

# BIRD RINGING ON LUNDY IN 2018

by

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## Introduction

In total, 2724 birds were ringed in 2018. In spring, ringers were on the island catching migrants for a week in late March and two and a half weeks in late April and early May. Coverage focusing on Wheatears consisted of three weeks in late May and early June, then Manx Shearwaters were the primary target for two and a half weeks from late August to mid-September, when early autumn migrants were also ringed. Migrants were then the main focus for the following two weeks, and again for four days in late October and a week in mid-November. Even though ringing coverage was similar to that in 2017, catches were reduced by spells of poor weather early and late in the season.

As in 2017, Blackcap topped the totals list, with 563 ringed. Manx Shearwater work was very productive, with a record total of 521. Swallow (461), Chiffchaff (185), Willow Warbler (325) and Goldfinch (161) also reached three figures. Goldcrest numbers vary greatly between years, with survival rates and breeding success highly dependent on weather conditions, and their 2018 numbers were less than a quarter of 2017's.

Other noteworthy totals included 37 Storm Petrels, with increasing numbers thought to be colonising Lundy as breeders; and 21 Dunnocks, the highest number since 2003 and a welcome rise after a run of lean years for the local population. Longer-term population trends can be difficult to assess because of changes in ringing effort and catching techniques, but several species have shown alarming declines as a percentage of Lundy's annual catches. Comparing the earliest available complete records, from 1972-81, with those of 2009-18, Garden Warblers have dropped from 1.5 to 0.2%, Spotted Flycatchers from 2.8 to 0.3%, Pied Flycatchers from 1.5 to 0.1% and Redstarts from 0.7 to 0.1%. These figures support other evidence that long-distance summer migrants have been facing very difficult times. Over the same period the main winners have been Manx Shearwater (1.7 to 11.8%), Blackcap (3.3 to 16.5%) and Goldfinch (0.1 to 2.1%), reflecting local or national population increases.

Among the 45 species caught, the most unusual nationally was a Pallas's Warbler, the fourth to be ringed on Lundy, which was mist-netted in late October along with five Yellow-browed Warblers. In more local terms, the tenth Great Spotted Woodpecker and twelfth Reed Bunting to be ringed on Lundy were also noteworthy. A complete list of the year's ringing totals is shown in the table below.

## Manx Shearwaters

Since rat eradication, regular shearwater ringers have become used to visiting the breeding colonies at night and gaining an immediate impression that numbers have risen since the previous year. 2018 was no exception, and the record numbers ringed included 361 chicks. Seven recently-fledged young and 153 adults were also newly ringed. A further 98 adults had been ringed previously, and these included ten originally ringed as chicks, the oldest of which was from 2009. The same ringed pair that raised a chick in a nest box in 2017 laid in it again,



*A Manx Shearwater chick – a record 361 chicks were ringed in 2018.  
© Rebecca Taylor*

but sadly their breeding attempt failed this time. Other recaptured adults included one from 2008 and several birds from each year from 2010 onwards.

Two Lundy-ringed shearwaters were found alive and well at the Skokholm colony in Pembrokeshire. One had been ringed as a chick in 2007 and previously recorded on Skokholm in 2016; its age and repeated presence suggest it has become a Skokholm breeder. The other, ringed as a full-grown bird in 2013, could have been a prospecting pre-breeder at that time, so its natal colony is unknown.

Sadly two young birds were reported dead on beaches in southern Brazil. One was found just 44 days after being ringed on Lundy as a chick, so it had already achieved much in that short time, making its first flight, learning to fish and migrating to the South Atlantic, all without parental guidance. As reported for the three birds found in the same area in 2015, it probably encountered extreme weather conditions that it was too inexperienced to survive.

The second, a delayed report from 2017, had survived for a year after fledging. Its finding location is of interest because Manx Shearwaters do not visit colonies in their first two years, so little is known of their migrations in that time. It was also the subject of an autopsy by a Brazilian research group. It seems that the immediate cause of death was drowning, but that it had been weak because of an infection. There was also a short length of plastic cord in its stomach. These two birds highlight the fact that Lundy's shearwaters depend on global weather systems and the general health of vast areas of ocean for their survival, not just good local breeding conditions.

## **Wheatears**

The long-term RAS (Retrapping Adults for Survival) project on Wheatears continued, with three weeks of trapping, ringing and observation of breeding birds in late May and early June, to study their rates of survival on migration and while wintering in West Africa. Thirty-one Wheatears were newly colour-ringed, and 56 birds colour-ringed in previous years were re-sighted.



*A male Wheatear, colour-ringed for the long-term study of Lundy's breeding population.*  
© Rebecca Taylor.

Observers can sometimes fail to see a colour-ringed bird in one year but find it in subsequent ones. Two such Wheatears were ringed in 2015, not seen in the next two years but retrapped in 2018. So they must have been alive in 2016 and '17, and past survival estimates need to be re-calculated. These now work out at 62% from 2013 to '14, 56% from 2014 to '15, 46% from 2015 to '16 and 62% for 2016 to '17. The figure for 2017 to '18 currently stands at 55% but may need upward revision in the future.

There was a difficult start to the breeding season, with some early arrivals facing severe weather. A female, originally colour-ringed in 2014 and seen each year since, was photographed in snow in March but not seen after that. There was more variation in laying dates and changing of territories than usual. However, at least 53 breeding females were present in the study area and extrapolation from this figure gives an island population estimate of 114 pairs.

Thanks as always 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 further records will be much appreciated.

