

HONORARY SECRETARY'S REPORT 2024

Michael Williams

The LFS has had a productive year and promises to have a busy time ahead – more on which below.

During 2024, the LFS sent four Conservation Breaks to Lundy, one in spring, one in summer and two in autumn. Of the possible 56 places, 55 were filled, with several reserves stepping forward to fill the withdrawals that often crop up. Many diverse tasks were completed. In April this included fence and wall repairs, and removing stockade fencing from the willows below Government House. In June, activities included assisting Dr Keith Hiscock with marine surveys as well as the usual activities. There were two breaks in October: the first involved filling gabion baskets at Bramble Villas to support the road and assisting Cressida Whitton from Devon County Council's Historic Environment team with archaeological surveys, and the second trip included a range of tasks in Millcombe Valley and a seal survey. Many thanks to leaders Belinda Cox, Hilary Winsor, Sue Murray, and Mandy English.

The first LFS Field Studies Course took place in April. These courses are intended to develop expertise in recording natural history to ensure we can continue to maintain our deep and rich records of observation on Lundy. Participants spent a week on Lundy with experts sharing their knowledge of freshwater ponds and streams, bird ringing and Grey Seals.

Fungi surveys were carried out by Professor John Hedger and Mandy Dee in April, September and November, with a number of sightings also entered by LFS members in the logbook. The November survey yielded 18 species of fungi new to Lundy, bringing the current island total to 862, and included a Fungus Foray over the south of Lundy, attended by 32 people including visitors, LFS members and island staff. A new development for 2024 is the inclusion of fungi detected by extraction of DNA from soil and root samples and identified from DNA databases ('metabarcoding'). These were found by Ruben Mole as part of his LFS-funded study, described below.

On the marine front, Lundy continues to be a hotspot for gelatinous plankton in the south-west, the highlight of which must be the Spiral Salp. (Salps are colonial sea squirts that live in the open ocean.) A nationally rare sea slug *Trapania tartenella* was found on the wreck of the MV Robert. As mentioned above,

► June Marine Survey (photo: Hilary Winsor).



▲ Fungus foray (photo: Joe Parker).



volunteers on a LFS conservation break assisted Dr Keith Hiscock surveying the shores around Rat Island and at Quarry Bay to catalogue non-native marine species in June. While a very few non-native species were highly conspicuous and widespread around Rat Island, some others seen in previous years were not found. Non-native species at Quarry Bay comprised just one example of the Australasian invader 'Darwin's Barnacle'.

Some very long lists of botanical species were recorded in the LFS logbook this year, with at least two new species of flowering plants for the island potentially seen; these will need to be verified before they can be added to the official list. The New Year Plant hunt took place again on 1st January, but only a few species were found in flower at this early date, with the most widespread being Gorse and Fuchsia.

Various reasons conspired to delay this year's Lundy Cabbage count, so that much of the cabbage had started to go over. An estimate of almost 2,300 plants was made, but comparing the flowering and non-flowering plants in distinct areas suggested the total number might be 50% higher, equalling an average year count. Laura Larkin and Andrew Whitehouse of Buglife spent a couple of days on the island investigating the flea beetles and weevils found on Lundy Cabbage; a full report is expected in the next Journal.

Sticking with terrestrial invertebrates, the first record of a Green Snail since 1906 was made by Mandy Dee. Mandy also reported the first sighting of Masked Yarrow Aphid, and Mark West found a Ragwort or Tansy Flea Beetle at Quarry Cottages. Evidence of Emperor Dragonflies breeding continues to be found in larvae found at Pondsbyr and more ovipositing, this time at Quarry Pond.

The sighting of the year must be that of a Common Lizard seen on the Gorse bushes at Rocket Pole Pond. Andrea May had not realised it was a unique sighting until Joe Parker saw the picture when she was showing him a photograph of an out of season Bullfinch. This further supports the Common Lizard sightings from 2000 by a National Trust group.

