

Letter from Lundy January 2010

What a lovely way to start the New Year. The first Lundy pony to be born on the Island in ten years was born today the 21st January. The mother 'Starlight' came to Lundy last year with her young stallion foal Harry and was in foal when she arrived. Both are in good health and mum is already very protective. True to form on Lundy we learn to expect the unexpected, as this new addition shouldn't have been born until March. The little mare has already been named 'Lundy Bray Marisco Redwing' or Redwing for short. It seemed fitting as Redwings are a common sight on Lundy at the moment, with many over-wintering here from Scandinavia.

When she's grown a little more she will run with the rest of the wild herd on the Island. At the moment though she's happily tucked up with mum in a warm stable out of the wind, both being cared for by the Island farmer. The Island Lundy pony herd is now 16 strong and they are a handsome lot. Many different colours however it is the roan and dunn colours which are traditional to the breed. If you visit the Island you can see them grazing between quarter and half way wall. Just remember though that while they are relatively tame as with all wild animals they should be approached with caution.

Unusually Redwing was the not the first animal to be born in 2010. An eager lamb made it into the world a little prematurely one foggy January morning. The first sign the farmer had was when he saw it gambolling towards his quad bike during an early morning flock patrol. The rest are due in a few weeks and then another lot later in March. It's always nice to see the young lambs out in the field, mums desperately trying to keep control and usually failing miserably as the terrors charge around at top speed once they've found their feet.

Aside from the new arrivals on Lundy most of January has been taken up with maintenance repairs on the Island. At the start of every year we have a period of shutdown when the Island is closed to visitors. It gives us the chance to focus on the infrastructure of the buildings and make repairs or adjustments as necessary. It usually involves us taking down all the vintage memorabilia on the Tavern walls and give it a careful clean. Many of the properties receive special attention too, where something needs replacing be it a boiler or wenlock fuel burner or what ever is on the schedule it usually gets done at this time.

It's always a novelty to walk around the Island when there are no visitors, and it would seem that the wildlife senses this too. I have seen the deer out on the Island more, taking the chance to graze the heathland plateau during the day. Normally they are tucked away out of sight down the side lands where they can't be disturbed. Other sightings have included the arrival of around 60 Lapwing and 50 Golden Plover early in January. During the cold snap on the mainland these birds would have been seeking the sanctuary of the warmer climate over here and headed east to avoid the harsh snowy conditions at home. A few weeks on and they are still around in quite large numbers which is lovely to see, reminiscent of many years ago when they used to breed here.

As we look ahead to the new season it isn't with trepidation. Each year brings new experiences and good times. We've had some memorable days already! Even though the Island never really changes, the schedule is varied and always busy which keeps the Island interesting and exciting. We have had a couple of new human additions to the Island team which brings a new dynamic and I'm confident as ever that there are good times ahead. From all of us on the Island I'd like to wish you all the best for 2010 and maybe we will see you on Lundy this year.

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Lundy Warden.

LETTER FROM LUNDY - APRIL 2010

Soaring high above Acklands moor 'blue purple d' as we now know her to be called, was patrolling the heathland. Effortlessly gliding and completely unmistakable with her vast wingspan and that characteristic red forked tail. It was the first time I had seen a red kite and I was completely spellbound. Hardly beating her wings she glided overhead for what seemed like an eternity, barely noticing myself glued to her every move and Lundy shop manager Nigel frantically clicking away on his camera. We rarely see raptors on the island and so it was an incredible encounter and one which will remain with me for a long time. Very quickly she became the talk of the island.

Fortunately that afternoon was a beautiful sunny spring day and the light was perfect for some great photos of her in flight. Little did we know that from these few (hundred!) photos we would be able to trace her journey right back to the place where she hatched. This required a little detective work at first, but it wasn't long before we were in contact with the very person who was responsible for her release into the wilds of County Wicklow, southern Ireland.

Red kites became extinct in Ireland at the end of the 18th century but a release program saw a number of chicks collected from mid Wales in June 2007 and then released in July 2007 in an attempt to re-introduce the species. This included 'blue purple d'. She gets her name from the coloured tags that adorn her wings, a blue left wing tag and purple right with the letter 'd' printed on it. All kites released from captivity throughout the British Isles are tagged with large coloured and lettered tags on their wings - all with unique letter colour combinations - this helps us identify them while in flight and it means we can track their movements. It obviously works, as when we looked up this particular tag combination we were lead to Ireland and a relatively recent reintroduction programme.

