

# HONORARY SECRETARY'S REPORT 2025

*Michael Williams*

The Hon Sec's inbox often receives some interesting enquiries, many of a historical nature. An unusual enquiry was received from the Lucilla Dramatic Society in Crosby who were seeking permission to reuse some of the photos of Lundy from the LFS website to illustrate the programme for a production of a play, 'Heaven's Paradise'. I was also able to provide advice to the Paddle Steamer Preservation Society about some Lundy books and entered into correspondence about an article published in the Puffin Post, for collectors of Puffin Books, which included a competition to win a trip to Lundy in 1967.

We have received some scans of some magnificent illustrations of Lundy made by a mapmaker for the Ordnance Survey in the late 19th century. A donation of magic lantern slides of Lundy in the Heaven era show life on Lundy in the late 19th century. These are a wonderful addition to the historic archive.

2025 saw the centenary of Martin Coles Harman (our founder along with Leslie Harvey) buying Lundy as his private estate. To discreetly mark this anniversary, we reprinted 'Island King' by Tony Langham – the biography of Harman. We also started a project to re-present the medals that hang in the Marisco Tavern, awarded to Martin's son John, that was completed in early 2026.



▲ John Pennington Harman VC. Display in the Marisco Tavern (photo: Alan Rowland)

I was finally able to make a long-awaited trip to the British Library, accompanied by Derek Green and Lars Liewendahl to deposit the Harman family's Lundy stamp archive with the Library's Philatelic Department. This had been identified when we cleared Diana Keast's store in Marlborough in February 2020 and I had agreed with Diana that it should be gifted to the British Library. It is a mine of fascinating postal history and the Library was extremely pleased to receive it.



▲ Donations to the British Library (photos: Michael Williams)

In October 2025 the LFS ran its second Field Studies course, organised and led by Mandy Yates. Unfortunately, the start of the course was delayed by one day due to high winds. Undeterred, thirteen students took part in five jam packed days of teaching which included studying fungi with John Hedger and Mandy Dee, and archaeology with Cressida Whitton. Fortuitously Chris Dee was also on the island and supplemented their learning with excellent bird talks and bird ringing demonstrations. Bee Cox also talked about how the LFS works and Carol Anne Lee gave a talk about seals.



▲ A peaceful moment indoors for the Field Studies Course (photo: Mandy Yates)

Two grants were awarded for research in 2025, both on Fungi and from researchers from Aberystwyth University who undertook their research in November. Ruby Bye used battery-driven traps to catch and eventually identify the spores of fungi in the Lundy air. Sheena Duller worked with John Hedger to survey the Coral and Club fungi in Lundy grassland for Louise Tranter, looking for 'cryptic' (hidden), possibly new, species of the Meadow Coral. Both studies are described in more detail on p92. The results of the DNA studies will be appearing in the 2027 volume of the Journal.

2025 was a bumper year for recording fungi and slime moulds (Myxomycetes) on Lundy, with 37

species found in the field which were new to the island, including one Myxo. The total thus now stands at 899 species of fungi but easily exceeds that figure if records from DNA and cultural studies published in the 2025 volume of the LFS Journal are added, of which more later.

John Hedger visited in March for a week to record microfungi on plants and ran a Foray open to visitors, notable for finding the Spring

Pinkgill, an elegant toadstool unexpectedly appearing in the Narcissi below the Ugly and a new record. As mentioned above, John and Mandy Dee led part of the Field Studies Course in October and over 140 species were found, including nine new records and a number of second records. Furthermore, John helped with the residential Imperial College field course which now has a day surveying fungi on the Airfield and South West Field as a part of the programme and is providing useful long-term monitoring of the fungi in these two sites.

Due to personal circumstances, Sandra and Alan Rowland were unable to undertake the Lundy Cabbage count in 2025. Fortunately, in 2024, the Assistant Warden, Tara McEvoy-Wilding, was instructed in the art of cabbage counting and she, with help from the conservation team was able to make a count in July, recording 4,127 plants, which is an increase of 82% on 2024. Alan, Sandra and the LFS all get a mention in the recently published book, 'Endemic' by James Harding Morris.

