

## Letter from Lundy – March

A surprisingly warm start to the year on Lundy has resulted in early signs of life popping up all over the island not only wildflowers and blossom buds but the first spring lambs of the year – and they are twins! Kevin the farmer will now be spending many days and nights for the next month nursing his flock to make sure our next generation of Lundy lambs enter the world safe and sound.

Our supply ship the MS Oldenburg is also gearing up for spring in anticipation of the start of the sailing season, however this year is a special year as she will be sailing into her 50<sup>th</sup> year! To mark this occasion we are issuing a new Lundy stamp and special birthday celebrations are being planned for later in the year. As would be expected the old girl has weathered a bit over the years, however, she should be looking her best for the start of this season as she has spent the past couple of months being serviced and painted and we look forward to welcoming her back to the island at the end of March.

Another significant anniversary is upon us, also of a marine nature. Lundy's No-Take Zone which stretches almost the entire length of the East side of the island is five years old this year. No-take zones are areas where no fishing is allowed at all and since its designation in 2003 it has proved very successful in helping to protect the marine life in the waters on the east side of the island whilst increasing the lobster stocks in this area significantly. Not only lobsters but many creatures have benefited from this completely protected area and hopefully we shall see more areas like this designated around the UK which will help protect our seas and marine wildlife for future generations to come.

Bird sightings on the island are a little thin on the ground at the moment, with the usual suspects like starlings, house sparrows, blackbirds, robins and wrens about the village and out on the island, skylarks, meadow pipits, peregrine, kestrels, crows and ravens can be seen patrolling the island. Seabird sightings are on the up and we are seeing more and more razorbills and guillemots staking their claim to nesting spots on the cliffs. Fulmars, kittiwakes, lesser black back gulls, herring and greater black backed gulls also look like they are gearing up for the breeding season – the fulmars are sitting at nest sites and the gulls are casually displaying to one another. We are eagerly awaiting the arrival of Puffins back to Lundy from the end of March onwards – we're keeping our fingers crossed that we might see a few more back on the island this year.

It's nearly Easter and I can almost taste the chocolate! Tradition on Lundy is to have an Easter egg hunt on Easter Sunday for visitors staying on the island. Every year we set clues that lead visitors (and some islanders) around the village – the final clue rewarding them with lots of chocolaty treats. It's a lovely fun way to spend Easter - the task is not to make the clues too easy!

So however you spend Easter this year, have an enjoyable time and we look forward to seeing you at some point throughout the coming summer season. Happy Easter from all of us on Lundy!

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Lundy Warden

## Letter from Lundy April

Springtime is such a beautiful time of year to be on Lundy and what a difference a month makes. Throughout February there hardly seemed any birds on the island but now, the air is filled with the sound of birdsong as the Spring migration brings hundreds of feathered visitors from far off lands, some just passing through while others will be staying on the island for the summer.

Bird migration is one of the most incredible feats in the animal kingdom. Every year as the seasons change, billions of birds worldwide embark on mammoth migratory journeys which will lead some to the other side of the world in search of more favourable weather conditions for feeding and breeding. Many birds use Lundy as a stopover site on their migration, to fuel up on insects or take a break from flying for a few days. Our position in between England and Wales means that we often catch migrants flying North in the Spring and South in the Autumn – and if we're lucky a few rarities might show up.

March brings the first of the spring migrants with wheatears and willow warblers arriving from central Africa and chiffchaffs from around the Mediterranean. Lundy's sheltered, wooded eastern valleys are great places to see many of the small songbirds like chaffinches, warblers, goldfinches, brambling, robins, dunnock and goldcrest while the plateau is usually best for waders such as the Curlew and Golden plover, and birds that prefer open ground like skylarks, meadow pipits and wheatears.

The first swallows of the year were sighted around 20<sup>th</sup> March, accompanied by sand martins all seen busily filling-up on insects, their fast, acrobatic flight, swooping over the ponds is unmistakable even from a distance. Some of the swallows will take up residence on the island for the summer – you can see them nesting throughout the village, their mud cocoons stuck firm to the rafters in the Linhay or in the farmyard buildings. Other birds that you will see nesting around the village are starlings. Nationally they have declined, but Lundy's small population are doing well and they are preparing to nest - often occupying holes in the eaves of buildings in the village, their noisy song is a familiar sound all year round on the island.

The Soay have started lambing - these hardy little sheep originate from a Scottish island in the St Kilda archipelago - Soay translating to mean 'sheep island'. First brought to Scotland's shores by the Vikings, Lundy's small herd were introduced in 1944 and have since adapted very well to life on the island as we have nearly 200! They are completely wild and don't need shearing, at this time of year they start to shed their winter wool and can look very tatty until their shorter fleece is exposed for the summer.

