



▲ Purple Sandpiper at Brazen Ward 19 March (photo: Stuart Cossey).

## BIRDS ON LUNDY 2023

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### INTRODUCTION

In previous Annual Reports of the LFS the account of the birds recorded on the island during the year was divided into two sections: The **Review of the Birding Year**, which gave a month-by-month summary of the key or interesting species seen, and the **Systematic List** which summarised data for every species seen for the year. The latter was much the longer section and was the result of systematic daily recording of birds, the data from which eventually allowed Lundy to re-join the UK **Bird Observatory Network**. The full list of birds recorded in the year can now be found on the **Lundy Bird Observatory Website** (<https://lundybirdobs.org.uk/>). However, the Review of the Birding Year will continue in the Annual Report and the 2023 account follows below.

### Review of the Birding Year

#### January

During January an overwintering **Sparrowhawk** (an unusual island record) and **Merlin** made the few remaining passerines wary, and an adult **Iceland Gull** took centre stage on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. By the end of the month, auks began returning in greater numbers to their ledges, with four figures logged by the 31<sup>st</sup>. **Purple Sandpiper** numbers gradually increased through the month, peaking at 11 on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February (a new record count). The first confirmed signs of breeding **Raven** were logged on the 16<sup>th</sup> and large gulls started to congregate at breeding sites. A female **Shoveler** appeared on the 5<sup>th</sup> and lingered until the 13<sup>th</sup>, marking the fourteenth island record. By the end of the month, Jenny's Cove, the island's largest auk colony, featured 5,100 **Guillemot**, 700 **Razorbill**. There were also three **Puffin**, the island's second earliest return date.



▲ Iceland Gull on High Street Field 22 January (photo: Stuart Cossey).

## March

We welcomed the first **Wheatear** touch down on the 5<sup>th</sup> and the first notable **Meadow Pipit** passage got underway on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. **Hooded Crow** were seen from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup>. Movements started to gain some momentum when light winds welcomed the first **Swallow** (16<sup>th</sup>), **Sand Martin** (17<sup>th</sup>), and **House Martin** (19<sup>th</sup>). A mini arrival of 33 **Chiffchaff** were grounded on the 18<sup>th</sup>, a day after the first **Blackcap** of the year. The first **Willow Warbler** appeared on the 21<sup>st</sup> Nine **Purple Sandpiper** lingered through the month and hirundine passage intensified.

## April

The month opened with moderate winds from the east and southeast, switching to rain showers and strong southwesterlies by the 10<sup>th</sup>. Easterly winds crept in again by the 14<sup>th</sup> and set in for a week from the 17<sup>th</sup> which saw the flood-gates of migration open. Totals quickly racked up to over 500 **Willow Warbler**, 74 **Chiffchaff**, four **Reed Warbler**, 12 **Grasshopper Warbler**, five **Sedge Warbler**, 300 **Blackcap**, three **Whitethroat**, a **Firecrest** and six **Goldcrest**. A respectable effort from the ringers present closed the nets at the end of play on the 17<sup>th</sup> having processed 402 birds! A big clear-out followed but a **Siberian Chiffchaff** was ringed on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. The 'big day' coincided with our Young Naturalists Weekend which was hosted for the first time with huge success and introduced fourteen 18–30-year-olds to the world of bird ringing.



On the 17<sup>th</sup> the 'Pondsury **Great White Egret**' marked the third island record. The 20<sup>th</sup> welcomed the island's seventh **Little Ringed Plover**, which was also seen the following evening. Light wader passage continued through the month and a **Sandwich Tern** graced the Landing Bay on the 12<sup>th</sup> as the **Kestrel** pair began setting up territory and a **Redshank** was grounded during a storm.

◀ Little Ringed Plover on Lighthouse Field 20 April (photo: Luke Marriner).