There were fewer records of both terrestrial and freshwater invertebrates. A brief survey visit by the National True Bug Recorder, Kevin Rowley, re-discovered the long lost Diving Bell Spider in Ponsbury, later subsequently found by Mark West. Kevin added a number of new Freshwater Bug and Beetle species in particular the Water Measurer. You can read his account of his trip on p36.

Neil Barnes added another Shieldbug, the Hawthorn Shieldbug, to the island list but discovered this has been previously found by Darrin Downing in 2022, which had gone unreported.

The Lundy Bird Observatory successfully completed its third and final probationary year as a provisionally accredited member of the British & Irish observatory network. We were delighted to find we had been approved for full accreditation after the Bird Observatories Council AGM in early 2026.

The Bird Observatory now oversees the bird reports and the highlights of 2025 include:

- 166 species recorded (including some for which formal acceptance by British or Devon rarities committees is still pending)
- 4,865 birds ringed (including 889 Blackcap, 753 Manx Shearwater, 517 Willow Warbler, 493 Chiffchaff, 323 Goldcrest, 246 Storm Petrel, 219 Swallow and 217 Meadow Pipit as the most ringed species; the totals for both Manx Shearwater and Chiffchaff being island records)
- An RSPB-led breeding seabird survey, which showed record post rat-eradication populations of Guillemot, Razorbill, Puffin, Kittiwake and Shag, with Lundy now internationally important for its assemblage of more than 45,000 breeding seabirds
- Continued productivity monitoring of auks, Kittiwake and Fulmar, data tagging of Manx Shearwaters and Storm Petrels, colour-ringing of large gulls, and ringing of the first Shag and Oystercatcher chicks since 2000 and 1976 respectively

On the bird ringing front, as noted above, a record total of 753 Manx Shearwaters were newly ringed in 2025, including 339 chicks. Previously ringed birds were recaptured on 499 occasions, the oldest having been encountered first in 2007. Some individuals were caught multiple times through the season, particularly the closely monitored adults breeding in nest boxes, providing a detailed picture of their lives. Fourteen pairs made breeding attempts in boxes, with nine chicks reared successfully.

The long-term colour-ringing study of Wheatears continued, with an estimated 61 pairs nesting in the study area between the Castle and Jenny's Cove. By the end of the season 111 of the breeding adults involved were carrying colour-rings. Adult survival between the 2024 and 2025 seasons, including migration to and from sub-Saharan Africa, was at least 53%. Direct evidence of their long-distance travel came in the form of a Lundy colour-ringed male that was photographed in Mauritania on his way north in March 2025, then seen back on Lundy in the breeding season.



▲ Double rainbow over Millcombe (photo: Tim Jones)

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 sent five Conservation Breaks to Lundy during 2025, equalling our recent count. In April, due to a helicopter flight being required, the number of volunteers was restricted to 11. The other four visits had a full quota of 14 volunteers, so a total of 67 volunteers spent a week on Lundy.

The work carried out was varied, including the usual rhododendron seedling searches, drystone wall repairs, fence removal and replacement, sapling care, plus gully and steps clearing, and Church and Museum cleaning. Some unusual tasks were seal surveys, helping with Storm Petrel nestbox checking, archaeological survey training, bracken control, grazing control enclosures removed and gabion filling at Bramble Villas access road.

All leaders reported successful and harmonious trips, and our grateful thanks must go to them: Mandy English, Belinda Cox, Evelyn Rita Northage Hicken, and Hilary Winsor (who led two Conservation Breaks).

The administration of the Society is the most significant part of this role. Over the summer I worked with our Chair, Belinda Cox, to find a new Honorary Membership Secretary and we are pleased to welcome Charlotte Gardner who has been co-opted to the Committee. Our thanks to Lucy Lo-Vel who stepped down from the role due to work commitments.

We look forward to the Society's 80th anniversary in 2026 and this will be marked with a Discover Lundy week on the island in May. Fingers crossed, we will host the AGM on the island during the week, the first time the meeting has ever been held outside Exeter or Crediton. (We did try to do this for 75th anniversary but the COVID pandemic prevented it going ahead.)

We will also be reviewing the recommendations from the Governance Review that was concluded in the autumn. The review has looked at our governance to ensure the charitable aspects of the LFS are fit and proper so we can continue to deliver our objectives effectively and for the public benefit.

My grateful thanks to everyone who contributes to the success of the LFS as we enter our 80th year and to you, our members, for supporting what we do.