



▲ A training day for the Lundy Conservation Team 16 November (photo: Joe Parker).

## CONSERVATION TEAM REPORT

Joe Parker (Lundy Warden)

It was another great year on Lundy with plenty of remarkable achievements. I am delighted to be compiling this Conservation Team report following my appointment as Warden in November 2023. Staffing changes always bring along tough goodbyes, and I am sure everyone involved with the LFS will join the island in recognising the great contributions of Rosie Ellis (Warden) and Stuart Cossey (Assistant Warden) and wish them both the very best for the future, continuing their excellent contributions to wildlife conservation beyond Lundy! As always, our success would not have been possible without the invaluable support of our residential volunteers. Everyone really did go above and beyond the call of duty, and the Lundy team wishes them all the very best of luck with their future endeavours. Matt White (known as Roger to avoid confusion with all the other Matts on the island) hit the ground running as our Assistant Ranger, helping with the ongoing estate and conservation programme, and will return to the island in 2024! Both Meaghan Kendall and Nicola Dunkin did splendid work monitoring our breeding seabirds and seals respectively, with the invaluable assistance of Nao Szulc with marine matters though the summer.

Atlantic Grey Seals did well, closing the year off with 66 pups born and hitting a maximum island count of 235 individuals on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August. Overall, it was a successful season, with an abundance of seals, seal pups, and low witnessed mortality. More details of the Seal survey can be found on page 47 of this Annual Report.

The recently re-accredited Lundy Bird Observatory enjoyed a good first year, and we thank the LFS for helping by donating rings and equipment previously held by the society. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the funds received from RSPB and Natural England for the purchase of a thermal imaging device, biosecurity equipment, and seabird rings. The Observatory celebrated its first anniversary in style, thanks to the efforts of Luke Marriner, who was our first-ever Bird Observatory Volunteer Assistant Warden. Angus Croudace also provided extra support in the autumn, returning to volunteer for a second season following his stint as Volunteer Seal Warden the previous year.

The survey season was filled by our seabird productivity studies, coupled with all-island censuses of cliff-nesting seabirds, gulls, Manx Shearwaters, and Storm Petrels. This is the first time these surveys have been conducted simultaneously, so no wonder it felt busy! The result was positive news about our breeding seabirds, with population increases and excellent productivity across the cliff-nesting assemblage. Twenty years after the successful rat eradication, the total breeding seabird population now stands at over 40,000 individuals, the likes of which have not been seen since the late 1930s. The upward trend for most seabirds on Lundy continues, with considerable increases in Manx Shearwater and auks, highlighting how the importance of Lundy has increased significantly in recent years. The seabird assemblage population on Lundy now exceeds the qualifying figure for SPA status, with Manx Shearwater and Razorbill populations also qualifying individually. The recent colonisation and rapid rise in Storm Petrels further add to the island's diversity, and it will be fascinating to follow this species in the coming years. Unfortunately, these large-scale increases are masking a decline in our *Larus* gull colonies, which is in line with national trends.

▼ Fieldworker participating in the RSPB Storm Petrel Census, The Quarries 15 July (photo: Rosie Ellis).



▲ Conservation Team Volunteer Angus Croudace in Millcombe 10 November (photo: Joe Parker).



▲ Luke Marriner, the Lundy Bird Observatory Volunteer Warden, monitoring seabirds 30 May (photo: Joe Parker).



► A Barolo Shearwater captured at night while studying a Manx Shearwater colony 13 June (photo: Luke Marriner).

On land, birding highlights included eye-opening nocturnal surveys, renovation of the Terrace Heligoland trap, two new species records for the island, and some of the best migration numbers on record. This was the first season passerine mist nets were permanently stationed in Millcombe through the spring and autumn. Autumn also saw a significant increase in the use of 'dazzling', to look for and capture birds at night using a thermal imaging device and an LED torch. The technique yielded new data. Overall, 4,745 birds were ringed. All-time ringing totals were exceeded for Common Snipe, Jack Snipe, Golden Plover, and Storm Petrel, while Redshank, Barolo Shearwater, and Waxwing were all added to the island's ringed species list.

