

HONORARY SECRETARY'S REPORT 2023

Michael Williams

The year opened with the wonderful news that Dr Keith Hiscock, Vice President and former Chair of the LFS, had been appointed an MBE for services to marine conservation. We were able to celebrate Keith's award at the AGM.

Further exciting news came in early February when the Bird Observatories Council re-admitted Lundy to the network of Bird Observatories in Britain and Ireland after an absence of nearly 50 years. This was the culmination of a process initiated by Dean Jones during his tenure as Lundy Warden, which developed into a collaborative effort involving a variety of individuals and organisations, with the LFS providing a key advisory role and pledging to continue support for bird-ringing and other activities under the aegis of the new Observatory. The LFS warmly acknowledges the significant commitment that the Landmark Trust and Lundy Company have made in taking on responsibility for running the Observatory and making critically important contributions to staff time, as well as allocating funding for day-to-day operating costs.



◀ The Lundy Bird Observatory Logo

A small Observatory Organising Committee, which includes a representative of LFS, meets virtually several times per year and provides advice to the Bird Observatory Warden on administrative, operational, and technical issues. In addition to providing a £25 per person contribution to the cost of rings used by LFS ringers visiting the island during 2023, the LFS also transferred to the Observatory rings and other ringing equipment previously held by the LFS. The Committee further approved specific additional funding, requested by the Observatory Warden, for the purchase of equipment needed to survey breeding seabirds, especially Manx Shearwaters and Storm Petrels. Through the Rodley family legacy, and with muscle from several Conservation Working Parties, the LFS supported the renovation of the Heligoland Trap on the Terrace, whilst we also contributed from the Rodley legacy to the new Bird Observatory and Biosecurity Hub being established near the Lodge.

The Observatory has taken over responsibility for maintaining the natural history Logbook, which continues to be kept in the Tavern for the use of all visitors and bears the names and logos of both the Bird Observatory and LFS. The Observatory has also taken on the task of compiling the annual Lundy Bird Report, which will be produced as a stand-alone, electronic publication – enabling more technical detail and greater use of graphics and photos than is possible within the LFS Annual Report. The latter will continue to carry a summary of bird highlights, bringing coverage of birds in the Annual Report more into line with that for other taxonomic groups. A further key activity that LFS is delighted to see is the Observatory leading on the progressive digitisation of LFS logbooks from past years. Unfortunately, the logbooks for much of the 1950s and 60s were destroyed by water damage many decades ago, when stored on the island.

As the inaugural year for the Lundy Bird Observatory, 2023 was fittingly full of birding highlights. None more-so than the results of the RSPB-led seabird surveys during the spring and summer. These showed that Lundy now supports a staggering 40,000 breeding seabirds, including 25,000 Manx Shearwaters, nearly 10,000 Guillemots, and over 3,500 Razorbills. Storm Petrels are expanding to new sites and the island's iconic Puffins reached a new post-rat-eradication peak count of 1,335 individuals.

Some 4,741 birds were ringed during the year – just a couple of hundred off the all-time record, which would almost certainly have been broken if the weather in the latter part of the autumn had been less stormy. Record numbers of Common Snipe, Jack Snipe, Golden Plover, and Storm Petrel were ringed, whilst Redshank, Barolo Shearwater, and Waxwing were added to the Lundy ringing list. The long-term ringing studies of Manx Shearwaters and Wheatears continued. Occupation of the Manx Shearwater nest boxes reached a new high, with a record ten chicks produced in them. A total of 518 adults and chicks were newly ringed, and plenty of valuable data on survival was provided by the 142 different individuals recaptured from past years' ringing. These included 32 returning Lundy-bred chicks, the oldest being from 2008. A bird ringed as an adult in 2004 is the oldest ever encountered on the island. The Wheatear colour-ringing project produced more good news, with estimates of 61 pairs in the study area and 163 pairs for the whole island easily surpassing previous records. Adult survival between the 2022 and 2023 breeding seasons was at least 55%.