Although it seems that the weather has just started to pick up it still managed to be bad for the start of the sailing season and sadly our first Oldenburg passenger trip of the year was cancelled due to stormy weather. Let's hope that the following sailings are going to have better luck and that the summer season will bring with it lots of fine sunny days and calm crossings for everyone to enjoy. Fingers crossed!

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Lundy Warden.

## Letter from Lundy May 08

I am thrilled to announce that Puffins have returned to Lundy for the summer! The first solitary puffin was spotted on April 8<sup>th</sup> and since then eight individuals have been seen regularly out at sea or at the burrow site at St Phillips Stone on the island. I have observed one pair 'billing' – this involves the pair quickly tapping their bills together which can get quite frantic, but is a good sign that they will breed soon. Also some puffins have been seen ripping up thrift and other plant material and dragging it into their burrows to use for nest material.

This is good news for our small population which has declined to a colony of only a few breeding pairs in recent years and is a far cry from the time when thousands of puffins would have visited the island to breed – the steep grassy slopes a noisy, bustling colony and a time when Lundy was deservedly called Puffin Island. 'Lund' meaning puffin and 'ey' meaning Island, became Lundy as it is known today.

These puffin sightings really mark the start of the summer season for us on the island. From now on and for the rest of the summer, we have Oldenburg visits three times a week which means more visitors to see our beautiful island. For us Wardens, as well as walks, talks and rockpool rambles, we start snorkel safaris which gives visitors the chance to explore Lundy's marine wildlife – talking of which, even life below the waves is gearing up for summer as we see more seaweed covering every available space on the rocky shore and lots of different creatures out and about having spent the cold winter months in hiding. The warmer weather seems to jump start them into action.

Yachts are also a common sight in Lundy's landing bay throughout the summer. Either people sailing over to enjoy the weekend on the island or divers coming to explore the amazing diversity of marine life which live in the clear water around the island. If you are coming over this summer you will also see both Nicola and myself on board the Lundy Warden RIB, patrolling the island and talking to people about the Marine Nature Reserve and No Take Zone on Lundy – give us a wave or come over and talk to us, as we are always looking for an excuse to spread the word on why Lundy is so special!

April was a good month for bird sightings, not only do we have lots of seabirds on the island at the moment, but we have seen a lot of song birds and birds passing through. Bird ringers have been staying on the island to see what is about and ring any in order to track their migration. Some of the more unusual species that have been spotted are, a ring ouzel, a turtle dove, numerous different species of warblers, a spotted flycatcher and a beautiful juvenile male Golden Oriole which is very rarely seen in the UK let alone on Lundy – a real treat for everyone that saw him.

Next month on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, we shall be hosting a National Whale and Dolphin Watch on the island as we do every year. A day spent at the Castle looking out to sea and recording which cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) are around our waters. This data is then entered into a national database of sightings to help increase our understanding of cetacean species and their movements throughout the UK. If you are on the island, why don't you join both Nicola and myself who will be manning the

post all day. All you need is a pair of binoculars and a little patience and fingers crossed we might even see a whale like we did last year!

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Lundy Warden

## **Letter from Lundy JUNE**

June was an important month for marine conservation throughout the Southwest. We have seen a landmark victory for the protection of the reef habitats in Lyme Bay and on Lundy we have just celebrated the fifth anniversary of the islands 'No Take Zone'. This occasion was marked by a visit to the island by the fisheries minister Jonathan Shaw, to see and hear for himself why Lundy's marine life is so special and worthy of the protection it receives.

For over 20 years our small island has been at the forefront of marine conservation in the UK. Leading by example and proving that if we are going to sustain our relationship with the sea for years to follow then we need to fully protect certain areas from damaging human activities.

Areas such as Lundy are like treasure troves in the ocean, full of jewels that are precious and need protecting from exploitation. The wealth of marine life in the waters around the island is unique, with such a vast variety of habitats rarely seen in such a small area – and each with its own characteristic wildlife where every available space is occupied. Habitats like rocky reefs, kelp forests, sea caves, the sandy seafloor and underwater cliffs support a phenomenal range of creatures and seaweed. This results in a diversity of marine life unlike anywhere else in the UK and it is for these reasons that the first steps were taken to start protecting Lundy's marine habitats, for ever.

Protection first began in 1986 when the island became the first statutory Marine Nature Reserve in England, put in place to protect the sensitive marine habitats around the island and preserve the marine ecosystem in as natural a state as possible. In 1994 Lundy was recognised as a Special Area of Conservation for its numerous underwater habitats, and in 2003 our most recent addition Lundy was declared as a site for the first 'No Take Zone' to be designated in the UK. An area stretching virtually the entire length of the east side of the island and protected by law - no fishing or removal of any wildlife is permitted in this area.

