

## **Warden's report (October 2012 - April 2013)**

The following report includes information gathered between October 2012 and March 2013. However as there was no Warden in place until February 2013 some areas have received little or no attention.

### **1. Staff**

1.1 In February, Beccy MacDonald took up the post of Warden. Following funding cuts and subsequent re-structuring there will be one permanent Warden based on the island throughout the year supported by a voluntary seasonal assistant. To contact the Warden, please use the following email address and not those provided in previous reports: [warden@lundyisland.co.uk](mailto:warden@lundyisland.co.uk)

1.2 Ashley Millman was appointed Voluntary Seasonal Assistant Ranger in March to work alongside Steve Pratt (Ranger) until the end of October 2013. Ashley has come to us from the National Trust where he was working as a Coastal Warden.

1.3 Ashlinn Mottahedin-Fardo will be joining Beccy as the Voluntary Seasonal Assistant Warden from the middle of May and will be in post until the end of November 2013 to assist with Natural England monitoring. Ashlinn is currently volunteering on Flatholm as an assistant warden. Her long term aim is to find a permanent position as a Coastal/Marine Warden.

1.4 Mel Parker has been seconded to the NE's Media department and the new Marine Lead Advisor for the Devon and Severn team is Ruth Porter.

### **2. Marine - general & monitoring**

2.1 Beccy MacDonald, Warden, undertook RIB training (RYA Powerboat Level 2) courtesy of Thom Flaxman Secretary of the North Devon Yacht Club.

2.2 MARINELife restarted their monthly survey on MS Oldenburg. One surveyor made the crossing at the end of March and observed large numbers of seabirds, particularly Razorbills and Kittiwakes. No cetaceans seen on this occasion. If you would like to see the March report please visit <http://www.marine-life.org.uk/ilfracombe-lundy>

MARINELife have also proposed a Wildlife Officer for MS Oldenburg and this is currently under discussion with the Warden. In essence, the Wildlife Officer would interact with island visitors during their journey to Lundy, pointing out marine life and educating them about the ecology of the MCZ and the waters surrounding Lundy.

2.3 An unusual sighting of a Basking Shark was made by a visitor on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> April, who watched it gracefully feed from Lametry Bay around to Rat Island. Another Basking Shark was seen on 20<sup>th</sup> April in Landing Bay by a member of staff and two visitors. This seems very early for these gentle giants to be in Lundy waters however a large group were seen three weeks ago off the Southeast coast of Ireland. Any opinions on this would be appreciated.

Small cetacean pods were seen going passed Quarry beach by the Warden in March during the Rhododendron works but could not be identified due to distance.

The first Harbour porpoise sighting (logbook) was on the 6<sup>th</sup> March on the west coast.

2.4 NTZ Infringements – in February concerns were raised regarding a marker buoy that had been positioned just within the NTZ (Landing Bay end). IFCA were informed of the buoy. Within two days the buoy had been removed. Clarification on the issue of keep pots within the NTZ is required as it is believed that this is what the buoy marked.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> April a small blue/black rib was seen with a fishing rod in the NTZ. Unfortunately it had left before the Warden was able to get any details from it.

2.5 Seals – Formal observations began again in April as adverse weather conditions stopped any observations in March and February. No observations were undertaken between November and January as there was no Warden.

An informal survey was carried out during the Warden’s powerboat training when 11 seals were seen at the Knoll pins, 1 at Threequarter wall bay, 6 at Surf point and 1 at Devil’s Kitchen.

The March survey (carried out on foot) counted 30 individuals along the East and North coasts. The aim is carry out one survey per month in May and June, followed by two surveys per month up to November.

The Logbook records provide the following information:

- 43 seals counted at Three Quarter Wall Bay (December 2012)
- 70 seals counted between Three Quarter Wall and Brazen Ward (January 2013)

Talks have been ongoing with Sue Sayer from Cornwall Seal Group and they have offered volunteers to assist with the surveys. We are working together to further the seal survey through ID photographs; this has been touched on before and needs to be developed so that we can learn more about the Lundy population and its movements.

2.6 A research group from Plymouth University will be staying on the island from 18<sup>th</sup> May to 29<sup>th</sup> June to carry out cetacean surveys and to analyse data from the C-Pods. At the time of writing both C-Pods were still deployed due to adverse weather conditions that have prevented their recovery.

