

Letter from Lundy – April 2006

April has been a busy month and the season is picking up, with lots of day visitors coming across on the Oldenburg, often in search of a Puffin or some of the other spectacular wildlife here on Lundy. We had our first Puffin sighting on the 7th April and they have been seen on a regular basis since.

The Swallows arrived on Lundy at the beginning of April and our first Linnet was spotted on the 1st with numbers increasing as the month went on with over 70 seen between 26th and 28th. We had a group of bird ringers visiting Lundy for a week towards the end of the month and they managed to ring over 200 of the 500 Willow Warblers that were seen here on 23rd. Other bird sightings in April included a Black Redstart, Honey Buzzard and 2 Whimbrel's were spotted several times between 22nd and 28th. Lundy's resident Peregrines have begun nesting and we've had sightings of Merlin's and Kestral's

The first Soay lambs we're seen on the 3rd April and most of the ewe's have now lambed, and with the annual Lundy mammal count taking place at the moment we will soon have accurate numbers for all our feral stock, including the Soay, Sika deer and Feral goats.

There has been plenty of minator beetles all over the island and one of the UK's fastest beetles, the Green Tiger Beetle, who can travel at speeds of 60cm a second, have been seen on the east side of the island for the first time this year.

The thrift has begun to flower at the South Lighthouse, and the rest of the island should follow suit soon. As the Oldenburg comes into the Landing Bay there is a display of yellow flowers from the Celandine and the first Lundy Cabbage has flowered as well as violets and bluebells, so soon there will be even more colours across the island, and we are hoping for another successful year for Lundy's flowering plants!

The Lundy RIB (rigid inflatable boat) was launched a couple of weeks ago to patrol the Marine Reserve and Lundy's No Take Zone (NTZ), unfortunately there has been some illegal fishing activity as a boat was reported doing some angling inside the NTZ, where no fishing or collecting of any sea life is allowed.

The Grey Seals around Lundy are still being seen regularly, often hauled out on the rocks and in the Landing Bay as the Oldenburg arrives. Some of the island staff did their first dive of the season recently and were accompanied by an inquisitive grey seal. With Snorkel Safari's starting soon we hope to get more visits from the seals around the jetty.

Nicola Saunders
Lundy Warden

Letter From Lundy May

Each year on Lundy a group of National Trust volunteers come across for a few days to conduct our annual mammal count. At the start of May this year they spent 2 days walking the island counting all the Soay Sheep, Feral Goats and Sika Deer. This gives us a great indication of the numbers of wild mammals we have on Lundy, and the results from this years count gave us estimated populations of 62 Sika deer; 125 Soay sheep and 58 feral goats. Towards the end of April there was a sighting of a very rare white sika, and last week it was spotted again and photographed for the first time.

Passage of Manx Shearwaters can now be seen daily, and some of their nesting burrows are now active. Nearly all the world's Manx Shearwaters breed on just a few islands around the UK, and they are a special British bird that we have a responsibility to protect. They are a truly oceanic species and incredible flyers, travelling as far a field as Brazil. They are often over looked by the casual observer as they only come into land under the cover of darkness, to avoid predators like the Blackbacked Gull. This year we are hoping to conduct another survey of the breeding population, and we are optimistic for a successful year now that Lundy is rat free and the chicks have a better chance of survival.

We've had sightings of a Little Egret by quarter wall for 2 days on 10th and 11th May. And between 7th-14th May we had a special visitor to Lundy, a Green winged Teal. The Green-winged Teal is an American species, although mainland records have increased steadily since the 90's this is believed to be the first one recorded on Lundy. Sparrowhawk, buzzard, kestrel and Merlin have all been seen, plus sightings of Hen Harriers and 2 Turnstones on the beach on 14th. Large numbers of guillemots and Razorbills can be seen on the cliffs with a count of over 2000 Guillemots on 25th May. The occasional Spotted Fly Catcher's have been sighted with a peak of 17 on 13th. And the Greater spotted woodpecker is still present in Millcombe valley as well as 5 Turtle doves.