The daily census – a key requirement for meeting the criteria to remain as part of the national Bird Observatories network – was completed on more than 95% of days, easily exceeding the required threshold. The census route covers much of the island south of Quarter Wall and is generally walked first thing in the morning by the Observatory Warden or one of the Volunteer Assistant Wardens. A Cliff Swallow (native to North America) and a Pallid Harrier (from Eastern Europe) both seen in October, were new for the island's bird list, whilst other notable rarities during the year included Cory's Shearwater, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow-breasted Bunting and Surf Scoter.

Apart from the birds, surveys of the fauna and flora of Lundy have also been important activities during the year. The numbers of the iconic Lundy Cabbage have increased by 77% from 2,792 in 2022 to 4,959. Surveyors are collaborating with Dr. Steve Bullock, Associate Professor of Aerospace Engineering at the University of Bristol, to investigate the possibility of using remote drones and AI to identify and count cabbage in the future. A scoping exercise will be undertaken in 2024. This already is in use in agriculture where drones are used to calculate the amount of fertiliser required on crops.

Invertebrates continue to be reported in the LFS Logbook with all the most recorded species being the most visible. Rose Chafer beetles, Dor beetles, moths, and butterflies being seen in good numbers. It was a particularly good year for butterflies with the rarely recorded Clouded Yellow and Speckled Wood featuring in the reports. Emperor Dragonflies have been recorded with increasing frequency over the last few years with a first record of ovipositing at Rocket Pole Pond in 2018. This was repeated in 2021 at Quarter Wall Pond confirming attempted breeding. The exciting sighting this year of a nymph in Pondsby by Alan Rowland confirms successful breeding. Whether nymphs will survive the depredations of the birds that use Pondsby is another matter which will be resolved in one or two years when skin moults may be found in the spring.

Stuart Cossey carried out the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI) New Year Plant Hunt on January 1st and recorded 14 species in flower. This event takes place nationwide with

▶ Stuart Cossey, Assistant Warden (photographer unknown).



hundreds of observers recording plants actually in flower (not just leaves or buds), but this is the first time we have had records from Lundy. Hopefully, this can become an annual event. The most obvious flowering plant on New Year's Day is always Common Gorse, but Stuart managed to find many less-conspicuous species like Ivy-leaved Toadflax, Petty Spurge, Early Dog-violet, and Tall Ramping Furnitory. The results are added to a national database and help to understand how wild and naturalised plants are responding to a changing climate.

Amongst the highlights for marine life, Atlantic Bluefin Tuna are being recorded off Lundy again; likely not seen for about 40 years. There has been an apparently significant recruitment of the iconic and nationally rare Sunset Cup corals at the Knoll Pins after a decline in numbers since the mid-1980s but, on the downside, the non-native Red Ripple Bryozoan on shaded intertidal surfaces has spread. Always popular with visitors, seals are doing well.



Our keen mycologists, John Hedger and Mandy Dee, requested some new identification books for the LFS library. These were used repeatedly over four weeks of recording during the autumn, and many of the 40 or so new records for the year were only identified thanks to the species being covered in these new books. With around fifteen thousand species in the UK, no one book will cover them all. We have around 800 records on Lundy – only fourteen thousand two hundred to go! John and Mandy also led two popular Fungi Forays during their visit.

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◀ Mandy Dee and John Hedger with the new fungal identification books purchased by the LFS, November (photo: Chris Dee).

During 2023 the LFS sent four working parties to Lundy. The March trip and the May week both had to miss the joys of the Oldenburg crossing and suffer with the helicopter trip due to the unexpected delay in the return to service of the ship. Both groups had a good mix of experience and new members with plenty of useful tasks completed including drystone walling with expert tuition from Vince Pipe. Both Autumn parties suffered from withdrawals due mainly to family illness, and our long reserve list was extremely useful in recruiting replacements for the 11 places that were cancelled for these two trips. Again, with several new faces, plenty of essential work was completed. The Lundy Conservation Team has expressed their thanks for the Society's significant contribution to conservation work. If you wish to attend a working party and can step in at short notice to replace late withdrawals, send an enquiry to Trevor Dobie at lundyworkingparty@gmail.com, and your details will be noted and placed on the reserve list. Further details can be found on our website www.lundy.org.uk under 'What We Do'.