2.7 Historical data on seals, cup corals, *Sargassum* removal, rockpool surveys and temperature loggers is currently being collated and reports produced for NE.

2.8 Seabirds: The first Puffin was seen at Benjamin’s chair by Peter Lambden, shortly followed by Grant Sherman who recorded three in Jenny’s Cove on 20<sup>th</sup> March. The population has grown to 15 on 11<sup>th</sup> April.

The Manx Shearwaters have returned to Lundy and were first heard by Chris Dee during his stay in the first week of April. This was confirmed when two unfortunate birds were discovered outside St.John’s Valley where it is believed that they collided with the wall.

A Long-tailed Skua was spotted flying over Millcombe by the bird ringing group and was promptly followed North on the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup> April.

On Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup>, the third bird ringing group spotted a male Golden Oriole. Unfortunately, they were not able to catch and ring.

2.9 The marine temperature loggers will soon be retrieved with the assistance of DG.

2.10 A beach clean-up was carried out by the Warden with the assistance of the NT working party in March. 577 items were found including 222 polystyrene fragments, 38 bottle tops and a dog collar. One Nursehound (*Scyliorhinus stellaris*) eggcase was also found and reported to The Shark Trust.

### 3. Terrestrial – General & monitoring

3.1 Feral stock: A full count of the stock was carried out in February 2013 by Lundy staff and this information was used to determine the outcome of the latest cull. A further count was undertaken by our deerstalkers on 15<sup>th</sup> March and this showed the populations to be as follows:

	No. of males	No. of females	No. of young	Total
Sika deer	6	46	7 Prickets	59
Soay sheep	52	114		166
Goat	3	12	5 kids	20

The present stocking levels are consistent with those recommended by our Higher Level Stewardship Agreement. We have been advised not to cull the goats any further in the near future as their numbers are very low. The 2012/13 cull has reduced the feral stock head count from 306 to 245; a reduction of 20% which will reduce the amount of grazing pressure. Considering this decrease along with that of the vastly reduced rabbit population, the amount of grazing pressure across the island has been significantly reduced.

The first Soay lamb was recorded on the 20<sup>th</sup> March and 18 lambs were counted on 12<sup>th</sup> April (plus 1 corpse). The harsh weather experienced during late March and early April has probably reduced the number of survivors.

3.2 Rabbits: Numbers have yet to recover since the Myxomatosis outbreak last year. The most recent count of nine individuals (including one black rabbit) is raising some concern as those individuals are showing symptoms of another illness, possibly Haemorrhagic fever (VHD).

3.3 Three working parties joined the Ranger and Warden in March; two from the National Trust and one from the Lundy Field Society. Although the weather was against us for most of the time the parties carried out Rhododendron seedling searches/pulling and burning (see Rhododendron eradication section for further details). A systematic clean of the Landing Bay beach (see beach clean section), Alexander clearance and a number of general tasks were also undertaken.

3.4 Rhododendron management: The Ranger's Rhododendron management plan for 2013 has begun to progress well although not at the level to which would be preferred due to the Easterlies that have hit the island hard over the past two months.

The following achievements were made in March:

- Plateau seedling searches were carried out across Middle Park with the following outcomes:
  - Area PE5 (Plateau East 5) – 0 seedlings found
  - Area PE6 (Plateau East 6) – 5 seedlings found and marked
  - Area PW7 (Plateau West 7) – 2 seedlings found and marked
- In Area 16 (Brazen Ward), 54 seedlings were treated
- Seedling pulling was carried out at Area 12, Quarries South with the following outcomes:
  - Section 12D – 512 seedlings found and pulled
  - Section 12C – 208 seedlings found and pulled
- All the remaining large bushes were cleared at Quarry gully with the assistance of a specialist access team from Rope Works.
- Burning of Rhododendron took place in Area 12, Quarries south with all the live Rhododendron from the Quarry gully being burnt (with 30% of that cut being lowered to the beach and burnt above the high tide mark). The burn platform was relocated and approx. 140m of cut stacks were burnt at a rate of approx. 30-35m /day.

3.5 Management of Alexanders: An early hit was made on the plants in Millcombe valley with a large number being pulled. The remaining plants will have their flowering heads removed regularly throughout spring to further reduce their spread.

3.6 A bat migration study has been proposed by Geoff Billington which is of great interest as no such study had previously been carried out. The LFS are currently discussing funding options with him and the Warden is awaiting a full proposal which will then be discussed with DG and NE to ensure that the study is appropriate.