On the 10th May a BBC film crew came over to Lundy with Kate Humble to film Lobsters and other marine life in the No Take Zone that forms part of Lundy's Marine Nature Reserve on the east coast of Lundy. A successful day was had by all, and they managed to get footage of a 'berried' (pregnant) female. So, for an opportunity to see some on Lundy's underwater wildlife keep your eyes open for the program 'Sea Watch', which should be broadcast later in the year.

Nicola Saunders
Lundy Warden

Letter From Lundy - June

Hello again, June has been a busy month around the Island for marine sightings, dolphins are on the increase with pods of between 12 to 50 individuals, seen throughout the month.

On 18th of June we had our first Basking Shark sighting of the year, followed by another on 19th and again on 25th. The Basking shark is the 2nd largest fish in the ocean after the Whale shark and they can grow up to 35ft in length. Despite their huge size they feed entirely on the microscopic plants and animals known as plankton that are found near the surface of the water at this time of year. It is encouraging to have sightings reported especially after the recent stranding on Westward Ho! beach.

The dive season has taken off and we have had over 45 divers staying on Lundy this month, exploring many of the fantastic dive sites around the Island. A dive journalist was amongst one group and he managed to take some fantastic photographs when diving with Grey Seals in the Marine Nature reserve.

The first Sunfish was seen on 21st and a second sighting was reported from the Oldenburg the next day en route back to Bideford. Sunfish are impressive looking fish that can grow up to 4m, they are the world's heaviest bony fish and have shortened disc shaped bodies that appear to be mostly head with a tail that is very narrow. They feed mainly on jellyfish which have also been increasing in numbers this month, with compass, moon, *Cyanea* and comb jellyfish all now being seen regularly.

Sightings of Manx Shearwater have been increasing with a peak of 3000 seen off Lundy on 23rd and 24th. We've had daily Puffin sightings with a max of 15 seen on 22nd, Puffin surveys are continuing and to date we have up to 7 confirmed nesting pairs on the island so we're hoping to see Puffin chick's again this year.

Other bird sightings this month have included a Grey Heron and a Quail, both of whom have been present for most of the month. And the first Guillemot chick was spotted on the 12th June.

With a reduction in the amount of rabbits on Lundy this summer, the vegetation on the island is flourishing. The Ranger, Chris, conducted a flower survey of the South West field this month and found many different species, including Sheepsbit, that has not been seen in flower in that area for more than 3 years! The Lundy cabbage survey group were also over conducting their annual counts and they managed to find all 3 Lundy cabbage beetles, and they estimate that there are over 8000 Lundy Cabbage plants this year, the 2nd highest count in 14yrs. The Sundews are growing well and the Heath Spotted Orchids have come into flower at Pondsburry. So a good season all around for flowering plants!

Nicola Saunders – Lundy Warden

Hello again from Lundy.

The majority of our seabird chicks on the island have fledged and many of our guillemots and Razorbills have left the cliffs to return to the sea until next year. This month we had a report of 11 Puffins all seen at St Phillips Stone at the same time, which is a great sign. We expect all the Puffins will have fledged in the next few weeks, so you'll have to be quick if you want to see one, but of course there is always next year !

Our first Lapwing of the year was spotted this month and 3 were seen at the south end of the island on 16th and then again flying pasted the Old Lighthouse. There was a large amount of aerial activity on the same day, first a greater Skua and 7 storm petrels were recorded followed by 69 light aircraft landing on Lundy's airstrip for the annual North Devon Strut. It was a hugely successful day with the highest number of planes to date, and no incidents or accidents, which was a relief to the pilots and Lundy's fire team !!

Bell and Ling heather are flowering at the moment – colouring the heathland a pink tinge, and there is plenty of Tormentil and Bog Pimpernel around the island.