A record total of 724 Manx Shearwaters were newly ringed in 2024, and 253 previously ringed birds were recaptured. Of these, 45 had originally been ringed as chicks so their age was known. The oldest adults were from 2007 and the oldest chicks from 2009. All provided valuable data on survival rates. Eggs were laid in 13 nest boxes and 10 produced fledged young.



▲ Shearwater ringing (photo: Joe Parker).

The long-term colour-ringing study of Wheatears had another record year. There were an estimated 69 pairs nesting in the study area between the Castle and Jenny's Cove, and the season ended with 124 of the breeding adults carrying colour-rings. Adult survival between the 2023 and 2024 seasons, including migration to and from sub-Saharan Africa, was at least 55%.

Please continue to add records to the logbook in the Tavern – there is always the possibility on Lundy that you may have seen something unique! It's always helpful to have photographs and as much detail as possible about location, and remember to always add your contact details so we can follow up any queries.

The LFS awarded three research grants this year, to Ruben Mole and Chenxi Zhang from Imperial College London (£900 and £460 respectively) and Amanda Mead from Middlesex University (£800). Both Ruben and Chenxi have authored papers for the next volume of the LFS Journal. Details of these fascinating projects can be found in Jennifer George's article on p13.

Separate financial support was provided for Ruben's mycological study to enable the analysis of soil samples, and the Society has also funded the renewal of the working parties' tools, and contributed towards the cost of a new website for the Marine Protected Area.

At the 2024 AGM, Alan and Sandra Rowland stepped down from their roles as Chair and Honorary Membership Secretary respectively. Alan has served on the committee for 25 years in various roles and will continue to do so. Sandra served a magnificent 17 years as our friendly and efficient membership secretary – a crucial role for the success of the LFS, which would be nothing without our members. The Society unanimously voted to elect Alan and Sandra as Vice Presidents.

Chris Dee retired as Honorary Treasurer – a post he had held since 2020. Chris has guided and managed our finances with great efficiency, including through the uncertain period of the pandemic. We were able to thank Chris for his contribution at the 2024 AGM. We have welcomed John Shelley as his successor and Lucy Lo-Vel as our new Honorary Membership Secretary.



John Hedger has migrated from editing the Annual Report to the LFS Journal, and Kathy Weston has become our new Annual Report editor.

We wish to ensure that the LFS remains sustainable well into the future. As a charity it is sensible to review our internal governance periodically. A small Governance Review Group has been established to evaluate our overall direction, effectiveness and accountability and its work includes auditing the skills of the current committee, reviewing the legal duties of its trustees and ensuring we are following the Charity Commission's guidance on good practice. It will report back during 2025.

The committee held four meetings during the year both online and in person. Mark West has been co-opted to the committee to lead on the

◀ Rhododendron hunt (unknown photographer).



▲ Sunrise from The Barn (photo: Kathy Weston).

proposed photo library and in early 2025 he agreed to act as Vice Chair whilst Bee went travelling. The Society's policies have been reviewed and our new Treasurer, John Shelley, is drawing up a reserves policy. A reserves policy is particularly relevant in our case because the LFS currently has significant reserves, mostly held in the form of stock market investments.

The technical infrastructure including the content management system for the website is being updated and the committee has agreed to implement a membership management system during 2025, which will help support the membership secretary and importantly, reduce the risks associated with our current standalone membership database.

Looking ahead, 2025 is the centenary of Martin Coles Harman buying Lundy as his private estate. A great lover of the natural world, he subsequently went on to found the Lundy Field Society in 1946. The LFS will be marking this anniversary in some modest ways, including reprinting his biography, 'Island King'.

We will be arranging another Field Studies Course in the autumn of 2025, covering the subjects of Lundy's fungi, archaeology and birds. We are grateful to Mandy Yates for taking on the organisation of this. Even further ahead, 2026 will mark the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Society so we are organising a Discover Lundy week in May of that year.

As ever, we could not do all of these things without you, our members. Thank you for your continued support.