3.7 There have been no rat related incidents since the last reports and the permanent boxes around the South of the island and on MS Oldenburg are being reset and checked once a month.

3.8 Three groups of bird ringers have been to the island with varying degrees of success due to the recent windy weather. So far they have rung a number of species including Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Grasshopper Warbler, Gold crest, Blackcap and Whitethroat.

Tony Taylor spent some time during his visit ringing adult Wheatears, with a view to starting a RAS project on them for the BTO. This scheme tracks the survival of adult birds from one year to the next, to assess how well they are coping in Africa through the winter. As the Lundy population is discrete it is an ideal population of which to develop this study.

3.9 The terrestrial birds are doing well with frequent sightings of Peregrines, Merlin, Sparrowhawk, Skylarks, Wheatears, House Sparrows, Swallows, Gold finches, Gold crests and Fire crests.

3.10 Isabel Whiney from Sheffield University will be returning to continue the House Sparrow research on 23<sup>rd</sup> April and will be joined by a colleague in June.

3.11 Pygmy Shrew research query – if anyone has any information regarding the research that was carried out on the DNA profiles of Lundy's pygmy shrews, Beccy (Warden) would be very interested to find out who was involved. Information has come to light that a number of shrew tails were collected and sent off to someone but whom, no one knows. NE is not aware of this research.

#### **4 Education, interpretation & events**

4.1 Walks and talks: During the absence of a Warden, Grant Sherman (Lundy Head Barman) did a wonderful job of continuing the regular weekly walks and talks for visitors. Simon Dell (LFS) has also undertaken visitor walks and talks when he has been available and his (and Grant's) assistance are greatly appreciated.

Since March, an introductory talk to Lundy has been arranged for changeover days with at least one walk per week. Both the talks and walks have been very well attended with very generous donations to the Lundy Fund. Due to their popularity these will continue throughout the season.

4.2 Simon Dell has become a valuable asset to the island, providing talks to schools and other interested parties on the mainland. These talks are furthering the local understanding regarding Lundy and supporting the island's Higher Level Stewardship.

Simon Dell is also assisting Beccy MacDonald (Warden) with group visits to the island and is helping to develop the island's education programme.

4.3 The Splash In! is planned for Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> June. Pre-registration has already begun.

Prizes from last year's cancelled competition from Olympus, AP Valves, FOC diving (Mares) are being used along with new prizes donated from Forth Element in the shape of a travel luggage set and a £200 travel voucher from Scuba Travel. Forth Element has also kindly donated hats for every participant.

Two external judges, Stuart Philpot and Neil Hope, will be attending the event. A third judge this year will be Nigel Dalby to bring in a different aspect to the judging panel.

4.4 Seabird interpretation boards are being developed for the Church by Chris Baillie (LFS) with assistance from Beccy MacDonald (Warden), Tim Davis, Richard Campey, Anna Taylor and Andy Lester. The board should be completed by the end of April/early May.

4.5 A leaflet on Bird ringing is being developed by Tim Davis with assistance from others including Beccy MacDonald (Warden).

4.6 Talk by Tony Taylor on Bird ringing on Lundy, with a historical twist to mark his 40 years of visiting Lundy, was well attended and very enjoyable. Specialist talks from LFS visitors and others are being encouraged to allow experts to impart their knowledge and for visitors to learn more about Lundy.

4.7 The Lundy Calendar 2014 will be available to buy from the end of April. Entries for the 2015 Calendar are already being received by the Warden.

## **5 Media**

5.1 Our "Letter from Lundy" has been reinstated with the March/April article printed in the 17 April 2013 edition of the North Devon Gazette.

5.2 Countryfile covered a piece on Marine Conservation Zones at the end of March. The team of four, including presenter Tom Heap, came to visit the island during the first week of April to interview Beccy (Warden) regarding Lundy's MCZ and NTZ.

5.3 Springwatch visited the island between 20<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> April to collect footage of Lundy for a special 'Best of British' edition due to feature sometime in May.

5.4 Articles: An general article on Lundy was produced by the Warden and should appear in the June edition of Reader's Digest at the request of the National Trust.

Information and images on the Lundy landscape and Warden led activities have been supplied for an article in Vogue, however we will not know if this will be used until May as it is for a piece in the June edition. The last update suggested that the Snorkel Safari's had a mention.