The annual No Take Zone (NTZ) surveys of the marine nature reserve have taken place this month, with the potting survey a few weeks ago. A team of marine biologist placed lobster pots all around the island and measured the crabs and lobsters that were caught (all were returned to the sea after their measurements were taken) and early signs suggest that not only are there many more lobsters in the NTZ, but they are also growing larger than those outside. A great sign that the NTZ is working as a safe haven for such sea creatures!!

At the moment the team is back on Lundy doing dive surveys to assess the effect the NTZ is having on other creatures, such as the protected pink seafan. This is a very delicate colonial animal that can live for up to 40 years, but it is very fragile and can be damaged easily through fishing activities or anchoring.

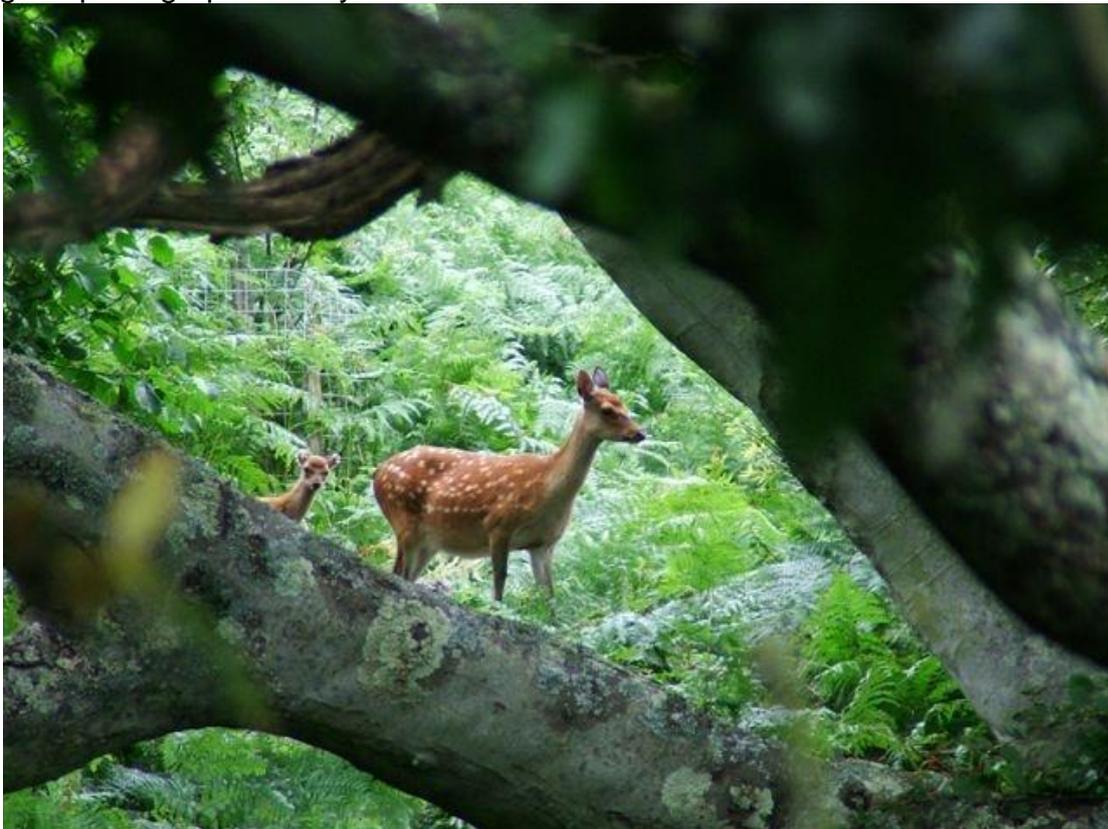
We are still having regular dolphin sightings from Lundy and the Oldenburg on her way to and from the island, with occasional sightings of sunfish and porpoise. We've not had too many more Basking Shark seen as yet, but I am assured they'll be passing by in the next week or so !! So if you do manage a trip to Lundy over the next month, keep your eyes peeled and please let me know by filling in the log in the Marisco Tavern.

