

## Letter from Lundy

The summer season has started with a bang on Lundy with the first of many MS Oldenburg sailings scheduled from Bideford and Illfracombe. The glorious weather over the last month has meant that the island has been brimming with visitors and we had our first full boat of the season already over Easter on Bank Holiday Monday.

Easter is always a busy time on Lundy, both for wildlife and Island staff. It has been lambing season for the domestic Lundy flock and Kevin the farmer has been working around the clock to make sure that our next generation of Lundy lamb enters the world safe and sound. The lambs are doing really well and have so much energy, already careering around the fields creating havoc for their mums.

Spring time also means that the wild Soay sheep on Lundy have also been lambing, but unlike the domestic flock, they don't need any assistance. Often twins, the lambs which are dark brown in colour will remain close to their mothers until they are weaned.

The Lundy Easter egg hunt this year was held on Easter Sunday which was a glorious sunny day. A set of clues lead children (and quite a few adults!) around the island collecting eggs as they went and the clues lead to a big basket of Easter eggs at the end of the trail. It was a wonderful way to spend Easter morning, collecting chocolate treats!

Lundy looks even more beautiful at this time of year, with many wildflowers in bloom. In Millcombe on the East side of the island, red campion, violets, lesser celandines and native bluebells are just a few of the species which grow in abundance in this sheltered valley. The Lundy cabbage will soon be in flower towards the end of May and covers the south east corner of the island in pretty yellow flowers.

The air is filled with the song of skylarks everywhere you walk on Lundy and over the last month we have seen a real increase in the numbers of terrestrial birds on the island, many of which stop over on their passage to the mainland. Willow warblers, swallows, sand martins, meadow and rock pipits are all species which can be seen in high numbers on the island at the moment. A few rarities have also been seen. A whooper swan visited us for a couple of weeks, spending a lot of time at Pondsbury, the largest lake on Lundy, before moving on again. A sub alpine warbler was seen regularly in Millcombe around the 20<sup>th</sup> April and a black eared wheatear was also spotted in the staff vegetable gardens earlier in the month – all caused a stir of excitement amongst keen ornithologists on the island.

Finally, you will be pleased to hear that the first Lundy puffins of the year were seen at St Philips Stone on April 5<sup>th</sup> and we will be monitoring the population closely and hope to see increases on last years numbers – watch this space! Other sea birds to look out for which are preparing for the breeding season on Lundy are manx shearwaters, guillemots, razorbills, fulmars, shags, oystercatchers – to name just a few - all of these can be seen around the island and are busily preparing for what we hope will be a successful breeding season for all Lundy's birds.

The beginning of May brought with it the first of many scheduled 'Education days' on Lundy, with a class visit from Bishops Nympton School. We have introduced these days to encourage children to visit Lundy and become more interested in their environment whilst having fun. The children really enjoyed the rockpool ramble and activities that I had organised for the day and left with big smiles on their faces.

Lundy is perfect for children to come and learn whilst exploring a great location - there is so much space to explore and lots of wildlife to see. We still have days available for schools to book in the autumn term and we are also open to bookings from groups other than schools which are interested in Lundy. The wardens are always happy to provide events when you get over here if you give us plenty of notice before arriving.

After a very hot dry April, May has been rather unsettled with rainy weather and strong winds, which has meant that it has been quite a quiet time for migrant bird sightings. However we have had a number of rare birds on the island. In the first week of May - a very pale example of a long eared owl had a few of us baffled at first - however its long earlike tufts gave it away on closer inspection when it came to roost for a few hours in Millcombe valley! A spectacular looking bird and definitely one to add to the rarities section of the Lundy bird log.

More recently, another very rare visitor to the island was a pair of European Bee-eaters spotted by the Warden, Nicola Saunders. A beautiful looking bird, quite like no other and very colourful. Their plumage is blue on the breast and brown and red on their back, they have a long black curved bill and a yellow face. Quite a treat for all the birders on the island.

The guillemots on the island have been sighted with their first eggs of the year and so we can expect to see chicks hatching in about 5 weeks from now. Other sea birds which can be seen nesting at the moment are Kittiwakes, Oystercatchers, Shags, Fulmars and lots of Gulls - The greater black backs are very territorial so watch out and keep your distance from nests!