Lundy's 'No Take Zone' is instrumental in helping sustain the marine ecosystem around the island and surrounding waters and the past five years have produced results which far exceeded our expectations. These 'closed off areas' provide creatures with breathing space, giving them the opportunity to grow and for communities to flourish, where once the area was heavily fished, it is now a haven for animals where the pressures of fishing have been removed. Most notably the common lobster which has suffered nationally through extensive fishing has shown an extraordinary rate of recovery on Lundy.

In time many creatures will benefit from the protection that Lundy has to offer, we hope now that other places around the country will follow Lundy's lead and start protecting their marine environment to the same standards, for our future generations.

The minister I think enjoyed his day on the island, and hopefully saw that although the island is only small, big contributions have been made to the world of marine conservation and these are well worthy of the celebration!

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Lundy Warden

## Letter from Lundy July

It's that time of year again when Lundy's west coast cliffs fall silent as the majority of our seabirds leave the island, heading out to sea for another year only to return again next spring to breed. Kittiwake, guillemots, puffins and razorbills only spend a few months actually on the island. Arriving around April and leaving again in July in which time they have to pair up with their long term mate or find a new one, lay an egg, raise a chick, all whilst battling the daily trials and tribulations of life on the ledge. To a tiny chick the danger of being hunted by gulls or knocked off the ledge by squabbling parents is a daily threat and it's a wonder that any survive at all!

But that's just nature way, and we know for a fact that lots of chicks have fledged this year, as it's the wardens' job over here to study the seabirds and see how well they are doing. In particular we have watched lots of guillemot chicks growing up fast as their busy, noisy parents fly back and forth with fish. Grant our barman saw one fledge its nesting ledge – leaping perilously from the cliff and gliding down to the sea, where it will spend the next few months with its father learning to feed, swim, fly and dodge gulls before it sets out into the wide open ocean all on it's own.

However, the real success story of the year for the second year in a row has to go to the puffin. Early April showed signs of breeding at St Philips Stone which is where they have bred for the past decade, but we were bowled over to find another NEW nest site at Jenny's cove – an area which hasn't been occupied since 1992. Not just a few either – up to 12 puffins could be seen on the slope at any one time and probably 2 pairs had a go at breeding as fish were seen being delivered to two different burrows.

Thrilled with the knowledge that we have a different nest area (and determined to exceed 2007's results), surveys were carried out with increased regularity. Our long hours of hard work were rewarded when not one but TWO chicks were seen at separate burrows at the St Philips stone site. Brilliant news and although the chicks won't return to the island for a few years it's great to know that the small population continues to grow.

The RSPB have just completed a census of all the seabirds on Lundy and we are eagerly awaiting the results to see which populations are increasing – this data is really important as it is added to the country's national data and gives us an idea of how seabirds in the UK are fairing as a whole. And considering that Lundy has the largest single island seabird colony in the south, our small island is an important addition to the national results.

A lot of knowledge can be gained from studying seabird especially with regards to the sea. Seabirds reflect the condition of our oceans; it is their source of food and their home for the majority of the year. Over the past few decades, seabird populations worldwide have been declining and this shows us that the seas in which they are living are not in good condition. Pollution through oil and plastics, being caught in fishing nets as by-catch and over fishing all contribute to the decline in seabirds, which is why we need more places like Lundy to become marine protected areas and create safe havens for seabirds so they can fish and live a long life continuing to flourish.

The efforts that Lundy has made in recent years to protect our seabird populations which include the seabird recovery program (rat eradication), protecting the seabird nest sites, being designated a marine reserve and a no take zone, all have been successful in benefiting our

seabirds especially regarding the puffin and will hopefully continue to benefit all the seabirds that visit our island for generations to come.

Sophie Wheatley  
Assistant Lundy Warden

Letter from Lundy October 08

Autumn has properly arrived on Lundy – the mornings are crisp and chilly, the evenings are getting darker and the swallows have all but left the island, destined to join the passage of birds on autumn migration. We have seen thousands of birds passing through, most just beginning their mammoth journeys across the globe in search of warmer climates.

Chaffinches have been recorded in their thousands as well as others like goldfinch, siskin, linnets and goldcrest being spotted in large flocks busily feeding up on the islands provisions before moving on in a flurry of activity. Redwings have also returned to the island which is another indicator of the season change, as they move from their Scandinavian residence to over winter on Lundy which is considerably warmer, supposedly!