### **Recoveries and Controls**

In addition to the Manx Shearwaters described above, eleven other ringed birds showed movements to or from Lundy in 2018. Information has not yet been received on two French-ringed Storm Petrels caught on Lundy in August and September 2018, but news has finally arrived of a Spanish-ringed Blackcap controlled on Lundy in 2012: it had been ringed in its first autumn the year before, presumably while on migration.

As well as the French birds mentioned above, three more ringed Storm Petrels were caught. Remarkably, two were caught on the same night on Skokholm Island, Pembrokeshire, and recaptured on Lundy, also on the same night, a few weeks later. Was this chance or do they have a long-term association? The third was ringed on the Pembrokeshire mainland just 5 km from Skokholm, in 2014.

A Lesser Black-backed Gull that was colour-ringed as a chick on Lundy in 1995 has been seen regularly on the southwest coast of France in past winters, and was back there early in 2018. Another colour-ring sighting concerned an Oystercatcher that was seen on Lundy in June but was in Pembrokeshire early and late in the year.

Well-travelled finches, ringed on Lundy during previous autumn migrations, included Chaffinches found in Sweden and Wales and a Siskin found in Germany, while a Goldfinch that may well have been raised on Lundy was in Dorset the following spring.

Details of all these birds are given below.

**Manx Shearwater** EF98315 – ringed as a pullus on Lundy, 7.9.07. Controlled on Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, 10.4.18. (3868 days; distance: 74 km; bearing: NW, 325°). Previously controlled on Skokholm, 18.8.16.

**Manx Shearwater** EX74428 – ringed as a full-grown bird on Lundy, 6.6.13. Controlled on Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, 19.5.18. (1808 days; 74 km; NW, 325°).

**Manx Shearwater** EZ59699 – ringed as a pullus on Lundy, 13.9.18. Found dead at Praia Caminho das Conchas, Sao Joao da Barra, BRAZIL, 27.10.18. (44 days; 8851 km; SSW, 204°).

**Storm Petrel** 2637071 – ringed as a full-grown bird at Wooltack Point, Marloes, Pembrokeshire, 1.7.14. Controlled on Lundy, 1.9.18. (1523 days; 72 km; SSE, 147°).

**Storm Petrel** 2740238 – ringed as a full-grown bird on Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, 19.7.18. Controlled on Lundy, 1.9.18. (44 days; 70 km; SE, 144°).

**Storm Petrel** 2740263 – ringed as a full-grown bird on Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, 19.7.18. Controlled on Lundy, 1.9.18. (44 days; 70 km; SE, 144°).

**Oystercatcher** FJ06160 – ringed as an adult (aged 2+ years) on the Gann Estuary, Dale, Pembrokeshire, 17.2.18. Identified by colour-rings at Gannets Bay, Lundy, 6.6.18. (109 days; 68 km; SSE, 149°). Also seen on the Gann Estuary on 2.4.18, 11.11.18 and 10.12.18.

**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, 7.1.18. (8228-8232 days; 814 km; SSE, 162°). Also seen at the same site on 25.1.18, 2.2.18, 13.2.18 and 18.2.18.

**Chiffchaff** KEH251 – ringed as a second-calendar-year bird on Lundy, 20.4.18. Controlled on Great Saltee Island, Wexford, IRELAND, 28.4.18. (8 days; 171 km; NW, 309°).

**Willow Warbler** KEH410 – ringed as a full-grown bird on Lundy, 22.4.18. Controlled on Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, 26.4.18. (4 days; 74 km; NW, 325°).

**Chaffinch** D184039 – ringed as a first-year male on Lundy, 20.10.12. Found freshly dead at Kungsgarden, Sandviken, Gävleborg, SWEDEN, 25.4.18. (2013 days; 1686 km; NE, 52°).

**Chaffinch** Z420852 – ringed as a first-year female on Lundy, 4.10.15. Found dead at Blaencelyn, Llandysul, Ceredigion, 22.7.18. (1022 days; 111 km; N, 9°).

**Goldfinch** S218151 – ringed as a juvenile bird on Lundy, 25.8.17, and retrapped there on 11 and 16.9.17. Controlled at Littlesea, Weymouth, Dorset, 13.4.18. (231 days; 165 km; ESE, 113°).

**Siskin** ABB7174 – ringed as a first-year male on Lundy, 26.10.17. Found freshly dead (hit glass) at Nortorf, Schleswig-Holstein, GERMANY, 10.3.18. (135 days; 1031 km; ENE, 72°).

**Ringling / recovery details received in 2018**

**Manx Shearwater** EZ36409 – ringed as a pullus on Lundy, 4.9.16. Found freshly dead at Trapiche, Penha, Santa Catarina, BRAZIL, 30.8.17. (360 days; 9688 km; SSW, 207°).

**Blackcap** 1L27285 – ringed as a first-year male at Finca Castillejos, Guadalajara, SPAIN, 16.10.11. Controlled on Lundy, 28.9.12. (348 days; 1180 km; N, 354°).

**LUNDY RINGING TOTALS 2018**

Manx Shearwater	(361)	521	Yellow-browed Warbler	5
Storm Petrel		37	Chiffchaff	185
Sparrowhawk		1	Willow Warbler	325
Woodpigeon		1	Blackcap	563
Great Spotted Woodpecker		1	Garden Warbler	4
Goldcrest		96	Whitethroat	7
Firecrest		5	Sedge Warbler	26
Skylark	(3)	4	Reed Warbler	3
Sand Martin		2	Wren	11
Swallow		461	Blackbird	14
House Martin		7	Song Thrush	6
Pallas's Warbler		1		

Numbers in brackets indicate pulli (included in the main totals).

Number of species: 45