



▲ Rocket Pole Pond (photo: Kathy Weston).

## TERRESTRIAL EXOTICS

Yet again, as the front cover of this Report attests, one of the species sightings we have been so sceptical about has proved to be based on reality.

Slow worms *Anguis fragilis*, first thought to have been accidentally introduced around 2011 but reported as long ago as April 2000, were last year joined by the sound of a Common Toad *Bufo bufo* calling near Quarry Pond in May 2023; again, this creature had been sighted in 2000 and 2001 by National Trust visiting work parties.

This year these two 'exotics' were joined by a third, a **Common Lizard** *Zootoca vivipara* (see Reptiles, Land Mammals and Bats in this issue). Warden Joe Parker and I scrutinised the photograph submitted almost accidentally by Andrea May. Andrea was seeking confirmation of an out-of-season sighting of a Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* when the Common Lizard photograph was spotted by Joe – she hadn't realised how unusual the lizard sighting was until Joe pointed it out. It was in the middle of a sequence of photographs, all so obviously identifiable as taken on Lundy that there was no doubt in our minds of it being a Lundy sighting.

It turns out that this was yet another species seen by a National Trust party at the millenium and not thought worthy of highlighting; lizards are relatively common on the mainland, so they must have thought its presence on Lundy was just as common.

## So, how did all these exotics come to be on Lundy?

I suggest that we can dismiss deliberate introduction as there are no other easily transferred species – frogspawn for example. Accidental introduction also seems unlikely, especially most recently with the biosecurity measures that are in place. Translocation of species is thought to result in an extremely low return (1.6%; Nash *et al*, 2020) with relocated species either moving on – not practical on Lundy – or simply dying out for lack of suitable habitat.

Lundy seems to have the ideal habitat for Slow worm and Common Lizard, and they have little impact on the fauna of the island: Slow worms depend on a variety of invertebrates, including slugs, snails, worms, spiders, insects and ant larvae (indeed, the first confirmed recent sighting of a Slow worm was under slate in an ants nest in Millcombe (Rowland 2012); Common Lizards are carnivorous and prey on small invertebrates, particularly soft-bodied prey such as spiders.

In discussing the favourite haunts of the Common Lizard, Michael (2024) might be describing the typical Lundy habitat where the Lizard was found: 'habitat features which provide shelter from the wind appear to be particularly valuable; these might include dense scrubby plants, such as Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, and vegetated but rocky quarry-like micro-habitats.' There is plenty of Gorse harbouring populations of soft-bodied spiders and other invertebrates on Lundy.

Why are we seeing these exotics with increasing frequency now? The explanation could be that these species have always been on Lundy, and it is another benefit of the successful Sea-bird Recovery programme completed in 2004, which rid the island of the major omnivorous predators – Brown and Black Rats. Whatever the case, please do look out for these three exotics and the one that is still missing, the Adder *Vipera berus*.

## References

- Nash, DJ, Humphries, N, Griffiths, RA** (2020). *Effectiveness of translocation in mitigating reptile development conflict in the UK*. Conservation Evidence 17:7-11
- Rowland A** (2012) *Slow worm: a new species for Lundy*. Discovering Lundy, Lundy Field Society Bulletin 42
- Michael, N** (2024) *The ecology and conservation of the Common Lizard in Britain*. British Wildlife magazine 36:3

An incidental sighting of my first Lundy Common Lizard occurred on 4 August 2024, on gorse near Rocket Pole Pond. I was slowly ambling about, always keen to find Lundy specimens. Following a break in the clouds, the sun came out, and a slight movement caught my eye: the lizard had seen me first, but we stared at each other for quite a while.

I reached for my phone, standing very still so as not to be seen as a threat, and the little critter carried on with its business. It looked like it was searching for food but could have been sunbathing. After obligingly posing it wandered off – let's hope it has a mate!

Such a charismatic, unique animal – I feel lucky and privileged to have had this encounter.

Andrea May