Close monitoring of the puffins has provided us with a number of sightings both at sea and around St Philips Stone burrow site, with pairs seen moving to and from burrows - which is encouraging news. These comical little creatures really stand out on land with their bright orange legs - out at sea you can often see them rafting on the edge of a group of guillemots and razorbills. Look out for them on the Oldenburg on your way to Lundy as they can feed quite far out at sea.

As well as our common varieties of wildflowers many of our rarer flowers are in bloom. The Lundy cabbage with its bright yellow flowers can be seen flowering in the SE corner of the island. The very rare balm leaved figwort which only occurs in the SW of England is also in flower it has small red flowers and can be seen mainly on the East side of Lundy, also the carnivorous sundew is now present at Pondsbury again for the summer.

With June on the way - we are starting our Snorkel safaris on Lundy. This is a great opportunity to take visitors out and explore the marine nature reserve up close -

hopefully the weather will be in our favour it's still quite cold in the sea at the moment and wetsuits are a must!

## Letter from Lundy June

June has been a very exciting month for marine wildlife around the Island, with the beginning of the month bringing the first basking shark sightings of the year. We normally don't see these sharks around Lundy until later in the summer so we were surprised to see these gentle giants in June. They are more common around the UK coastline throughout the summer, as they feed on the abundance of plankton in the seawater at this time of year.

Pods of common dolphins and bottle nosed dolphins are becoming a regular sight from on board the Oldenburg and are often seen around the Island too - they look so playful when they leap and breach out of the water, you often wonder if they do it for fun. They move so quickly through the water especially when pursuing mackerel which is a very fast swimmer. There is lots of mackerel around the Island at the moment which hopefully means we will see lots of dolphins in the coming months! Keep a look out on the Oldenburg if you're coming over and let us know if you see anything.

As well as basking sharks & dolphins, this time of year brings the SeaWatch Organisation's National Whale and Dolphin Watch week. People from all over the country spend time looking out to sea and record their cetacean sightings which then get added to a national database of sightings. On Lundy we have been getting people to record their sightings and have held a special event spending the day looking out to sea. One of the days in particular sticks in my mind and will be a day that I won't forget for a long time.

On the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> June, the whale & dolphin watch started up at the Castle which is a great viewing platform for watching marine life as you get a wide angle view of the east coast and the waters around the south of the Island and can see for miles! With the fine weather and perfect sea conditions for cetacean watching we attracted a small but keen crowd and began our cetacean watch with binoculars and telescopes trained out to sea in anticipation.

The sea was flat calm which makes sighting fins breaking the surface of the water much easier to spot and before long James Leonard, a regular visitor to Lundy and an experienced cetacean spotter was the first to see a porpoise - this spurred us on greatly in our search for other marine life.

A few hours passed and the weather and sea conditions started to deteriorate to the point where we had to abandon the watch – so we headed back to the Tavern. When the weather cleared we resumed our watch with a number of staff from the veranda out the back of the Tavern and spent time watching a feeding frenzy of gannets diving and thousands of Manx shearwaters feeding about half a mile out to sea.

Whilst watching this already spectacular sight - a dark figure was sighted in the water right in the middle of the mass of feeding seabirds by Nicola Saunders, the Warden. With two telescopes and 5 pairs of binoculars trained in anticipation on this dark figure, our expectations were exceeded when an

enormous whale surfaced a few minutes later, breaking the water with its huge back and dorsal fin clearly in view.

It was my first ever sighting of a whale on Lundy! The whale was a baleen whale which is characteristically long and slim line in shape, with a long back and small dorsal fin – at present we think it could have been a minke whale, which is fairly common to the waters of the UK. The whale remained around the Island feeding for over two hours, a truly wonderful creature that will definitely go down as the best sighting for whale and dolphin watch week on Lundy!

On a slightly smaller scale - the 28<sup>th</sup> June was a momentous occasion for the Yellow horned poppy which came into flower on this day – this might not sound terribly exciting but for a plant which only flowers for one day of the year it's quite a special day.