Nicola Saunders
Lundy Warden

August's Letter From Lundy

Hello from Lundy !

I saw my first Sika fawn of the year this month, on 10th August. Whilst walking along the Lower East Path, I was just coming around the corner into Quarter wall Corpse and mother and fawn were just a few feet in front of me. It was an amazing sight and a rare treat to get such a close up view of a young deer. They are very secretive creatures and needless to say, they did not stay put for too long, but I did manage to get a photograph as they both bounced off to seek cover.



On 15th August we had a new arrival to Lundy, a 5-month-old Stallion called George. He is the first Stallion we've had on Lundy for a few years and will join the herd of mares, taking the island pony population to 14.

Although nearly all of the nesting seabird colonies are now deserted again for another year, the Manx Shearwaters are still on the island. They can still be seen in large numbers off shore and can be heard most nights coming into land to return to their burrows. A survey of the nesting burrows will be taking place in September and I will let you know what results it brings.

Right on cue, as promised, Basking sharks, the 2nd biggest fish in our oceans started to pass Lundy. The first sighting was on the 7th August, when a 4 metre shark was seen in the landing bay and observed by visitors for over 3 hours before it carried on along on it's way. Since 21st August we have had daily sightings at different spots all

over the island. Sophie, the Assistant Warden, and I were becoming very frustrated; despite regular sightings from visitors we just kept missing them. BUT our luck changed on Wednesday 30th and what a day it was !

M.S. Oldenburg arrived just before 12pm with over 200 visitors and as she arrived in the bay 30 – 40 common dolphins followed her closely. They swam right into the bay and were watched for over 15 minutes just a hundred metres or so from the jetty !

The seals have started to pup and we have started an island seal survey to monitor the number of pups that are born and try to get a good estimate of the resident population size. On our first count on 30th August, we counted 118 adults and 2 pups on the east coast of the island. Hopefully, if the weather is kind to us all the surveys will be done using the islands RIB, (Rigid Inflatable Boat), but counts and observations from land are also very useful, so we have started a new 'Seal Logbook' in the Tavern, and are asking visitors to fill it in when they see seals. All the information we gain from our surveys and the visitor sightings will be a great help.

We were half way up the east coast of the Island conducting the Seal Count when it started to drizzle, and by the time we'd reached the North end of the island the weather closed in so we decided to head back to the jetty. We were driving back to the landing beach at a fairly slow pace with the driving rain in my face when I got a quick glimpse of a black fin before it disappeared. We stopped the boat and scanned the surface, and sure enough there was a 15ft basking shark about 100m away from us.



We stayed a good distance away and watch it for 10 minutes or so when all of a sudden we spotted a second one on the other side of the boat. We watched both for a while to see which direction they were moving, then, given them a wide berth, we slowly moved to a position a few hundred metres in front of them and turned off the boats engines. A few minutes later we suddenly noticed a dark shadow in the water and one of the sharks swam right alongside the boat with its huge mouth wide open filtering the water below. Despite their massive size, basking sharks are very gentle, have no teeth and only eat plankton, which are microscopic plants and animals found in the sea.

I didn't even think to take a photo at this point, did manage to get one of the sharks on the surface with its dorsal fin in full view and the tip of its tail just peaking through the water !

What A day on Lundy – Dolphins, over a hundred seals and Two Basking Sharks – Wow !

Nicola Saunders
Lundy Warden

September's Letter From Lundy

Hello from Lundy !

As the summer season is drawing to a close, life on Lundy is quietening down slightly, the summer months have flown past and it is hard to believe we only have a month left of M.S. Oldenburg sailings before the winter Helicopter season begins and day trips to Lundy come to an end for another year!