Damian Clarke of the Wicklow Mountains National Park is the project officer responsible for red kite releases there. Three years ago in 2007, 'blue purple d' hatched in Wales and at around six weeks old was taken to Ireland to be released by Damian along with 52 other red kites. Once free she was thought to be one of only two pairs to find a mate and breed (albeit unsuccessfully) in 2009 - the first time in over 200 years in Ireland! She really is quite a special bird.

But why come to Lundy? With a wingspan of just over 5 ½ feet, red kite wanderings can take them long distances with ease. Maybe she is doing just that - wandering, possibly looking for a mate or to return to Ireland one day after her visit to Devon. She remained with us long enough for many people to get a sighting of her at some point over the past few weeks. But as I write this, it has been a few days since our last sighting and I suspect that she has taken flight and set her sights on another destination. Possibly further inland or even back to Wales or Ireland who knows from here?

Red kites were exterminated in England and Scotland towards the end of the 19th century but now are making a steady come back after years of successful captive breeding and release programmes. You may be lucky enough to see them patrolling the moor lands or cliffs of north Devon, as I have been told they are regularly seen near Hartland. Look out for coloured wing tags to help you identify the birds you see. You may even see 'blue purple d', our young wanderer from Ireland.

If you want to know more about red kites there is a wealth of information on the world wide web. In particular, for Irelands release programme visit www.goldeneagle.ie

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant warden.

Letter from Lundy June

From the island

The 2010 sailing season has got off to a busy start. Long sunny days are bringing many visitors to our shores with the Oldenburg regularly seeing over 200 people aboard. It feels like a real summer for the first time in years. Earlier in the season we had a wedding, launched our new beach visitor centre, enjoyed a folk festival and squeezed in an underwater photographic competition to boot!

The folk festival is an annual event and this year it coincided with an historic occasion on Lundy. On a gloriously sunny 15th May we invited everyone to Lundy who had been involved in the project of updating the beach visitor information centre. The project has been progressing slowly for the past few years and many people had an input into its creation. The final product is a beautiful representation of Lundy depicted in a wooden freeze along the lower walls of the building, with information panels above and a huge marine mural which shows the wonderful marine creatures that live below the waves around Lundy.

On the day we also celebrated the raising of a new flag pole and flag on Hangman's Hill - marking a little piece of history on the island. For many years a flag flew over Millcombe Valley. However an accident damaged the pole and it was only this year that there has been chance to replace it. After a little restoration work by our engineer Roger Fursdon, the new flagpole was ready for the 15th May. A special Lundy flag in the shape of a blue and white 'L' interlinked, first flown by the Harman family when they owned the island, has been recreated and chosen to be flown on special days - it marks our unique status over here and is a statement of our pride for our small island. On all other days the union flag will fly.

We celebrated the occasion by getting Diana Keest, daughter of Martin Coles Harman to raise the flag. The Harman family (owners of the Island from 1920's to 1960's) first flew the Lundy flag and so Diana was the perfect choice for the job. A large crowd gathered to watch the event and a group of shanty singers were on hand to sing a few traditional songs. It was a memorable day.

Wildlife update

Not only has it been an eventful couple of months for us living on the island – the wildlife has been busy showing us a few special moments as well. Many calm sailings on the Oldenburg crossing from the mainland have resulted in numerous sightings of dolphins. They often come close to boats and as the Oldenburg doesn't travel too quickly, you can get a great view of one of our most special marine inhabitants leaping from the water as they hitch a ride on the bow wave from the boat.

On land we have had another foal born, which this time is a stallion called Bill. He's a lovely dark roan colour and a great play mate for Redwing who was born in January this year; fortunately they are all getting on well. We are keeping them near the village and they are enjoying all the attention that our visitors are giving them. All of our Lundy Ponies are available to sponsor, as we are a charity, donations help us to maintain the island to the standard we do – so if you are interested in helping look after the ponies, give us a call and we'll send you some information.

Towards the end of the spring bird migration, particularly in early June there is usually the chance of seeing a something out of the ordinary flying about. This year was no exception! A black kite, wryneck, Hen harrier and Osprey have been seen by visitors but to top this recent list of rarities a male Barolo's Little shearwater was recently heard calling from the

island at night. To the average person this might not sound exciting. But this bird is causing quite a stir in the birding world as it is only the third record of this species on land in the UK – it's a first for Lundy and Devon. It only calls at night time, well after dark. This is common for shearwaters as they typically avoid landing during the day to avoid predation by gulls.

We have no idea how long it will stay, but it is on land and calling for a mate, it could stay for the season before leaving the island with the other shearwaters in September. It is a southern hemisphere species and has obviously taken a wrong turn along its journey to end up at Lundy!