Despite the curtailed sailing season, engagement opportunities with visitors were plentiful thanks to the valued support of the Lundy Ambassadors. All told, 78 Ambassador visits were logged, with almost 600 visitors attending guided walks. The 'A Team' also helped deliver 11 outreach visits and 16 school visits, which included key stage two, key stage three, and A-level students. Warden-led snorkel safari events continued to be in high demand, interpreting the MPA (Marine Protected Area) and connecting visitors with the marine world. At the same time, pop-up seabird stations at Jenny's Cove highlighted the island's thriving seabird colonies for visitors.



▲ Positive Lundy conservation news on BBC Radio Devon.

Still, on the engagement theme, Lundy's marine life reached a national audience when celebrated in a special documentary inspired by BBC's 'Wild Isles'. Commissioned by the RSPB, WWF, and National Trust, 'Saving Our Wild Isles' featured the richness of the underwater natural world around Lundy. The island hit the national press again in the autumn, with a press release celebrating the recoveries in populations of ground-nesting seabirds such as the Puffins which have happened after rat eradication, resulting in reports in the Guardian, Telegraph, and BBC, as well as other regional and national news outlets. The interpretation panels in the Beach Building and Hartland heliport received a very welcome refresh thanks to the Rachel Penny Legacy. Be sure to check them out when visiting in 2024! In April, we hosted a young naturalist's weekend for the

first time with great success. Fourteen 18 to 30-year-olds were offered discounted rates to stay in hostel-style accommodation and experience the full range of island conservation activities, including bird ringing, rock pooling, dry stone walling, and seabird surveying. The weekend received excellent feedback and hopefully inspired a few new 'Lundyites'.

► A Lundy Puffin at the North End 4 June (photo: Joe Parker).



I am delighted to report that the island remains rodent-free for another season. Many thanks to Biosecurity for England for restocking the island's biosecurity monitoring supplies. The new Bird Observatory and Biosecurity Hub building (featured in Derek Green's Report on page 16) is now well-fitted, a project funded by the Rachel Penny legacy, Lundy Sparrow Project, and the LFS. It is in 'The Lodge' garden and features a laboratory table with stools, a fridge freezer, and storage cupboards. The new island Weather Station is now live and online, also funded by the LFS; readings feature on the LFS, Landmark Trust, and Lundy Bird Observatory websites.

The recent highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) outbreak has been a cause for concern. A record number of cases were reported nationally through the summer of 2022, and it has remained a constant worry ever since. To help safeguard the island's wildlife, the RSPB funded a biosecurity disinfectant mat, which was used by all island guests through the breeding season to disinfect footwear. HPAI swab tests, provided by the Animal and Plant Health Agency, with an agreement with Natural England, were used to check any fresh carcasses found on Lundy. Fortunately, the results showed that the incidence appeared to be very low. Two dead Herring Gulls tested positive: a chick from the Needle Rock colony on 23<sup>rd</sup> June and a non-breeding adult found at Christie's Quay on 26<sup>th</sup> June.

Feral stock management resumed this season after the 'Covid years' prevented culling. This ongoing management of the collective grazing regime is essential to protect the island's grassland and heath communities, which are important features within the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Control of non-native invasive plant species received a welcome boost with support from the Bannister Trust, which is funding rhododendron management, spanning rope access work, training, and surveys.

The annual Lundy Cabbage survey conducted by Alan and Sandra Rowland yielded positive results, with plants appearing to be doing well both in abundance and distribution. The counts increased by 77% from a low of 2,792 in 2022 to 4,959 in 2023.

Looking ahead to 2024, we are pleased to welcome Tara McEvoy-Wilding as our new Assistant Warden, especially as she brings complementary expertise in all things marine into the team. We look forward to again working closely with the LFS and will be glad to welcome you all to the island in 2024.



▲ Alan and Sandra Rowland carrying out the annual survey of the Lundy Cabbage along the East Side from a boat skippered by Laura Proudfoot, an Oldenburg crew member (photo: Rosie Ellis).



▲ Flowers of Lundy Cabbage *Coincya wrightii* photographed in May near to Smelly Gully (photo: Paul Dean).