

THREE BIRDS NEW TO LUNDY

CATTLE EGRET

Dean Woodfin Jones

Since my arrival on Lundy in the winter of 2017, I have been birding nearly every day in the hope that at some point I'd be fortunate enough to find a first for the island. Luckily for me, on 24th March I had the whole day off from office duties so I thought I'd make the most of the good weather and spend the day walking around the entire length of Lundy's coastline in search of birds.

Here I hoped to see some nice migrants such as Ring Ouzel and Black Redstart between the buttresses and bays, as well as seabirds returning to breeding ledges and, if lucky, a few colour-ringed Wheatears back from their wintering ground in sub-Saharan Africa.

I had got up before sunrise, awaking to a day of chilly north-easterlies, beautiful clear skies and excellent visibility. With my island wrap-arounds, I usually start at Castle Parade and make my way along the west with the light behind me, then back along the east as the sun shifts overhead.

As I approached the end of the Parade I noticed a medium-sized white heron sheltering from the winds on the rocks behind the Lametor. I remember saying to myself, "wow a Little Egret, what a smashing Lundy scarcity to start the day!". I had seen Little Egret in pretty much the exact same spot as this bird in 2017, as well as one of my most memorable and exciting Lundy finds, a Black-crowned Night Heron – the fourth record for the island. Then after further examination I realised that something was a tad off about this egret. Through my bins the bird looked stockier, more compact in build and with a fairly short neck and bill – unlike Little Egret. I got my scope up to get a better look: thick, pinkish legs – not black with yellow feet as in Little Egret – and an all yellow bill. I had found Lundy's first Cattle Egret!

The bird was well tucked up, obviously not enjoying the weather. In fact the bird barely moved at all during the length of the observation, other than a few wiggles and adjustments to avoid spray from the sea as it crashed into the rocks below. From here I enjoyed the bird for around 15 minutes or so before I needed to shoot off for my long walk around the island.

These rocks at low tide are seemingly a magic spot for 'lost' herons and one I always make an effort to visit, particularly during an unpleasant northerly wind and a good low tide in spring. Dreaming on, I wondered what would be the next heron species I see here. Great White Egret or Purple Heron maybe? Or maybe something truly ridiculous like Great Blue Heron. On Lundy anything can happen!

Lundy's first Cattle Egret, Lametor, 24th March (photo: Dean Jones).



SQUACCO HERON

Dean Woodfin Jones

The morning of 25th May started off in a bit of a whirlwind with a few hours of birding in Millcombe in the morning, followed by preparations for an early ship arriving from Bideford. This day was a special one however, as I had some noteworthy guests arriving to monitor some of the island's breeding birds – Luke Sutton and Seb Loram.

Post-arrival of the ship, we headed straight to the North End of the island to look for birds, planning to then slowly make our way back south towards to the *Oldenburg* by the end of the day. We had just made it to the southern end of Gannets' Bay when all of sudden I heard a group of Oystercatchers making a racket close to the shore. As we looked down from our lofty granite ledge, we saw five Oystercatchers chasing a rather large, tawny-buff brown bird close in to the shore of the bay. My heart started racing! Luckily the bird ended up landing on a big slab of granite next to the low shore just below us. After a second or so – lifting my binoculars – a rush of excitement and momentary disbelief ran over me. I was looking at a Squacco Heron!

Despite the harassment from the Oystercatchers, the bird managed to get some rest for a couple of minutes, enough time for me to get my scope on it and to obtain some 'iffy' but important record shots, and of course for Luke and Seb to get onto the bird. Then, coaxed by the still ticked-off Oystercatchers, the heron sneaked off behind some large boulders and out of view. After around five minutes or so, the bird emerged from its rocky hideout and was seen flying off towards Gannets' Rock with the five Oystercatchers in hot pursuit! A truly fantastic-looking bird, particularly in flight with its beautiful snowy white wings and tail, features not seen when the bird was perched.

The heron remained on the island for a total of eight days, seen once more a few days after this initial sighting along the east coast. From 28th May the bird then settled for four days around Rat Island, allowing some superb prolonged views during appropriate tides. The bird even managed to get a little 'twitch' going on the 30th as it sat in full view opposite the Jetty, to the delight of the newly disembarked day-trippers and bird-ringing team.

This was easily one of the highlights from what was an outstanding season for rare birds on Lundy – and an encounter I will never forget.

Dean's finding of the Cattle Egret and the Squacco Heron, together with Martin Elcoate's discovery of the Isabelline Wheatear (see overleaf), brings the number of bird species recorded on Lundy by the end of 2019 to 331. Ed.

Lundy's first Squacco Heron, Rat Island, 25th May (photo: Dean Jones).