It is at this time of year that rare birds often turn up on the island, blown off course while on migration and this year has been no exception. One particular sighting has caused a real stir on the island and amongst the birding community. A 'paddyfield warbler' was sighted on the East coast sidelands by John Smith who had been staying on Lundy. This is a first sighting for Lundy and Devon which makes it particularly special (recent Lundy bird sightings and photos can be viewed at [www.lundybirds.co.uk](http://www.lundybirds.co.uk)). Other rare sightings include a long eared owl, a Richard's pipits and a number of yellow browed warbler – proving to be an memorable stay for many bird enthusiasts this year.

It not just the 'bird' season which has got off to a flying start! The 'Rhodi bashing' season is in full swing and already we have had five groups of volunteers on Lundy since September, helping us to eradicate the invasive Rhododendron plant from the island. A combination of 'working holiday' groups from near and far have travelled to Lundy to help us tackle this invasive impostor. The Lundy Field Society, BTCV, Accenture (an IT company who devote their charity days to helping Lundy) and the National Trust – who in return for their blood and sweat, spend the week here enjoying the outdoors and doing something completely different. By the end of the week, everyone hates Rhododendron and never wants to see another plant ever again – but they must enjoy themselves as we see the same faces coming back to help year after year!

We have waved goodbye to the regular Oldenburg sailings until next year, her only visits from now on will be to deliver cargo supplies to the island to keep us going through the winter. Now it is the helicopter season the only visitors arriving on the island will be coming to stay. The island takes on a different atmosphere at this time of year. It's much quieter, almost like it's preparing for winter and the bleak time ahead. Winters over here can be wild when the wind picks up and the sea gets really stormy. The island is very exposed with no protection on the West side from Atlantic winds which makes for a bracing time if you decide to brave the elements and go for a walk. Alternatively you might prefer to watch it all going on from the cosy confines of the Tavern sat in front of the log fire!

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Lundy Warden

## Letter from Lundy December/January

I love Christmas on Lundy! It is celebrated in a traditional way. In the morning this year there was a gathering in St Helena's Church for a session of carols & festive hymns – a few visitors to the island bought instruments to play and a very merry time was had by all who attended. While this was going on the Tavern was a buzz with Christmas lunch preparations – the staff ironing tablecloths and adding the final decorative touches before serving up a Christmas meal with all the trimmings.

After the visitors have finished it's the islanders turn for dinner and a good excuse to have a party. Everyone turns up to enjoy the afternoon together, with a meal, a few party games and then to dance the night away into the small hours. With such a festive atmosphere on the island it was hard not to get swept up in the celebrations and it's safe to say that everyone had a really lovely day.

As I write this it's not quite the new year. It's that funny limbo time in between Christmas day and 1<sup>st</sup> January but as 2008 comes to a close now is a good time to reflect on the past year. It's been a strange one weather wise and I think everyone spent the summer wondering when it was going to start, although that didn't stop us getting out and about on the island. The summer seabird surveys proved a real success. We found a new puffin nesting site with new recruits hanging out at the burrow sites. The RSPB survey of Manx shearwaters showed that their numbers on Lundy have increased significantly over the past few years and also guillemot & razorbill numbers are looking healthy. Fingers crossed next year will be even better.

The autumn/winter season brought a spectacular effort of Rhododendron bashing, thanks to all the volunteer groups we had come over and help clear – and it looks like we are on target to have it cleared within the next few years. Work on the beach road is still on going throughout winter and is due to finish next year a special thanks to all those who donated towards our needy cause!

As we move into the new year and in the current climate of financial worry and trepidation of what 2009 might bring, its important to think about what we care about most in life and take pleasure in simple things. We don't need vast numbers of material items in our life to make us happy and Lundy's natural beauty proves this to me day after day.

It's a modest way of life over here but we are rich in terms of the beauty of nature and wildlife that visits our island and indeed the people who visit. Even now, in the winter season a short walk out of the village or through the woodland will present a special find – perhaps a firecrest or longtail tit blown to the island by the biting Easterly winds or a stag standing proud atop the side lands. In winter visitors to the island come here for the solitude and may not expect to see much while out walking although you might not see many people there is still lots of wildlife here sitting out the winter.

The waxcaps, a type of fungi are coming to the end of their colourful display, showing up as blobs of yellows, crimsons, greens and golden oranges dotted amongst the grasses on the island plateau. Putting on a vibrant colourful show they are a real treat to spot in an otherwise quite bleak winter landscape. Ravens & gulls

seem to take pleasure in the strong winds soaring high and tumbling down through the air at great speed - they put on a thrilling performance! Even the evening sun at this time of year creates wonderful colours and swathes cutting through the sky like a curtain of colour.

This just proves that if you want to be entertained regardless of where you live, turn off the TV and go for a walk there is lots to be discovered once you step outside your front door and the best thing is it's all FREE!

Happy New Year to you all on the mainland from everyone on Lundy.

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Lundy Warden