We came to know about this flower during a recent visit from a botanist who came to Lundy to survey the endemic Lundy cabbage and who spotted it whilst walking down the beach road – it is the first ever record of the plant on the Island and is yet another rare and protected plant to add to the Island's list – the 'yellow horned poppy' is a coastal flowering plant which produces a beautiful yellow flower lasting for just one day. Growing in the most inhospitable of places down at the bottom of the slate cliff at the jetty next to the road, it has miraculously survived the past 6 months of road works and thousands of people walking past it unbeknown of its significance.

On the seabird side of things - you will be pleased to know that the Lundy puffins are doing well - Through continued dawn patrols monitoring we have seen a number of individuals returning to their burrows with sandeels in their bills. This is a good indicator that they are raising chicks and is very encouraging news that the puffins are breeding and hopefully introducing a new generation of puffins to the Island.

That's all from a wet and windy Lundy for this month – here's hoping that July brings with it some sunshine!

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Lundy Warden.

## **Letter from Lundy July**

Fantastic news! In between the depression of the gales and showers that seem to be dominating our summertime, we have had a moment of sheer jubilation. Finally all the early mornings of getting up at 5 am to study our small population of puffins have paid off. On the 14<sup>th</sup> July, Nicola Saunders the Lundy Warden spotted a puffin chick technically called a 'puffling' during a morning puffin survey. Judging by the behaviour of three other pairs of puffins at the site which are bringing feeds back to their burrows regularly, it looks as though they could also have chicks – which would bring our number to four in total.

When first seen the chick was quite large and probably within a week or two of fledging, So we increased the frequency of our surveys to get more glimpses of the chick before it left the island. I saw it for myself a few days later – a lot darker in the face than the adult with a dark bill. Puffins only develop the very colourful bill when they are breeding. Every opportunity to photograph the chick was made and thanks to Grant Sherman, who is a barman on the island, we actually have video footage of the chick coming out of its burrow! We believe that this is only the second sighting of a puffling on Lundy in the past 30 years.

Another exciting discovery that we have made recently is that bats are roosting on the Island and what's more they are doing so in one of the holiday properties on the island. The colony of bats, which are thought to be a species of Pipistrelle, were discovered by a visitor to the island who has a specific interest in bats. It wasn't until nearing the end of the visitors stay and after many late nights and very early mornings of bat searching, that he discovered the bats were actually nesting right outside the property he was staying in! We have spent a few nights staking out the property where the roost is and have counted between 23-29 bats flying out, which suggests it could be a breeding colony. This is the first ever bat roost recorded on the island and a very exciting discovery – I'll keep you updated if we see anymore.

The month of July on Lundy brings with it a few key events on the island. Many of the seabirds are coming to the end of their breeding season for the year and their chicks are fledging, however fulmars and manx shearwaters can still be seen into August as their breeding season is quite long. On the island plateaux the ground nesting birds have also fledged, Skylarks, Pipits and Wheatear chicks can be seen flying around after their parents still a little fluffy but doing well it would seem.

The first Sika deer calf of the year has been spotted by a visitor staying on the island. Throughout July the female 'hinds' separate from the herd to find a quiet spot to give birth – usually in the long grass or bracken. The calves are born in dappled summer colours, which act as camouflage in the grass. On the marine side - the grey seals around Lundy are reaching a peak number at this time of year as more adult seals come over to the island for the chance to

breed with our resident population. The females are looking quite rotund and I expect many will be pregnant from last year ready to give birth in the caves around the island from October onwards.

The annual Gig race from Clovelly to Lundy also took place this month as planned however due to the horrendous weather conditions leading up to the event only one gig chose to row across and did so in a time of just over 4 hours. In celebration of their efforts a BBQ was laid on in the lambing shed on the island and live music provided by The Dambuskers who are a local folk group from North Devon. A very merry time was had by all.

Another great Lundy tradition is nearly upon us again – The Lundy Olympics! A chance for visitors and islanders to try their hand at events like clay pigeon shooting, welly wanging, the sack race, the three legged race and much more. This year the event is taking place on the 13<sup>th</sup> August and is open to everyone who is staying on the island. It's a fun filled day for all the family with a BBQ provided to boost stamina for the final event, the tug of war 'Islanders versus visitors' – watch this space to see who wins!