The LFS has continued to give small grants to support work on Lundy. These included £200 for working party equipment during the year. Financial support was also provided to renew the island's weather station. You can now monitor current meteorological observations on Lundy through our website. Two research grants were awarded in 2023. Yeng Sen received £312 to present her 2022 Lundy Manx Shearwaters research at a conference in Scotland and in the summer of 2023 Tara McEvoy-Wilding received £289 to develop a new method for sampling seabed invertebrates, using several loofah sponges held in a weighted frame.

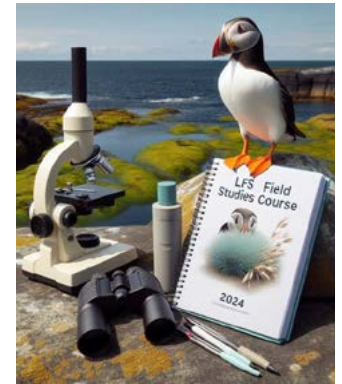
In terms of LFS business, the committee has been busy with a range of topics. We considered the role and person specification for a future LFS President by drawing up a role description – we are now seeking the right person to fulfil this role. As a charity, we have a duty as members, committee members, and officers to act in the best interests of the Society, so codes of conduct were drawn up, following good practice in the sector, and ensuring we had appropriate governance mechanisms in place to manage grievances or inappropriate behaviour. A planned LFS Day Trip to Lundy in June was unfortunately cancelled due to poor ticket sales, but on a positive note, plans are progressing for a Field Studies Course in April 2024 to develop the next generation of observers and recorders of Lundy's natural history.

Publications remain a core activity of the Society in delivering its objectives. The eighth volume of the LFS Journal was published during the year with Keith Hiscock editing for the first time. John Hedger edited the 2022 Annual Report and Bee Cox produced the Discovering Lundy bulletin. These are considerable undertakings with many hours invested in their production, so we record our thanks to Keith, John, and Bee. Chris Webster authored our new history and field guide, Lundy's Archaeology, with support from André Coutanche, Alan Rowland, and Mandy Yates. It provides a description of the sites on Lundy, the story of the archaeologists who investigated them, and a modern interpretation of how they fit into Lundy's story and the wider world.

There have been several changes in the Lundy Conservation Team. The Society records its tremendous gratitude to Rosie Ellis and Stuart Cossey, Warden and Assistant Warden respectively, who left Lundy during the course of the year. Our relationship with the team grows stronger every year and we wish both Rosie and Stuart all the very best for their futures. Within the LFS Chris Dee indicated last year that he wished to step down as LFS Treasurer due to his increased involvement in the Lundy Bird Observatory. Chris has been ably managing our finances for four years. Our thanks to Chris and welcome to John Shelley who has agreed to succeed him. Bill Williams has been trying to step back from the role of Honorary Independent Examiner for the past couple of years and he has now been able to do so. Thank you, Bill, for your contribution over the past seven years.

In the autumn, Sandra Rowland told us that she wished to stand down as Membership Secretary for personal reasons. Sandra joined the committee in 2007, taking over the role from Maggie Shaw, and has held the position for 17 years in total. Through Sandra's efforts, diligence, and perseverance the Society membership has grown by more than 50% during her tenure. Our enormous thanks to Sandra for her service. Lucy Lo-Vel is taking on the role, reconnecting her family with the Society's administration as her grandfather, John Dyke, was Honorary Secretary between 1959 and 1965.

My final thank you is to you, our members, for your support.



▲ LFS Field Studies courses will start in 2024 (photo: Michael Williams).



▲ Rosie Ellis, Lundy Warden (photographer unknown).