## May

The month started well with a fleeting sighting of **Hoopoe** on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. It was followed by a long-staying **Purple Heron** which arrived on the 5<sup>th</sup> and hung around Pondsury until the 21<sup>st</sup>. While only the fifth island record, it was not entirely unexpected given the spring influx across the southwest and east coast of England. Other long stayers included the overwintering **Purple Sandpiper** flock which lingered through spring until a lone individual on the 23<sup>rd</sup> marked the latest spring record for the island. A **Hooded Crow** frequented a flock of **Carrion Crow** counterparts from the 30<sup>th</sup> of April to the 24<sup>th</sup> of May. A **Wood Warbler** appeared briefly on the 5<sup>th</sup> while the first half of the month enjoyed a strong hirundine passage, peaking at 17,000 Swallow on the 7<sup>th</sup>.



▲ A Purple Heron flying over Pondsury 19 May (photo: Richard Campey).

Then a nice run of birds began with a stunning male **Serin** which played hard to get on the 21<sup>st</sup>. Two male **Crossbill** and a fall of 42 **Spotted Flycatcher** on the 22<sup>nd</sup> sparked the island into life again as the bulk of the passerine migration began to wane. The following day did not disappoint, as the Spotted Flycatcher count rose to 64 individuals. The 24<sup>th</sup> opened with the strident song of a first-summer male **Common Rosefinch** singing in Millcombe to the backdrop of migrant **Willow Warbler** and **Cuckoo** song. A **Dotterel** on the 25<sup>th</sup> made way for a **Red-throated Pipit** and **Grey-headed Wagtail** the following day. The island Common Rosefinch population doubled on the 27<sup>th</sup> as two singing birds were logged in Millcombe and St John's Valley.



▲ A male Serin near Benjamin's Chair 18 May (photo: Richard Campey).

▼ A Grey-Headed Wagtail on St. Helen's Field 26 May (photo: Richard Campey).





▲ The first summer male Rosefinch in Millcombe 24 May (photo: Richard Campey).

## June

The Common Rosefinch lingered but remained elusive, with brief bouts of song heard on four occasions from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> of June. A Quail was seen on the west coast on the 7<sup>th</sup> before a singing male Barolo Shearwater was heard whilst conducting a ringing session at a Manx Shearwater colony! This is the third island record, the previous two being of a different male who visited the island for several weeks in 2010 and 2011. The Barolo story continued through the month as the bird was eventually caught and ringed on the 13<sup>th</sup>. It was last heard calling on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

## July

After a remarkable record of a singing Tree Pipit on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June, July kick-started with excellent sea watching even by Lundy standards. A big Manx Shearwater movement along the Bristol Channel involved a remarkable 13,360 individuals passing Lundy's shores in a single hour on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July! As huge numbers of Cory's Shearwater invaded southern Ireland and south-west England, Lundy finally joined in on the action on the 31<sup>st</sup> when a single bird passed Dead Cow Point in late evening (marking the second island record!).

## August

A Sooty Shearwater joined the action on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, marking the first record since 2019. Strong winds resulted in a delayed start to any autumn passerine ringing and nets were finally opened on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August. A Ruff on the 10<sup>th</sup> trumped a Green Sandpiper the previous day. 173 Willow Warbler arrived on the 13<sup>th</sup> but quickly cleared out after which the first passage Tree Pipit was recorded on the 16<sup>th</sup>. The second half of August built momentum with a double

Hippolais warbler day and plenty of common migrants filtering through. A change of pace came on the 23<sup>rd</sup> when a Melodious Warbler was trapped and ringed in Millcombe. A second 'Melody' then popped up along the lower east coast on the 27<sup>th</sup> while an Icterine Warbler graced Millcombe between the 27<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> and a Common Nightingale (a scarce migrant on Lundy - only the seventh record this century!) skulked around on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

## September

Clear skies and bright, dry days meant that, despite consistent easterlies, the first two days were subdued, with common migrants trickling through and the morning census thin on the ground. A Pintail was present between the 1<sup>st</sup>-to the 7<sup>th</sup>, initially favouring Millcombe Pond and the Landing Bay before relocating to Pondsbury. Incredibly, the duck ended up in the top shelf of a passerine mist net, but frustratingly did not remain pocketed long enough to extract!