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Lundy Warden

## Letter from Lundy August /September

I can't believe the summer is nearly over! This seasons chicks have fledged for the year, the swallows are getting ready to migrate, the Lundy Olympics have come and gone *and* we are nearing the end of our busiest season on the island – soon it will be Helicopter season!!

Finally though some good weather! The last month of sunshine we have been enjoying have brought lots of visitors to the island to appreciate Lundy at its finest - in the glorious sunshine. The island really is looking beautiful at this time of year. Throughout August and September Lundy is swathed in purples and pinks from the heather which has come into flower. Bumble bees and butterflies can be seen busily feeding on the fragrant flowers whose sweet aroma fills the air.

Although many of the seabirds which have been breeding on the island have fledged their young and left the island for the year, our population of Manx shearwaters are still here. These seabirds raise their chicks in burrows which in the past on Lundy has made them easy prey for rats – the shearwater population was badly affected by the large rat population that Lundy used to have. However since the eradication of all the rats, the Manx shearwaters seem to be doing really well, and things are looking positive for their future. Since gaining our rat free status, we are currently Europe's largest rat free island – a title we are very proud of and one which was recently at risk of being toppled.

Back at the start of the month in the early hours of Sunday morning on 5<sup>th</sup> August, Lundy coastguard, which consists of 11 islanders including myself, was alerted to a fishing vessel that had run aground on the east side of the island. When we arrived at the scene, the Bruno of Sutton a 50ft squid fishing vessel with her three crew onboard had ran aground just north of Quarry Beach. With the tide dropping the boat had become wedged on boulders and was thought to be taking on water. As a precaution the crew were evacuated by members of dive charter boat the Pride of Bristol which luckily had been moored in Lundy anchorage for the night and came to their aid when they heard the 'mayday' call over the radio.

But in the end it was up to Appledore Lifeboat to pull them clear of the rocks and five hours after the alarm had been raised the boat was being re-floated and towed back to Bideford out of where she had come. So apart from being a little shaken up fortunately no one was injured.

Also on the scene were RAF Chivenor who scouted the area for signs of pollution which is always a high risk when boats run aground and is something we don't want happening in our Marine Nature Reserve – fortunately there was none. However another risk with situations like this is that rats might get onto the island. For the past few weeks we have carried out daily monitoring and laid rat bait around the area of the grounding as part of a contingency effort to prevent rats re-infesting the island. Although the vessel didn't actually sink there is always the possibility of rats abandoning ship and swimming

ashore – a disaster we want to avoid in order to preserve our well deserved title and the future of our burrowing seabirds

Talking of preserving titles - the Lundy Olympics this year was a real success with islanders and visitors alike taking part in all the events. The one which had everyone in stitches was the dumpy bag race – very much like the sack race but on a larger scale with three people to a bag! Needless to say the result was mayhem! It would appear that trying to coordinate three bodies and six legs to move in unison is particularly challenging when you're rolling around on the floor in fits of laughter! It was a sight to behold believe me.

It saddens me though to have to report that the tug of war this year was a complete shambles and I'm having doubts as to whether Lundy Islanders truly had their minds on the job at hand – defending the 2006 title. As much as it pains me to write – the title of tug of war champions 2007 went to the visitors side. Actually it was a complete utter whitewash and the stronger (and heavier) team won fair and square.

September signalled the launch of our beach road appeal, calling on people who have Lundy in their hearts to help with the cost of reinforcing a small part of our main road – which is obviously very important as it is our main access route to the island! Work has been taking place throughout the year and is due to begin again in October. We have had a really positive response which goes to show peoples affection for the island. The island relies on our visitors without whose support we would not be able to keep up the work we do, both accommodating visitors and also carrying out conservation work that go into protecting the wildlife with which we share the island.

Talking of wildlife – we have had a few sightings of Sunfish (*Mola mola*) recently. Apparently the largest and heaviest bony fish in the world, It looks like a dustbin lid with fins stuck on its opposite outer edge and can grow to 1m in diameter! It's most peculiar looking creature with great big eyes and it is native to both tropical and temperate seas – it was a real treat to see one swimming along off the coast of Lundy especially for me as it was the first time I had ever seen one!

