

# CONSERVATION TEAM REPORT

Dean Woodfin Jones (Lundy Warden)



The strident calls of ravenous Rock Pipits fill the Village as birds relocate to soggy fields from their usual sea cliff haunts; fearless flocks of gulls and corvids gather gregariously on the drier and blustery days to chase the farmer through High Street Field for his feed; and stunning Starlings serenade upon various Landmark properties – all hinting at the breeding season to come. Another year has passed – one which has seemingly done so quicker than ever before. It's that time again to reminisce, rejoice and to rally ideas together for the upcoming season – January shutdown!

As you are all too aware, the year 2020 has been a year like no other, not just for Lundy but for the entire planet as the Coronavirus spread from the east, changing lives, forcing lockdowns, tier systems and social distancing from family and friends.

On the island the season started off in marvellous fashion with around 200 trees being relocated from cosy nurseries into areas of Millcombe Wood and St John's Valley, as well as lots of sorting and planning for a plethora of events and monitoring for the year ahead. Shortly after this period, however, post prolific working party with the National Trust in March, the nation went into full lockdown, just as we were gearing up to welcome the first ship full of visitors. It became evident as the weeks went on that the events and gatherings that we all know and love on Lundy would not be able to go ahead. Everything, like the eagerly awaiting Lundy Marine Festival, the welcoming of numerous schoolchildren and Lundy Ambassadors for a day of exploration, the LFS work parties, the snorkel safaris, and the company of regular visitors, researchers and friends from across the channel, all went by the board.

Despite all the losses encountered due to lockdown, it was in fact a remarkable time for the Conservation Team. Here the Lundy locals (following government guidelines), in their characteristic communal and dedicated demeanours, helped out on a voluntary basis where they could, resulting in a very rewarding and prolific time for conservation and general maintenance on the island.

Just some of the tasks carried out included the removal of no less than 1,053 young Rhododendron plants from the east sidelands (a task normally achieved using multiple work parties), the creation of a new wildflower meadow outside Paradise Row, carting and laying literally tonnes of granite to the North End and Old Light for repairs to the main track, Alexanders clearance in Millcombe,

building and repairing the Quarry Beach steps, frequent beach cleans, the erection of two new lengths of fence at Quarter Wall (to restrict the roaming steers and ponies from doing a Houdini into Ackland's Moor) and of course to try to cover as much as possible of the usual bird ringing activities, seabird productivity monitoring and migratory bird counts.

Looking back, I can't actually think of words that would do justice to the incredible privilege we had being here on Lundy during lockdown. Skylarks took to building their nests right next to normally busy footpaths, the Sika deer became fearless and were often seen roaming the Village in the day undeterred by Lundy staff, seas were shipless and bustling with nothing but seabirds, seals and cetaceans, and the island's vegetation quickly reclaimed paths and engulfed benches in just a few quick months – all a reminder of how truly wild this little island is here in the Bristol Channel.

Finally, come July, the lockdown restrictions lifted, allowing us to get some lucky visitors over on the *Oldenburg*, although in much reduced numbers. Despite all the new rules on travel, and access to the General Stores and the Marisco Tavern, it was truly magical being able to welcome guests back to the island again – even though it was from a distance of two metres, or seven rafting Puffins depending on your fancy.

Towards the end of the season we managed to bring over some long-term volunteers to help with the year's seal surveys and ranger duties. Once again I'd like to take the opportunity to say a massive thank you to Volunteer Assistant Ranger Peter Hayes – a young lad with a long history of visiting Lundy who we managed to hang on to, keeping him on as our new Outdoor General Assistant. Also a huge thank you to Volunteer Assistant Wardens Ben Hanson and Sophia Upton who helped out in so many ways throughout the late summer and autumn, particularly with the seal counts and surveys, and of course for their top class company.

One person I must single out for all her amazing work and dedication towards the Conservation Team is Rosie Ellis, a lady who has truly outdone herself this year by stepping in on all the ranger duties, helping on seabird surveys, ship duties and continuing with the island's ever-growing education programme, amongst countless other tasks. Thank you so much, Rosie, for all your help. Is there anything you cannot do?!

After a prolonged absence in the Conservation Team, we welcomed a new Ranger and his partner to the island in September. Matt Stritch and Jo Farrow, a pair who are no strangers to island life after first meeting and then moving to Lundy from their sea turtle and frigatebird-filled lives on Ascension Island. Both have well and truly settled on Lundy now and we are very much looking forward to working with them in 2021.

*Dean Jones and Fiona Bradley building the new wall at Quarters (photo: Rosie Ellis) and (right) Pete Hayes (Assistant Ranger), Ben Hanson (Assistant Warden), Matt Stritch (Ranger), Rosie Ellis (Education Officer) & Alice Waterfield (General Assistant) clearing Millcombe Pond (photo: Dean Jones).*



I'd also like to thank the islanders, particularly Zoë Barton, Sue Waterfield and Tom Carr for all their help with this year's seabird studies; Pia Murrell, Rachel Sylvia and Matt Scantlebury for their help with fencing and Rhododendron clearance; Richard Goodman for his stellar work making Quarry Beach accessible again; Joe Burford-Redgrove for helping clear the Lower East Side Path; Fiona Bradley, Tess Footitt and Cameron Alway for their help with building new dry-stone walls and walkways; and Rob Waterfield and Derek Green for all their support again this season.

As always, between all the glories of living in such a place, there have been some real stand-out happenings and observations for me this year. These include: the multiple nights ringing one of Lundy's most magical and somewhat mythical birds, the European Storm Petrel, at North End; those three incredible seawatches where I was extremely lucky to see a breaching Thresher Shark and two mighty Bluefin Tuna erupt from glass-like seas; all those delightful evenings spent plodding through soggy fields in the rain in search of Woodcock and Snipe with Rob Duncan and Jamie Dunning; all the glorious rare birds I was lucky enough to set eyes upon, in particular the White's Thrush, Sora, Bridled Tern and Lundy's first White-tailed Eagle in 140 years (thanks Tim & Tim for the latter), and of course, each and every day I had the privilege to spend my time immersed in the busy lives of Lundy's incredible seabird colonies.

Last but by no means least, a HUGE thank you to you at the Lundy Field Society for all your ongoing support, all of the very entertaining online talks and your constant dedication to the island. Also, thanks to all those who helped secure Lundy's future by donating to the Lundy Appeal during what was, like everywhere else in the country, a very uncertain year.

The Conservation Team are very much looking forward to seeing you all back on the island very soon. Take care and stay safe!

*Chandam Kittiwake III and mother Annie in Barton Field, 18<sup>th</sup> July (photo: Dean Jones).*

