

## SECRETARY'S REPORT

Michael Williams

The Lundy Field Society was 75 years young in 2021 and we commemorated this in several ways. Following the success of previous Discover Lundy activity weeks, another was planned for May, however, the coronavirus restrictions in place at the time prevented the week going ahead. This was disappointing given almost two years of planning. Another project which had been in planning for a similar length of time came to a much more successful fruition: a commemorative stamp issue. Three panoramic illustrations of Lundy, each perforated into a pair of stamps were prepared and launched in May. Our thanks to Lars Liewendahl, Lundy's stamp advisor, Alan Rowland and Derek Green for their work, and the artist Sharon Smart for producing such elegant souvenirs of our anniversary. We were also able to unveil a commemorative picture in the Wheelhouse in the Tavern illustrated with images of Martin Coles Harman and Leslie Harvey, our founders.

The AGM was due to be held on Lundy for the first time in our history during the Discover Lundy week. Unfortunately, Covid prevented this and we rescheduled the meeting to September, moving online. I hope we can return to holding future meetings in person as there are a number of members who are not able to participate in online events.

At the last AGM in September, the very new news was that Dean Jones, the Lundy Warden, would be leaving Lundy with his fiancée Zoë Barton, Head Housekeeper, to return to Northern Ireland in a role with the RSPB. Dean has made a massive contribution to the conservation of Lundy and especially in ornithological observation. It is through his leadership that Lundy is progressing towards re-establishing itself as a Bird Observatory. Derek invited me to join the recruitment panel for the new Warden in October and I'm pleased to say that we appointed Rosie Ellis, Dean's assistant, as the new Warden. Rosie is originally from Reading and came to Lundy in 2019 via Norwich, Cornwall and North Devon. As Assistant Warden, she has also combined her role with that of Education Officer, engaging with school groups as part of the education programme run jointly by Lundy and St Helen's Centre.

*A Northern Ireland selfie from Dean and Zoë, and a rockpooling Rosie Ellis (photo: Keith Hiscock).*



We were also able to appoint a new Assistant Warden in Stuart Cossey who has come to Lundy from the Bird Observatory on Bardsey Island, off the Llŷn Peninsula in North Wales. Stuart arrived on Lundy in November with his partner Megan Hollywood Harry. We very much look forward to continuing to work with Rosie, Stuart, Matt Stritch and the rest of the Conservation Team in the years ahead.

The year concluded with the tremendous sadness of the passing of our President, Diana Keast. Diana, the daughter of Martin Coles Harman, was the last surviving private owner of Lundy. After the sale to the National Trust, Diana maintained her relationship with Lundy, visiting regularly and she reinforced those connections through the Lundy Field Society. Diana became a Vice President in 2007 and we were pleased to elevate her to our President in 2015. When she attended the committee meeting later that year it was only the third time in the Society's history that the President had attended such a meeting – the last being in 1969! Diana remained a regular attendee until the travelling became too much for her, but she continued to participate by commenting on business and writing to Officers, including myself, in her instantly recognisable, elegant hand.

A highlight of my role is dealing with enquiries and correspondence that reach me as Honorary Secretary. During the past 12 months I have dealt with a broad range of enquiries including requests for maps of Lundy, images from the Catford archive, and filming for a documentary. I was also asked by Lyndsey Green to reply to an enquiry she had received from someone whose ancestor was reputed to have been a lighthouse keeper on Lundy. It transpired that he was in fact part of the Coastguard based on Lundy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and I was able to provide quite a significant amount of information supplemented by references to articles in our Bulletin and Journal.

There has been correspondence about the Gade family tree, and I have been able to supply some information and images to the Ilfracombe Museum about the Old Light. Simon Dell and I also corresponded about the swearing in of a Mr Hole as Constable on Lundy in 1787. I answered an enquiry about the MV *Polar Bear* leaving service on Lundy which also elicited some information about its visit to Kinlochleven to collect John and Ina Hinshelwood who were moving to Lundy in 1973! I also received an enquiry from John Bament who is the grandson of Jack Bament who worked on Lundy from 1928 to 1932. This resulted in a scrapbook of contemporary newspaper cuttings and a set of family photos taken on Lundy being donated to the LFS.

There were three working parties in 2021 that avoided lockdown restrictions, all in October and in consecutive weeks. Rebuilding the Heligoland Bird Trap on the Quarry Terrace was a major objective, and considerable effort was devoted to it. Chris Webster was on hand to oversee the groundwork for archaeological reasons in the first week. Other tasks taken on included gulley clearing, drystone wall repairs, pond level management, preparatory work for a lightning conductor around the church, bridge replacement near the Casbah, tree management, rhododendron seedling searches and many other jobs, vital to aid the Lundy Conservation Team. The inaugural swim for the 'Lundy Bluetits' was a highlight for some with a dip in the sea. We record our very grateful thanks to the group leaders Megan Debenham, Jan Paul and Belinda Cox for their hard work with lots of extra organising due to the Covid regulations and last-minute changes to personnel.

The total number of bird species recorded in 2021 was 162 (a provisional total, pending confirmation of some rarities), which was very much in line with 2019 and 2020. Easing of Covid lockdown restrictions came early enough in the season for ornithological recording during the year to return to something more like normal. The presence of resident bird specialist Dean Jones, succeeded in November by Stuart Cossey, together with other members of the Lundy Conservation Team, made a huge contribution to ensuring high-quality coverage throughout the year.