A ringtail Hen Harrier graced Quarter Wall briefly on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and migrants dropped in throughout the day on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, with a final total of 82 Willow Warblers. Working the east that afternoon was very memorable, featuring a Western Bonelli's Warbler, Melodious Warbler and Wryneck, later accompanied by a long-staying juvenile Rose-Coloured Starling in the village in early evening, which hung around until the 20<sup>th</sup>.

A period of settled light easterlies brought further excitement, a first-year Woodchat Shrike on the 6<sup>th</sup> was matched by ringing four Wryneck in five days. A fifth unringed bird showed on the 12<sup>th</sup>, along with a Nightingale below the Terrace and a second calendar-year Hoopoe was dazzled the evening before. After a slow early autumn on the raptor front, passage picked up with a first-year Marsh Harrier arriving off the sea on the 10<sup>th</sup>, followed by a first-year Osprey and a brief Hobby appearance on the 11<sup>th</sup>. A Bonelli's Warbler showed very nicely on the Terrace on the 10<sup>th</sup> - although no calls were heard; it is likely it was the same individual logged seven days earlier.



▲ Melodious Warbler in Millcombe 31 August (photo: Luke Marriner).



▲ A Rose-coloured Starling near the village 3 September (photo: Luke Marriner).



▲ Woodchat Shrike in Millcombe 6 September (photo: Angus Croudace).



▲ A Hoopoe caught by dazdling at night (photo: Adam Day).



A mini fall of 76 **Blackcap** occurred during a period of northerly winds overnight on the 13<sup>th</sup>. However, clear skies and low winds quickly beckoned them onwards and a mass exodus left the island quiet. Strong easterlies over the following weekend brought a few new birds in, but most sensibly hunkered down. During a short-lived break in the weather, the 17<sup>th</sup> saw feeding activity resume and a stunning first-year **Barred Warbler** drop into the Millcombe mist nets, staying on the island into the following day.

On the 15<sup>th</sup>, a first-year **Dotterel** was dazdled on the North End Plateau whilst a **Storm Petrel** ringing session took place further down the cliffs. Following the smart **Grey-headed Wagtail** in spring, a first-year individual was found associated with two *flavissima* on the 15<sup>th</sup>. A couple of **Wryneck**

◀ Barred Warbler in hand having been caught in the mist net in Millcombe, 17 September (photo: Anna Sutcliffe).

continued their tenure along the east and around Millcombe, with one unringed individual also newly-in at Rocket Pole on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

Hurricane Lee arrived at pace during the middle of the month, displacing large numbers of North America land birds. With unprecedented numbers of vagrants crossing the Atlantic, Lundy joined the west coast action from the 20<sup>th</sup>, logging the first of three **Red-eyed Vireo** to grace the island.

After this period of strong westerlies, the weather calmed by the 21<sup>st</sup> resulting in a fall of 350 **Blackcap** across the island. Other records of note included a **Sandwich Tern** on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, a first-year **Osprey** on the 18<sup>th</sup>, a **Wood Warbler** trapped and ringed on the 21<sup>st</sup> and a **Little Bunting** feeding alongside **Linnet** on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Later in the month Storm Agnes delivered the first **Balearic Shearwater** of the year during a sea watch on the 27<sup>th</sup>, and the 29<sup>th</sup> featured a push of hirundines accompanied by a juvenile **American Cliff Swallow** (a first for the island).

▼ Red-eyed Vireo a North American vagrant caught in Millcombe 9 October (photo: Angus Croudace).



▲ A first year Dotterel photographed during a 'dazdling' survey at night on the North End plateau 15 September (photo: Joe Parker).





▲ A Wood Warbler trapped in Millcombe on 21 September (photo: Brittany Maxted).

