrine pellet on Lundy, 12.7.17.

**Swallow** S218358 – ringed as a first-year bird on Lundy, 14.9.17. Controlled at Longis Reserve, Alderney, CHANNEL ISLANDS, 16.9.17. (2 days; 240 km; SE, 133°).

**Chiffchaff** KDY004 – ringed as a second-year bird at Nanjizal, Lands End, Cornwall, 22.4.17. Controlled on Lundy, 27.4.17. (5 days; 144 km; 31°).

**Reed Warbler** S327850 – ringed as an adult at Porth Hellick, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, 18.4.17. Controlled on Lundy, 20.4.17 and 22.4.17. (2 and 4 days; 180 km; 40°).

**Sedge Warbler** D995351 – ringed as a first-year bird at Squire's Down, Stalbridge, Dorset, 1.9.16. Controlled on Lundy, 1.5.17. (242 days; 163 km; 278°).

**Sedge Warbler** Z981823 – ringed as an adult on Lundy, 20.4.17. Controlled at Hasfield Ham, Gloucestershire, 22.4.17. (2 days; 188 km; 63°).

**Sedge Warbler** Paris 7502526 – ringed as a first-year bird at Tour aux Moutons, Donges, Loire-Atlantique, FRANCE. 18.8.15. Controlled on Lundy, 20.4.17. (611 days; 468 km; 337°).

**Wheatear** Z660128 – ringed and colour-ringed as a breeding adult male on Lundy, 3.6.15. Bird with same unique colour-ring combination seen at Pulias, Guernsey, Channel Islands, 13.3.17. (649 days; 244 km; 142°). Then seen on Lundy from 24.3.17 to 4.6.17.

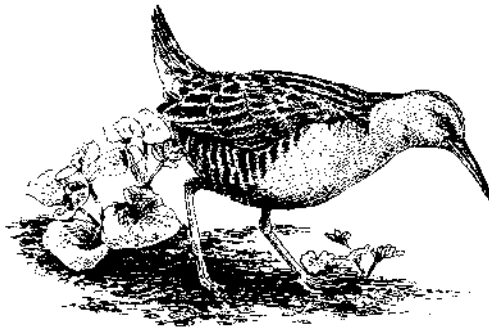
**Chaffinch** Z981660 – ringed as a first year female on Lundy, 25.10.16. Found dying (hit window) at Lifton, Devon, 12.11.17. (383 days; 64 km; 155°).

**Goldfinch** S218196 – ringed as a juvenile on Lundy, 11.9.17. Controlled at Buttercombe Barton, West Down, Devon, 13.11.17. (63 days; 36 km; 91°).

## LUNDY RINGING TOTALS 2017

Manx Shearwater	(119)	363	Song Thrush	23
Storm Petrel		19	Redwing	44
Water Rail		1	Spotted Flycatcher	5
Goldcrest		479	Robin	35
Firecrest		16	Nightingale	1
Sand Martin		1	Pied Flycatcher	9
Swallow		323	Redstart	7
House Martin		4	Whinchat	1
Long-tailed Tit		6	Stonechat	5
Yellow-browed Warbler		4	Wheatear	(14) 66
Chiffchaff		222	Duncock	13
Willow Warbler		463	House Sparrow	11
Blackcap		668	Pied Wagtail	2
Garden Warbler		9	Meadow Pipit	15
Lesser Whitethroat		3	Chaffinch	100
Whitethroat		37	Hawfinch	3
Grasshopper Warbler		15	Bullfinch	1
Sedge Warbler		80	Greenfinch	1
Reed Warbler		4	Linnet	19
Wren		31	Lesser Redpoll	2
Ring Ouzel		1	Goldfinch	62
Blackbird		36	Siskin	44
			<b>Total</b>	<b>3,254</b>

Numbers in brackets indicate pulli (included in the main totals).  
Number of species: 44



*Water Rail by Mike Langman from 'The Birds of Lundy'*