The RSPB-led survey of cliff-nesting seabirds in June, found record post-rat eradication numbers of Guillemots, Razorbills and Puffins, the counts for the latter two species having more than doubled since the last census in 2017. Fulmars, Shags and even Kittiwakes also showed increases, but the three breeding large-gull species – Herring, Lesser Black-backed and Great Black-backed – are not faring so well, with both black-back species posting steep declines. Separate investigations of suitable habitat showed that the island's breeding population of Storm Petrels continues to grow in number and expand to new sites. The number of pairs was conservatively estimated at a minimum of 50, which is nevertheless impressive given that Storm Petrel was only added to the list of confirmed breeding species in 2014.

As usual, a number of rare and unusual birds were logged during the year, the stand-out being a Sulphur-bellied Warbler (our front cover image) that appeared for one day only in June – not only a first for Lundy, but a first for Britain and Ireland and just the second for the whole of the Western Palearctic. Other national rarities during the year included a Rustic Bunting (also in June), a Red-eyed Vireo in October, whilst a Little Grebe in the Landing Bay on 30 July was just the fifth Lundy occurrence of what is a common and widespread species in most of Britain.

The island continues to progress towards regaining its former status as a member of the Bird Observatories Network of Britain and Ireland. Associated activities included the progression towards this included continuing digitisation of historic ringing records and the restoration of the Heligoland Bird Trap. It is hoped that provisional accreditation could be granted to Lundy in 2023, with full accreditation following, pending successful completion of a two-year probationary period.

2021 was a productive year for bird ringing. The total of 4,446 birds ringed was the highest since 2009. The long-term studies of breeding Manx Shearwaters, Storm Petrels and Wheatears continued, with increased success in the shearwater nestboxes, and Wheatear work going a long way towards recovering the high proportion of colour-ringed birds that had been achieved before Covid restrictions prevented this work in 2020. Two more studies were added to these: the long-term Lundy House Sparrow colour-ringing project, previously operated independently by Imperial College London and University of Sheffield, transferred to using rings issued to the LFS, and a colour-ringing study of Lundy's breeding Starlings was started.

While these extra House Sparrows and Starlings contributed to the year's high ringing total, the spring and autumn seasons of migrant ringing were particularly productive too. Most notably, the previous record annual totals for Blackcaps and Siskins were easily surpassed, and between them made up more than a third of all birds ringed.

Alan & Sandra Rowland were able to undertake the Lundy Cabbage count, having missed 2020, but photographic monitoring and invertebrate counts were not undertaken. Total numbers increased by 65% from just over 5,000 in 2019 to over 8,200 in 2021. The plants appear to be doing well both in abundance and in extending their habitat and a small landslip adjacent to the Lundyite Dyke on the Beach Road produced more plants. Rhododendron is under control, there is a low number of rabbits, and selective culling of feral stock appear to be benefitting the Cabbage.

The webinars continued at the start of the year and Tim Jones joined me for the webinar in February. His excellent talk attracted the largest audience we have ever achieved – somewhere in the region of 450-500 watching live and over 800 subsequent catch-up viewings. Plans to start a new series of webinars in the autumn did not proceed due to other pressures. John Tyrer, who has led two photography webinars, has come forward to help the Society build a photo-library. This is an exciting development, and we were able to co-opt John to the committee in the latter part of the year.

The £500 grant given to Dr James Waggitt of Bangor University for research in July 2020 on the influence of tidal currents and weather patterns on cetacean presence in Lundy waters, was



*Lundy Cabbage counting from the Lundy RHIB, 7<sup>th</sup> June (cabbage photo: Mandy Dee).*

deferred until June 2021. A grant of £500 was awarded to Jamie Dunning for a study of 'The role of social interactions in the life history of the House Sparrow' which took place during 2021. Jamie is the current Lundy Sparrow Project PhD student. We were also able to provide financial support of £500 for field equipment for the visiting school groups to St Helen's Centre.

A sub-committee reviewed and developed proposals for the long-term sustainability of the LFS, focusing on the Society's communications and ways in which the LFS can both better retain its current membership and attract new and younger members. This continued work started in 2020 following the outcomes of the membership survey in 2019. It proposed a series of priorities for the committee to consider. Unfortunately, the committee could not agree on how to take these forward and the work has halted.

Our new Journal editor, Tom Dickens, explored ways in which software could support the editorial process and how we could present the Journal through an online platform. This would improve discoverability of current Lundy research and raise awareness of the Journal among potential authors, as obtaining content is very reliant on a considerable amount of cajoling of authors. A new editorial board was considered. Regrettably, Tom later resigned from the committee and his ideas have not progressed further. Keith Hiscock has picked up the mantle as his successor.

Tim Davis retired as editor of the Annual Report. During Tim's tenure the presentation and quality of the publication has increased immeasurably, and we now have a flagship publication in full colour. We thank Tim for his service and transformation of the report. John Hedger has agreed to take on the editorial for the 2021 report. Frances Stuart retired from the committee and we record our thanks to her for leading our work on safeguarding and we are delighted that Frances will continue to lead in this area.

We are extremely grateful for a significant legacy received in 2021 from the estate of Pat Rodley who, with her late husband Ken and late sister Pamela Dunthorne, were long standing members. The Society will receive £66,000, of which we had received £52,000 by the end of the year. A significant portion has been invested in our endowment fund. The receipt of such a generous legacy resulted in a long wish-list of ways in which a portion of the reserved income could be used to support our objectives. This was distilled down to a priority list of projects including organising field courses, researching how we might attract younger members, providing financial support to enable relevant equipment to be bought, and supporting the Lundy Bird Observatory. These ideas are being developed and it is noteworthy that the Rodley legacy has already been able to support the restoration of the Heligoland Bird Trap.

At the end of our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, we are in a strong position to build further on our recent growth. Thank you for your support.