▼ Merlin at Jenny's Cove 14 October (photo: Richard Campey).



▲ Ortolan Bunting in Millcombe 7 October (photo: Angus Croudace).

Four bunting species made the island's year list in just over a week in September, with a **Little Bunting** on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, followed by an **Ortolan Bunting** on the 30<sup>th</sup> and regular **Reed Bunting** sightings from the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October. But most bizarrely, as a dominant westerly system stalled passage, a first-year **Yellow-breasted Bunting** bucked the trend on the 25<sup>th</sup>, becoming only the third island record; previous sightings date back to the 1980's.

### October

**Golden Plover** featured daily, peaking at 29 on the 12<sup>th</sup> and a sea watch on the 2<sup>nd</sup> came up with two **Arctic Skua** and a **Great Northern Diver**. After a notable absence, the first autumn **Merlin** finally arrived on the 4<sup>th</sup>, followed by the first **Black Redstart** of the season on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Mist nets were opened more frequently in response to the light winds and the most productive session came on the 9<sup>th</sup>, processing 51 **Siskin**, and a new **Red-eyed Vireo** as the first winter thrushes arrived overhead.

The first **Snow Bunting** was picked up on the 4<sup>th</sup> before the second **Ortolan Bunting** of the autumn was found in Millcombe on the 7<sup>th</sup>. A single **Redshank** grounded during a storm was subsequently dazzled on the 16<sup>th</sup> and hung around until the 18<sup>th</sup>. By mid-October, **Common Snipe** were being recorded across the island, with a maximum day count of 26 logged on the 12<sup>th</sup> and they were quickly joined by the first **Jack Snipe** which arrived

on the 13<sup>th</sup>. However, a fascinating dazzling session on the 14<sup>th</sup> hinted at the true extent of Snipe passage. Fifty-five Common Snipe, five **Golden Plover** and a single Jack Snipe were ringed.

Raptor representation improved from the 12<sup>th</sup> as four **Merlin** arrived, accompanied by **Redwing** and two **Short-eared Owl**. A ringtail **Hen Harrier** quartered the island from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup>, trumped by a stunning juvenile **Pallid Harrier** which arrived on the 19<sup>th</sup>, the first record for Lundy. Enjoyed by many at locations across the length and breadth of the island, it was watched carrying away a Common Snipe and later roosted by Pondsbyry. It was observed leaving the island shortly after dawn on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

The first **Yellow-browed Warbler** of the autumn was very elusive in Millcombe on the 15<sup>th</sup>, while a single **Chough** pushed along the west coast. A first-winter **Yellow-Legged Gull** was found feeding on a carcass of an Atlantic Blue-fin Tuna on the 17<sup>th</sup>, both good Lundy records. At least two **Yellow-browed Warbler** occupied the east coast on the 20<sup>th</sup>, with one bird continuing on the island until the 27<sup>th</sup>, typically being found in Quarter Wall Copse. A **Red-breasted Flycatcher** joined the action on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

A late **Tree Pipit** lingered between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> and a **Richard's Pipit** was flushed south over the Castle on the 20<sup>th</sup>. A **Treecreeper** on the 21<sup>st</sup> represented only the second appearance of the year. After the first initial push of 1,500 **Chaffinch** on the 16<sup>th</sup>, the passage peaked at 4,031 on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and another 3,114 the following day. A **Lapland Bunting** toured the island from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the second **Snow Bunting** of the autumn was elusive on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. After only one previous record dating back to November 1956, a female-type **Surf Scoter** briefly featured off the east coast on the 27<sup>th</sup> before being spooked by a resurfacing **Great Northern Diver**. Several weeks ahead of the big national influx, an adult male **Waxwing** brightened up Millcombe on the 28<sup>th</sup>, becoming the first to be ringed on Lundy on the 31<sup>st</sup> and continued on the island until the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November.



▲ Common Snipe photographed during a 'dazzling' survey at night 2 Oct (photo: Luke Marriner).



