

CONSERVATION TEAM REPORT

Rosie Ellis (Lundy Warden)



Lundy's Fire & Rescue Team pose in front of Old Light after a busy day of training and equipment checks, 21st April (photo: Kobe Garfoot).

Another record-breaking year on Lundy with wildlife thriving around our coast. A Minke Whale in the Landing Bay, a Wryneck in the hand doing impressions of a snake, and a 'mega' for Lundy, Britain and Ireland and beyond... the Sulphur-bellied Warbler (if you had not read all about it in the tabloids already!). Looking back at the year I see how much changed for us all on the island. We have said our fair share of tearful farewells to friends, neighbours and colleagues, and hello to many new but now familiar faces.

2021 started out feeling ominously like 2020 with the usual January shutdown becoming a lockdown. This time we were joined by teams of contractors to carry out tasks such as pointing walls, fixing gigantic compasses, restoring the Rocket Shed and, oh, yet more pointing walls. Thanks to all the grants, and customers choosing to postpone rather than cancel their holidays, we were able to keep on working, with Manx Shearwater nestbox repairs, sapling planting and rocky shore surveys before we opened. With our usual spring work parties cancelled, many thanks go to staff who helped to get saplings in the ground quickly and, with the cullers unable to get here, many thanks to those who helped with the stock count.

With the information on volunteer positions going viral this year we were spoiled for choice with hundreds of candidates from the UK but also Germany and Korea. In the end we were joined by Yorkshire and proud walling extraordinaire Assistant Ranger Adam Waters and the great northern birders Ben Arkless and Eleanor Grover for our Assistant Seabird Wardens. In true Lundy style, our spring volunteers stayed on longer than anticipated; Ben eventually leaving us for a paid role on Brownsea Island and Eleanor getting back home in time for Christmas!

The season was filled with our usual productivity surveys, RSPB seabird counts, Natural England rocky shore surveys, Biosecurity for LIFE training and the long-awaited return of our snorkel safaris – with some cosy new wetsuits thanks to North Devon Biosphere. Except for our poor Kittiwakes, seabirds are doing well, with the bounce-back of the seabird recovery project still being felt. Many thanks to Alan and Sandra Rowland for the cabbage counting, an enjoyable and productive boat survey was a highlight of the year for me, plus the T-shirt!

Finally, schools and universities were able to join us again with fourteen groups winning the 'no lockdown lottery' and able to get across to Lundy. Thanks to Plastic-Free North Devon, a lucky few got to snorkel with some help from the Conservation Team – it's a tough job but someone's got to do it! Many thanks to our team of LFS Ambassadors for all their help with school groups, walks and talks. It was so great to finally be allowed to have a get-together and a long-awaited group picture.

I am coming to realise there is never a normal year on Lundy. Nonetheless, 2021 was particularly busy with sold-out boats and accommodation. The Conservation Team would not be able to engage with the numbers of visitors that we do without the LFS Ambassadors' considerable help. Special thanks to Amanda Head for her faultless work, as ever, co-ordinating the team this year.

In Autumn we were joined by Chloe Mortlock and Lucy Woolfenden for another record-breaking year for our Atlantic Grey Seal pupping season. Many thanks to them for their passion and dedication to finding every pup; 62 is the new number to beat and our highest ever count of seals (244), with more hiding in sea caves no doubt. (More details of the counts can be found on p.109.)

We had all known it was coming at some point but it was still a sad day on the island when Warden Dean and his partner Zoë handed in their notice. Not many people in life get such a lovely boss and I will be forever grateful for the chance to work alongside such a knowledgeable and passionate colleague who has given so much to Lundy. We look forward to many future visits from them and wish them both all the very best for their new adventure back on the big island of Ireland.



Many thanks to Eleanor Grover who stayed on and helped out with surveys and write-ups in the interregnum after Dean's departure and generally going above and beyond. Tom Carr has now taken over the farm after years of being Kev's right-hand man. As I am sure anyone who knows Tom would expect, he has thrown himself into his new role and the lambing shed is looking spotless.

Rosie and Matt with one of the newly installed Manx Shearwater nestboxes, 5th February (photo: Dean Jones).



Assistant Ranger Adam walling with LFS working party members, 8th October (photo: Amanda Yates).

As for the Warden role, I am very humbled to have been successful in applying for the post. It is a little nerve-wracking following Dean as Warden, but I am very lucky to be supported by Stuart Cossey, a fantastic birder, as the new Assistant Warden and Education Officer, and by Ranger Matt Stritch who lots of you hopefully got the chance to meet on our three weeks of back-to-back work parties that finally got to go ahead, along with a National Trust staff week.

Many thanks to Matt for all his hard work in 2021. There are many essential but never-ending ranger tasks that often go unnoticed. From clearing drains in a downpour to strimming the Lower East Side Path in a heatwave, he is always a pleasure to work with. So many jobs were ticked off thanks to the LFS work parties, with lots of walling improved by the lambing shed, the Heligoland Trap almost complete, the Casbah bridge replaced, Rhododendron seedlings marked, lightning conductor dug, and everyone's favourite: kindling and drains. The 'ranger shack' has moved to the lambing shed and renamed as the 'ranger cave'; now volunteers can be treated to luxurious new surroundings when weather forces us indoors. Many thanks for the hard work and dedication of all volunteers and special thanks to Trevor Dobie for all the work he does behind the scenes.

Although Lundy Cabbage, seals and most seabirds are on the up, there is still a lot of work to do making up for lost time following lockdowns. Deer, Goat and Soay numbers are high and the cullers will be working overtime this winter to get the population back down to levels agreed with Natural England to prevent overgrazing of wildflowers. The long-running Rhododendron eradication is still a mammoth undertaking with thousands of plants still to be dealt with. The 2022 season promises to be a busy one with daily Bird Observatory surveys, 2,000 metres of fencing almost complete and of course the long-awaited Marine Festival.

So much to look forward to and I hope to see you all soon!

Painting team Rosie, Pete Hayes and Matt pose in front of a half-painted Stoneycroft, 22nd March (photo: Dean Jones).