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Lundy Warden

## Letter from Lundy October

Fear not people of North Devon! The island has not been evacuated, the beach road has not collapsed into the Bristol Channel and the island water is safe to drink! Hopefully this will quash a few of the rumours which seem to be circulating about Lundy at the moment.

On the other hand unfortunately it is true that island has been invaded, not by pirates, but by a 24hr stomach bug. The virus fondly known as notorious 'Norovirus' (it does sound a bit pirate like!) graced us with its presence back at the end of August and since then this particularly irksome character has continued to spread around the island to staff and visitors alike – determined to introduce itself to as many people as possible.

With support from the local council and the health protection agency we have attacked from every perceivable angle and even closed the island for a short period to deep clean every single square inch! We pride ourselves on a very high standard of cleaning in the properties on Lundy as a matter of course – but this time we had to bring out the big guns as this bug is air born! Every member of staff has been involved in a military cleaning operation to eradicate every trace of this impostor, which is why most staff for the past few weeks appear to have been smelling of a rather delicate fragrance known as hypochlorite – which, for those of you that don't know it, is bleach!

The efforts of all the island staff should be commended for the extra hours of work that has been put in to eradicating the virus, but the problem lies in the fact that it is spreading happily around North Devon as we speak. Until it dies a death on the mainland and while people are transporting it to and fro unfortunately it will continue to make its way over the water as long as we have visitors on the island helping to spread it. And visitors are what keeps the island alive and kicking, without who the island as we know it wouldn't exist. So if you have heard a rumour about the island and a dreaded virus please don't worry we are all fine and its business as usual.

Life on the island continues as ever though and October time is pupping season for our grey seal population. Little bundles of white fluff are being born throughout the islands sea caves and secluded beaches away from prying eyes. The pups spend about 5-6 weeks feeding on mothers rich milk before they are weaned and can fend for themselves. Usually we will only see the pups when they have grown a bit and are able to swim with the other seals – seals are usually quite good at hiding a newborn pup so as they are not disturbed.

We have had our last school visit of the year over to the island. Pupils at East the Water school enjoyed rockpooling on the island and learning about the weird and wonderful creatures that live on our rocky shore. I will be venturing out once again at the end of the month visiting a number of schools locally in North Devon giving talks about Lundy's Wildlife and why its so special - If you see the Lundy car out and about give me a wave!

Last but not least, this month has been a particularly good month for bird enthusiasts with literally thousands of birds passing through on their various migration routes around the world. Lundy is an important stop over for many species and the past few weeks have even turned up a number of rare sightings.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> October a colossal nine and a half thousand chaffinches were recorded from the island and on the same day over a thousand fieldfares, 700 siskins, 800 starlings and over 600 redwings were reported. Of the rarities a Red breasted flycatcher, Yellow browed warbler, Balearic shearwater, Richards Pipit & a great spotted woodpecker – all very exciting!

These sightings tie in very nicely with the launch of a great new Lundy bird book 'The Birds of Lundy'. Researched and written by Tim Davis and Tim Jones who have been visiting the island for many years and are experienced Lundy ornithologists who have generously suggested that the proceeds of the book should go towards conservation work on the island. If you are interested in finding out more about the book information is available at the website [www.birdsoflundy.org.uk](http://www.birdsoflundy.org.uk) - have a look it's for a very good cause!

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Lundy Warden

## Letter from Lundy November

Winter really feels like it has arrived on Lundy. There's a definite chill in the air, the tavern log fire has been lit and as we waved good bye to the Oldenburg for the year with one hand, we have welcomed the arrival of the helicopter season with the other.

Work on the beach road has started again. Throughout the year stabilisation of the road has been taking place on areas that over time have weakened. Parts of the road are over 200 years old and naturally have experienced a lot of wear and tear through waves crashing against the island day-in day-out and through increased traffic over the years by people and vehicles. We are currently raising funds to help pay for the work which is planned to continue into 2009. So if you are considering donating to charity this year remember Lundy.