▲ A Pallid Harrier photographed flying over Lundy on 19 October (photo: Eden Davis).



▲ A Yellow-browed Warbler in Quarter Wall Copse on 17 October (photo Angus Croudace).



▲ A male Waxwing caught in Millcombe on 31 November (photo: Luke Marriner).

## November

The eleventh month opened with a late **Osprey** on the 1<sup>st</sup>, the fourth record of the autumn and the latest recorded for Lundy by five days. In Millcombe a **Woodlark** sheltered on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and a small **Woodcock** roost started to form. It was a quiet month for waders but included four **Golden Plover** passing west over the helipad on the 13th (between passenger flights). Barton's Field had been a magnet for **Jack Snipe**, but nocturnal surveys stalled owing to inclement weather or full moon phases. Feeding parties of 60 **Gannet** were a common feature off Lundy, sometimes accompanying a pod of 20 **Common Dolphin**. **Merlin** became a regular (if fleeting) sight over the village, along with an overwintering **Kestrel** and a **Peregrine**.

## December

A **Great Northern Diver** frequented the Landing Bay through the month, although appearances were sporadic. Further offshore, movements of auks peaked at 500 **Guillemot** and 200 **Razorbill** logged on Boxing Day. A big clear-out of passerines left Millcombe feeling like a ghost town, only the calls of squealing **Water Rail** and ever-present **Robin** song broke the silence. Two **Woodpigeon** remained faithful to the valley, as well as the small **Woodcock** day-time roost. Pondsbury remained quiet, acting as a day-time roost for **Snipe** and peaking at 11 **Teal** on the 13th. Island coverage waned but a late push of nocturnal surveys in late December ringed an additional seven Woodcock, eight **Jack Snipe**, four **Common Snipe** and a **Snow Bunting**.

## OTHER BIOLOGICAL RECORDS FROM LUNDY

The following reports have been compiled by the recorders for each group of organisms. Most of the records have been taken from the pages of the LFS Logbook not devoted to birds, and we thank all those who have taken the time and trouble to enter their observations of animals, plants, bryophytes, lichens, and fungi whilst on Lundy. We have not attempted to verify all the records, but unusual or interesting observations will have been checked with the originators. Most of the information will also eventually appear on the LFS website and on the various national databases.

**Please keep entering your 2024 sightings and sending us photographs that can be used to illustrate the 2024 AR!**

### MARINE SPECIES

*Compiled by Keith Hiscock*

There were no formal surveys of marine species in 2023 and so records are gleaned from the LFS Logbook (including Warden's records) and from observations made by the compiler. Records of commonly occurring species are not included unless there are unusual numbers or observations of breeding. Most records entered to the LFS logbook in 2023 were of cetaceans. A few records appear on iNaturalist. MARINElife survey reports (<https://www.marine-life.org.uk/survey-reports>) include records of cetaceans on the passages to/from Lundy which are summarised here but are not strictly from Lundy waters.

Names of taxa given here are the most recent (at March 2024). For authorities for each species and to check against changes to names, go to [www.marinespecies.org](http://www.marinespecies.org).

### ALGAE

#### OCHROPHYTA

##### **Wireweed** *Sargassum muticum*

A non-native species recorded at Lundy for the first time in 1999. Recorded in 2023 around Rat Island and in the Landing Bay and in pools south of the Lametor peninsula. Amounts seemed less than in some years generally but pools in Devil's Kitchen had a higher infestation, most likely because clearing plants from the pools stopped after 2021. (Keith Hiscock).

### MARINE INVERTEBRATES

#### GELATINOUS PLANKTON

The very few records of gelatinous plankton ('jellyfish' from various phyla) suggest that Lundy continues to attract 'oceanic' species. However, scyphozoan jellyfish were sparse in 2023 in south-west England in general and likely at Lundy. Especially notable is that there were no observations from Lundy of **Barrel Jellyfish** (*Rhizostoma pulmo*) that usually attract logbook entries.