



▲ The Conservation team conducting a nocturnal survey during a magical aurora display (photo: Joe Parker).

## CONSERVATION TEAM REPORT

*Joe Parker – Lundy Warden*

It's been a great year for wildlife conservation on Lundy. 2024 was my first full year as Island Warden, and opened up opportunities for the wider team to settle into their roles. Assistant Warden Tara McEvoy-Wilding, has brought a fantastic marine focus to the island and really sank her teeth into our engagement and outreach programmes, putting together superb resources and leading on many of our school visits. I'll touch on that a bit later. Roger White quickly settled into the Ranger role and I'm sure many LFS work party members will be familiar with his handiwork. The season has also been a great opportunity to work more closely with the Island farmer, Tom Carr, as thoughts turn towards a new stewardship scheme on the horizon.

As always, a huge thank you to our residential volunteers this season. I'm really proud of the volunteer programme Lundy continues to offer; many of the season's successes are thanks to their invaluable efforts and time in the field so it's great to see the team 'fledge' the island and move on to the next chapters of their conservation journeys. Thomas Weston was first to arrive in March as the Bird Observatory Assistant Warden, conducting the daily census counts and bird ringing studies into late September, when Tom Williams picked up the baton in October to see out the remainder of autumn migration. Lucy Pécasse settled into the Seabird Fieldworker role, becoming a top-rate fieldworker and Manx Shearwater ringer through the spring and summer until the role transitioned into our Seal Fieldworker, expertly fronted by Ben Long, who diligently recorded the season's seal activities. A full breakdown of the seal season can be found in the report produced by Tara and Ben on pp58-62.



▲ The superlative Lundy Ambassadors (photo: Lucy Lo-Vel).

Euan Leach took on the Assisant Ranger role, maintaining the island infrastructure and getting stuck in with the various LFS and National Trust work party tasks, no matter how mucky! It was also great to see some familiar faces eager to return and get their Lundy fix. Luke Marriner, a former Bird Observatory Assistant, returned in the late autumn alongside Angus Croudace and new Lundyite, Brenig Hughes, who was introduced to the island through an RSPB Storm Petrel tracking visit and returned to volunteer with the Observatory later in the season. A summary of the birding year can be found on p36.

Our wonderful Lundy Ambassadors also deserve a special thank you. If you are not familiar with this supergroup, these wonderful folk help deliver our guided walks every sailing day, alongside school group visits and outreach on the mainland! This season we clocked up 97 'ambassador days', delivering 66 guided walks to over 750 island visitors, plus 17 school trips to Lundy. The majority of those are primary

schools from the local catchment, representing 14 of those outings, with the remainder consisting of three secondary schools and two college groups. We've also focused efforts on improving the educational value and 'journey' each school group receives; not only are they



▲ Action shot of Tara McEvoy-Wilding leading a school trip, as featured in DevonLive.

enjoying a memorable day trip, we have also been fine tuning the experience with pre-trip outreach visits into the school, setting new Lundy Superhero activities, and post-visit engagement, all with marvellous input from Amanda Head and Francis Stuart. Next season we're looking to pull together more engagement tools and roll out a seal champion competition, tackling the topical issue of seal disturbance by bringing it to the attention of our catchment schools and empowering local families.

In addition to the conservation team illustrated talk every changeover, the Bird Observatory team runs a daily wildlife log, collating the island sightings from the day. During peak migration, this 8pm gathering regularly snowballs into large crowds of stayers filling the wheelhouse and my logbook with excellent wildlife records. If you're staying on the island this year, please do consider joining if you've not been before. While all records are most welcome, you do not need to have a notebook full of records to contribute – simply grab a drink from the Tavern and listen to what sightings have been seen on the island today. For those looking to get more hands on, Tara delivered 19 Snorkel Safari sessions, carefully planned around the tides and sailings, taking over 100 people out snorkelling around the Landing Bay to interpret the island's Marine Protected Area. When the weather had other ideas, these events were replaced with Rockpool Rambles, exploring the wildlife-rich intertidal zone on foot.

If you've popped over to the island in the last few months, you might have noticed that our interpretation panels at Hartland Heliport and in the Landing Bay Boat Building have been updated and improved. The revamp is thanks to the Penny legacy, and I can definitely recommend you take a look on your next visit.

The Lundy Marine Protection Area Advisory Group meets a couple of times a year to discuss all MPA matters, bringing together local water users, charter boats, researchers and management organisations. Conservation team attendance and efforts have focused on revising island and marine codes of conduct, increasing awareness of the MPA and sensitivities such as the seabird and seal colonies and wider marine environment. To help deliver this message further, we've set up a mailing list with all the local charter boats, promoting what's happening on the island, shouting out success stories, sharing seal and seabird updates, and circulating best practices. Coupled with a full renovation of the island's RHIB which is set to be back on the water in 2025, the warden team are set to enjoy a greater presence across the MPA.



▲ Lundy Superheroes classwork ahead of a Lundy school trip.