Throughout autumn and winter on the island the conservation team are busy with an ongoing Rhododendron management project fondly known as Rhodi-bashing. Since this dreaded plant was first introduced to the island back in the 1800's, it has spread up the East side of the island. Not native to the island or the UK it is an invasive alien species and actively reduces the number of plant, bird and insect species where it grows. If left unchecked it would completely take over wiping out many important species from the island – in particular the highly prized and protected Lundy Cabbage which only grows on Lundy and nowhere else in the world.

This project is a huge task and has over the decades involved many man hours to remove it bit by bit from the island. The past two years however have seen some of the biggest efforts thanks to our ranger on the island Chris Flower, his chainsaw and many willing volunteers.

Recently we had a group from the Lundy Field Society and a group of National Trust Wardens and their volunteers, but you don't have to have any experience of conservation work to help out as one group proved. Normally used to a 9-5 office job in front of computers all day long the group from the company Accenture worked so hard and pulled out all the stops to clear as much rhodi as possible in the time they were on the island. We have been really impressed with all the volunteer groups and it's fair to say the rhododendron took a really good bashing this year - a big thanks goes out to everyone involved.

Volunteers are very much part of life on Lundy and throughout the summer we can accommodate 2 or 3 at a time. Many people also come over on working holidays, these are organised by the National Trust and take place at select times throughout the year. If you are interested in volunteering on the island please contact the warden at [warden@lundyisland.co.uk](mailto:warden@lundyisland.co.uk) we could always do with some extra help!

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Lundy Warden

## **Letter from Lundy December**

Another busy year is coming to an end on the island and this will be my final letter for 2007. A staggering 17,000 visitors have stepped foot onto the island this year, hopefully all leaving with a little bit of Lundy spirit in them. Several islanders have arrived and some departed our shores, but in a world that seems to be moving at such a fast pace, the one thing that doesn't change is the island itself. That's how we like it – people come back year after year to see the island and its wildlife just as they remember it – it's like taking a step back in time.

Which is why it's always busy here at Christmas. People book up the properties months sometimes years in advance just so they secure their favourite property and have a traditional Christmas on the Island. It is such a lovely time of year on Lundy. The Tavern is adorned with traditional decorations and we get a huge tree which sits a proud 10 feet tall in the corner of the room. There's a real sense of Christmas spirit.

Another reason to celebrate is New Years Eve on Lundy and it's always a blast. There's a longstanding tradition of fancy dress which applies to visitors and islanders alike just to add a bit of silliness and welcome in the new year with a laugh. This year's theme is 'Lundy Wrecks and Ruins' so we shall see who can think laterally and maybe take home first prize in the competition. There's usually a warden's walk on New years day which should help blow out a few cobwebs from the previous nights celebrations as we go in search of wildlife around the island.

Since I last wrote, it's been quiet for wildlife sightings. It seems like the island has been in a perpetual storm as we are bombarded daily by squally showers and high winds. Ships are common sight sheltering and shivering in the lea of the east side of the island which is called the Lundy Roads, patiently riding out the tempestuous sea. This wild weather makes observing wildlife a little harder than normal. The sea is churning with white horses and any porpoise or dolphin that might be around are well disguised in the rough waves. On the island all the deer, sheep and goats spend the day sheltering out of the wind, while the birds are having trouble flying in straight lines and look exhausted being blown around all day. Some of the larger birds however seem to enjoy the high winds - gulls, ravens and crows can often be seen gliding through the air almost playing in the wind as it gusts at high speed.

Things that do like the wet weather though are fungi. The island is dotted with yellows, greens, reds, oranges and pinks representing all different kinds of mushroom and toadstool - mostly different species of 'waxcap'. The waxcap is a toadstool characteristically found growing in ancient grasslands, which are naturally occurring grasslands free from fertilisers and pesticides, of which Lundy has vast expanses. These small toadstools come in all sorts of colours with names like ballerina, snowy and parrot, they sound more suited to characters in a pantomime rather than of the mushroom world!

Before I sign off, on behalf of everyone here on the island I wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy new year from Lundy. Hope to see you next year!

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Lundy Warden.