The 15th of September marked the beginning of the Rhododendron season on Lundy. Rhododendron is a non-native species; it was introduced to Lundy in the 1920's into Millcombe Gardens and has spread wildly across the east coast of the island. It is a very aggressive plant species and although beautiful in it's natural environment it causes many problems in areas where it shouldn't be. It forms thick stands of vegetation that prevent any natural light penetrating through to the soil below so stops other plant species from growing. The main threat that it causes on Lundy is to the Lundy Cabbage, which is found nowhere else in the world and is confined to the southeast corner of Lundy. If the Rhododendron were left unmanaged it would take over the Lundy Cabbage's natural habitat and possibly cause its extinction!!

It is for this reason that Rhododendron Clearance is one of our major conservation tasks on Lundy and from September through to March when the nesting birds have left we begin to cut down the Rhododendron and we get a lots of welcomed help. In late August a new chipper arrived on Lundy, much to the delight of Chris the Ranger, as this will make his job far easier.

We are now able to chip the Rhododendron and use the chippings in our composter or as mulch to be spread on the sidelands. Then on 23rd of September our first volunteer working group arrived for a weeks worth of Rhododendron clearance. We get 6 volunteers working groups each year with about 14 volunteers in each and as you can imagine the extra manpower is invaluable!

I promised in last months letter to let you know how the Manx Shearwater Surveys went this month. On the 12th and 13th we had two RSPB employees over to survey the Shearwaters. When doing the survey you have to wait until it is dark and visit the nest sites with a torch to check for chicks that will only come out of their burrows at night! We did this on 12th, 13th and again on 18th September. On the first night we saw 12 chicks and 11 on the second and on the final check just the one, which would suggest that they had fledged in the few days in between. This is a good early sign for the Manx Shearwater population on the island and it was very exciting to see the young birds at the begin of their long journey.

A Buff-breasted sandpiper was seen towards the north end of the island on 8th September and we've also had a sighting of a juvenile Woodchat Shrike and a Yellow-browed Warbler.

We started to do some moth trapping on the island this month and had an event for National Moth Night on 23rd September. The moths are attracted to a light and fly in

and get trapped, then we check the trap in the morning and identify the moths and release them. We have had some spectacular moth sightings this month, including lots of Humming bird Hawkmoths and a Convolvulus Hawkmoth, which has a 10cm wingspan and a proboscis (a long tube-like tongue) of up to 13cm!!! Check the Lundy Birds website for a photograph on www.lundybirds.co.uk

The weather over the last month has meant that we have been unable to do any more seal counts, but are still hopeful for the next few weeks. Many more seal pups have been seen from land and we've managed to get some fantastic photos with a long lens, so as to keep a safe distance away and not disturb the youngsters and the mothers.

Until next month, bye from Lundy!

Nicola Saunders
Lundy Warden

OCTOBER'S LETTER FROM LUNDY

Hello from Lundy !

The sailing season is officially over, with no more MS Oldenburg trips to Lundy until March, we now have a helicopter service that bring the visitors and all the island supplies every Monday and Friday.

Talking of island visitors, we've had a number of rare bird sightings this month, including a Lapland bunting, a Subalpine warbler and an Osprey. A Shorteared owl, Richards pipit, Wryneck, Cetti's warbler and a spotted Crake have all been spotted in the last month.

On 20th October 10 pink-footed geese arrived on Lundy and have been seen daily since. They're a winter visitor from their breeding ground in Iceland and Greenland, families often stay together over winter and these 10 can usually found feeding on grain and wild shoots in Brickfield near the quarry cottages, which is a short walk from the village.

October has been a wet month by Lundy standards and it came as a huge relief, after a long and dry winter our water supply on the island was becoming critical, but I am pleased to say that with a few days of ran we have started to replenish supplies and the Quarter Wall Pond has begun to fill up after a month of no water, much to the delight of the Lundy ponies, as this seems to be their favourite drinking hole.