Another focus of the season has been taking a closer look at the livestock and grazing regime across the island. One of the positives of my season has been sitting down with Tom Carr, the Lundy Company and the National Trust to consider the role and vision for the domestic and feral livestock. Excellent progress has already been made to reduce the domestic sheep flock and the Sika, Soay and goat populations in preparation for a managed increase in cattle and ponies, which will benefit our heathland cover, bracken management and species-rich grasslands. Looking ahead, we'll work alongside the National Trust and Natural England to forge a new management plan as we look to transition into a new countryside stewardship agreement. Over the last 18 months, we have increased our transparency around the feral livestock management conducted on the island. The management team attend our warden talks and letters are circulated across the properties during visits to explain why and how we carry out these activities.

We are still reaping the rewards of our continued rodent-free status. While it is important to recognise this achievement, it is also important that the island does not become complacent and remains ready to manage a rodent incursion at any given moment. Rodents stowed away on vessels can comfortably swim for a couple of kilometres, so ongoing checks are needed to ensure our nationally important seabird colony can breed in peace. We are delighted to work with the Biosecurity for LIFE project and last summer welcomed their newest member of staff: Kuki, an Australian Cattle Dog

and highly trained conservation detection dog, to conduct a routine check for rat signs. Dogs have 300 million scent receptors compared to our six million, making them ideal companions to detect rodents. Rather than relying solely on passive surveillance techniques such as wax blocks, the ability to add an active detection technique to our biosecurity toolkit is a real game changer.

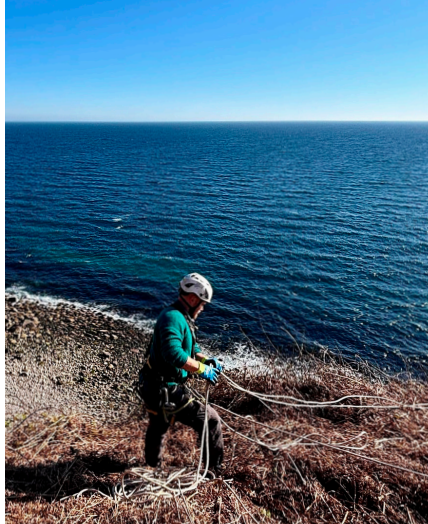
Changes in the law now mean as of 2025, we can no longer use second generation anticoagulant rodenticides in outdoor locations. This is overwhelmingly good news for the responsible use of rodenticides nationally, but it has immediate impacts on our ability to deal with incursions on important seabird colonies on islands. Fortunately, HSE have recently agreed to issue 'fast-track' approval of critical situation permits to Lundy (and other seabird islands) within 24 hours of a suspected incursion. We can all play our part in maintaining the island's biosecurity, so please continue to check your cargo before traveling to the island – it'll save the conservation team a lot of stress!

The Lundy Field Society has been instrumental over the last few decades in the ongoing non-native and invasive *Rhododendron* eradication. After a stellar effort from various work parties and rope access visits, I'm optimistic that we'll have a non-flowering year this season. When I came into this post, this particular goal felt a little



▲ Left to right: Tessa Coledale (Biosecurity for England Officer), Joe Parker (Island Warden), Laura Bambini (dog handler) and Kuki (biosecurity detection dog) (photo: Joe Parker).

ambitious, but concerted efforts in 2024 covering vast expanses of the plateau, sidelands and east coast cliffs are paying dividends. If you spot any pesty waxy-leaved *Rhododendron* plants popping up from the seed bank, please let us know! The lack of *Rhododendrons* helps the Lundy cabbage population, although 2024 was very much a middling year for cabbage. Other tasks completed with the LFS work parties include repairing the Manx Shearwater nest boxes, clearing the Millcombe fruit cage and wider walled gardens, beach cleans and Heligoland trap maintenance.



▲ Action shot of the Peninsula Access team about to abseil down on to unsuspecting *Rhododendron* plants thanks to a grant from The Banister Trust (photo: Joe Parker).

Another success story has been the positive response from the Lundy climbing community following the announcement of more extensive restrictions to reflect the continued expansion of Lundy's seabirds. As the island now boasts the third-largest cliff-nesting seabird colony in England, it's no longer suitable for visitors to scramble around sites like The Flying Buttress (AKA The Battery) through the breeding season. Devil's Slide and select east coast sites remain open year-round, however the vast majority of the coastline is now restricted until later in the season. Most restrictions are lifted by mid-August, but extensions remain in place for the later breeding Fulmars into September. For the latest climbing information, please visit the Landmark Trust website.

Now here's a question I didn't expect to be asking in a Lundy publication... How did a Common Lizard make it over to the island? I'm not sure we'll ever get to the bottom of this particular oddity, but you can read more about this bizarre record on p64 of the report. It'll be really interesting to conduct further surveys. So if you're visiting the island, particularly over the summer months, please keep an eye out for reptiles. The conservation team will deploy some corrugated metal sheets around the island which will function as great little basking spots for reptiles, so we'll be inspecting these over the coming years. We'll keep you posted, and with so much to look forward to in the coming season, I hope to catch many of you on Lundy in 2025!



▼ LFS work party installing the refurbished Manx Shearwater nest boxes (photo: Joe Parker).