

CONSERVATION TEAM REPORT

Dean Woodfin Jones (Lundy Warden)

Fabulous flocks of wintering Kittiwakes foraging for a meal within the island's No Take Zone, perfectly camouflaged Woodcock nestled in the undergrowth awaiting the evening spoils in Tillage Field, male Skylarks periodically erupting into the crisp blue winter sky to signal the oncoming season. Yes, it's January once again. Where did last year go?!

As Lundy enters a new decade and 'shuts down' for most of the month of January, we here in the Conservation Team are taking the opportunity to reminisce about yet another spectacular and eventful year on our magical isle. What truly fortunate folk we all are to live in such an exciting environment full of remarkable wildlife – above and below the waves – interesting and considerate people, and a never-ending schedule of exciting events and goings-on.

Some of the best of these for me in 2019 were ... that beautiful day Zoë and I nearly choked on clouds of flying ants as we sat agape with amazement at the sight of a mammoth Minke Whale cruising past North Light ... those two hours I spent lying on the main track surrounded by sheep 'mines', as I watched the visiting Black-headed Bunting feed just metres away ... those six weeks with the spectacular Cornwall Seal Group and Research Trust and their didactic Grey Seal skeleton 'Septimus' ... each and every time I delved into the idyllic waters of the island's Marine Protected Area, particularly that afternoon where we were joined by a monster Barrel Jellyfish ... and the day the new embroidered banners were hung proudly in the church – all of which illustrate a love for the island and the unbreakable community spirit here in North Devon. I could go on and on...!

One very special event to mention was the Golden Anniversary of the running of Lundy by the Landmark Trust and the signing of its new 50-year lease. No longer must visitors jump from wash-tub tenders to reach the island's shores, witness invasive Rhododendron pushing out island endemics, read of rats eating unborn burrow-nesting seabirds, buildings lying roofless and unloved, or destructive fishing methods blighting our seas. It is truly incredible how Lundy has transformed and prospered in what is really a short period of time in the grand scheme of things. Yet despite all this change, Lundy still retains its unfathomable charm, mystery and ecological and educational importance – and it's not done yet!

2019 was another very busy year for finding and treating Rhododendron. Thankfully the team had ample help from both National Trust and Lundy Field Society work parties, which located a total of 1,482 plants (compared to 7,786 in 2018). Of these 1,252 were along the East Sidelands, particularly around the Terrace area which was the last section of coast where the extensive Rhody stands were cut and burnt. On top of the island, 230 plants were found and treated and four flowering plants removed before setting seed. It is incredibly encouraging to see this huge reduction in the number of young plants present on the island, illustrating that everyone's hard work will continue to improve the natural biodiversity of the east coast and the continued re-establishment of our endemic Lundy Cabbage. A massive thank you to everyone who has helped out with this ambitious project over the years; together we have found and removed from the island a total of 87,532 plants since 2011! A huge and, to date, highly successful effort.

Continuing on the flora front, 2019 saw an increased effort in planting numerous young trees and shrubs in Millcombe, mainly blackthorn, willow, alder and oak. After identifying, numbering and carrying out condition assessments on all the trees in the valley, it was evident that quite a few of the old trees were reaching the end of their days. Therefore to ensure a succession of plants that support the incredible diversity of insects and bird life which rely on Millcombe for food, shelter and a place to breed, 200 young trees were planted in the winter of 2019. In addition,

another 250 plants are currently growing in our nursery, ready to go out in 2020. All being well, we will be enjoying the wonders of Millcombe for years to come, and – if we are lucky – we may even see the return to the valley of some of the island's lost breeding birds, such as Song Thrush.

The massively important biosecurity effort continued with the monthly checking of 70 rodent monitoring stations across the island. Luckily for us and the island's wildlife there were no confirmed sightings of rats or mice in 2019 – though we did have one scare late in the autumn of a potential mouse at North Lighthouse. Thankfully, after four weeks of monitoring, there were no signs of a rodent having sneaked onto the island. Instead we got loads of poo, teeth marks and camera-trap footage of our endearing native Pygmy Shrews.

Once again I'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who gave their time and energy to the island in 2019. In particular, I must single out the fabulous work of the Lundy Ambassadors, who helped enormously with so many guided walks, outreach talks and school groups over the season. Then there were the National Trust and Lundy Field Society working parties which assisted with some of the island's larger and more physical tasks, such as clearing Brambles Pond, fixing fences, Rhody searching, and shifting all the granite and old Rhody brush up to the Terrace for the purpose of fixing fallen walls and for keeping visitors warm in the Marisco Tavern throughout the winter! Then of course there are the Conservation Team Volunteers who all worked their socks off to help with the running of the island and with the annual monitoring of Lundy's special inhabitants, namely our charming little Puffins and portly seal pups. I tip my tatty hat to you all!

The Lundy Conservation Team in 2019. Clockwise from left: Edmund Goody, Nick Herbert, Dean Jones, Alex Sydenham, Caitlin Worsley, Siân Cann and Rosie Parsons (photo: Zoë Barton).





*Team Seal (l-r): Caitlin Cunningham, Samantha Nieto, Dean Jones and Rosie Ellis
(photo: Zoë Barton).*

And last but by no means least, a huge thank you to the little lady from the Valleys, Siân Cann (former Assistant Warden) for the spectacular job she did on developing the St Helen's Centre project, and to Nick Herbert (former Ranger) for looking after and maintaining the island's infrastructure, footpaths and drystone walls, treating problem plants and managing work parties. Lundy wishes you both all the very best with your new lives over there on the big island.

Following on from Siân – for those who have yet to meet her – is our new Education Officer, Rosie Ellis. Rosie came to Lundy after working as an Assistant Beach Ranger with the National Trust in Woolacombe. Since she arrived here in late August, Rosie has excelled well beyond expectations, very much delving full throttle into her new role and Lundy life – in fact, so much so that you'd think she has always been here!

At the time of writing, the days are now starting to lengthen, meaning the start of the 2020 sailing season is not far away. After her well-deserved break, our beloved *MS Oldenburg* will shortly be back out on the high seas, delivering lots of lovely goodies to keep us fuelled through the rest of the winter months. The Conservation Team are very busy too, planning for the upcoming season, finishing off the island's annual reports, leading visitors on guided walks, carrying out important biosecurity measures, and helping plan Lundy's first Marine Festival. 2020 is already shaping up to be a very busy and exciting year – hope to see you all there!

All the very best.