In July I talked a little bit about the No Take Zone (NTZ) Surveys of the lobsters, the results this year have now been studied and are fantastic. In June the surveys measured the sizes of lobsters from different locations around Lundy and this year the results showed we had 7 times as many landable lobsters (those that are big enough to be legally caught by fishermen) inside the NTZ than there were in different locations around the island. The NTZ was put into place in 2003 so it is still early days, but these results are a really positive sign of the effect that it is having on the marine environment. Not surprisingly this generated some interest and at the begin of the month we had the BBC across to the island to film a special report for the 6 o'clock news, which was shown earlier in the month, and can still be viewed online on the BBC website.

On 26th October a new member of staff, Richard, joined us on the island. Richard is on a 3 year a National Trust Careership placement and his time will be split between college, working for the National Trust at Hartland Point, and here on Lundy as part of our conservation team.

Next month I'll be spending a week off the island visiting some local schools to talk about Lundy and all the different wildlife that can be found here. Hopefully we'll be running a similar program early next year and it may even become an annual event.

Nicola Saunders
Lundy Warden

NOVEMBERS LETTER FROM LUNDY

Hello from Lundy !

November started with a trip to the mainland. Between 7th and 10th November I visited 7 local schools to talk about life on Lundy and the wildlife that we have over here. The trip was a big success and in February Sophie Wheatley, our assistant Warden will be making a second trip to visit more schools that we could not get to this month.

There is so much to see and do on Lundy and it's a great place for school groups to visit to learn about all sorts of subjects from Archaeology and history to ecology, geography, conservation, wildlife and the marine environment.

Students can also learn about our waste management policies that we have here on Lundy. As on the mainland, waste is becoming a bigger problem than ever before and with increased visitor numbers we have had to look carefully at how we manage our waste. In order to help the environment and to keep the Island looking it's best, we have a number of recycling initiatives to reduce the amount of waste that we send off to the mainland for landfill.

We receive a lot of cardboard on Lundy to help protect our supplies from being damaged during delivery by ship or helicopter, all of the waste cardboard is then shredded, compacted and baled ready to be used for winter animal bedding on the farm. Once winter is over, the waste bedding is then composted down ready to be spread back on the Island in spring.

We also have a glass imploder on the Island which shatters all of our glass waste allowing the sharp free cullet to be used as an aggregate for road maintenance and any building works we may be undertaking. Tin and plastics are out-sorted and send off on our supply ship, M.S. Oldenburg to South Molten Recycling for further processing until we can find a suitable use for them here.

We also have on Lundy a "rocket" composter which devours all of our food waste from the Marisco Tavern and staff properties, this greatly reduces all of the perishable waste into a dry compost, eventually allowing the material to be spread back on the Island.

Throughout the year we offer a program of walks and talks for visitors to the island and in the summer we also have rockpool rambles and snorkel safaris all of these and specially tailored events can be arranged for visiting groups to Lundy to make the most out of the trip and learn more about wildlife and island life.

After a busy week on the mainland it was straight back to Lundy for a week of Rhododendron clearance. On 13th November a group of National Trust Wardens and volunteers from North Devon joined us for 3 days of cutting, dragging, chipping and burning one of our Rhododendron stands. With 13 people in total and 5 chainsaws cutting, a huge amount of work was achieved and despite a couple of wet days we managed to clear half a hectare of the Rhododendron which as you may be aware

from my previous letters that we are clearing to conserve the Lundy Cabbage which grows no-where else in the world.

The winter birds have arrived back on Lundy and we've had sightings of snipe and woodcock, and the pink-footed geese that arrived last month are still present. Fieldfare and Redwings have been seen regularly with a maximum of 400 of each seen on 10th November. As well as our resident peregrines we've also had sightings of sparrow hawk, merlin, kestrel and a female hen harrier this month. A Short Eared Owl was reported on the 8th & 9th and a Great Northern Diver on 10th.

Our helicopter service is still running every Monday and Friday, bringing visitors from Hartland point to the island and we are busy preparing for Christmas and New Year when we have a full island of visitors. So until December, farewell from Lundy.

Nicola Saunders
Lundy Warden