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Warden.

Letter from Lundy. A 'round up' of the past few months.

What a year on Lundy! It feels like we've packed 10 months into the summer season alone. It seems only yesterday that we were marvelling at the spring flowers bursting through and now we are busy clearing the falling autumn leaves from the road on an almost daily basis. How time flies!

The warm summer weather this year has really made a difference and the numbers of visitors to the island has reflected this. Only now in October are we seeing the slight drop off in visitors as we near the end of the sailing season. Soon we shall be waving goodbye to the last Oldenburg of the year and welcoming the start of the winter helicopter season, when everything seems to drop a gear in speed and we get on with the tasks that we are too busy to do over the summer.

There is a lot to report on Lundy's wildlife, especially from our seabirds that have had a successful year at their nest sites earlier in the season, especially for our most common seabirds like; Kittiwake, Guillemot, Fulmar and Puffin, which over the past 20 years plus have suffered declines nationally. We monitor these birds closely during their chick raising phase to see how well the populations on the island are coping. I'm pleased to be able to report that all of these species are doing better than in recent years and managing to successfully rear a good number of chicks at the colonies studied.

We are also encouraged by the success of our Puffins some of which have successfully raised chicks this year. With such a small population on the island (less than 15 pairs breeding), it's amazing that they keep returning to the island each year. Normally such a gregarious bird would head for larger colonies but fortunately a small number keep returning, and this year our early morning and late evening surveying efforts were rewarded with the sighting of two chicks, one at both colonies on the island. It's not much but it's going to be a slow road to recovery and it's a good start.

Such sightings make the hours of being painstakingly glued to your telescope well worth the effort when you catch a fleeting glimpse of a large fluffy grey chick dashing into the sunlight to greet their parent, followed by an even faster return dash back into the safety of their warm, dark burrow after being spooked by an inquisitive neighbour.

When the seabirds begin leaving the island to head out to sea, this marks the beginning of the seasons change for me. The last being to leave are the Manx shearwaters in mid September. All chicks have now fledged and from this point onwards we start the steady approach to winter. However while it is noticeably quieter, the transition from autumn to winter is far from dull as there are a number of interesting wildlife episodes to experience and plenty to look out for on the island.

The autumn bird migration for one! This year the migration has already brought some interesting species to the island as birds use Lundy as a staging post on their mammoth migratory journeys. At this time of year birds are stocking up on much needed food to help them make the journey to their wintering grounds, which in some instances can be thousands of miles away. A few notable species that have been spotted are a Crossbill; Lapland bunting; Common rosefinch; Firecrest; Treecreeper; and a Ring Ouzel most of which were spotted around Millcombe Valley. Others from around the island and at sea included a Sparrowhawk; a Sooty shearwater; Great Skua and Snow buntings – I could go on! But finally if you needed any other indication that winters is on its way then the first Redwing of the year has also been sighted.

If birds aren't your thing then, maybe a visit at this time of year might reward you with the view of a new born grey seal pup. Usually born in secluded caves or on beaches, it is not

uncommon to see them born on the more open beaches along the east side of the island. The photo shows one born early September on Quarry Beach – still with its white fluffy coat, it is reliant on the mother to return to it regularly to feed it. After a few weeks and having moulted to a waterproof fur coat, it is ready to face the world alone. We have around 50 pups born each year and at this time of year you have a good chance of seeing them in the water learning to swim and trying out the cold Atlantic Sea for the first time. Their fat reserves are so critical to their survival at this stage.

As well as young seals, you will notice large bull seals – the males, relaxing on rocks or bottling near ‘pupping’ beaches and caves guarding their groups of females until they are ready to breed. I get so much enjoyment from seal watching and can spend hours watching from a distance. It is such a treat to be able to watch wild animals in their natural habitat, behaving naturally and interacting without even knowing I’m there.

Finally, a word from the island; a little like the migratory birds, islanders are busy preparing for the winter season and stocking up on provisions for the winter. Taking advantage of the final few boat sailings to bring over provisions for the shop and tavern; machinery, fuel and in particular, feed for the farm animals. This year especially, as our new venture of introducing pigs to the island has been a success. We now have a few more mouths to feed as one of our Gloucester Old Spot pigs has just given birth to some adorable piglets and we are expecting some more born soon.

Maybe you will be joining us over winter to experience Lundy from the cosy confines of the Tavern or your property perhaps braving a walk in the wild winter winds! If you do, then why not join a Warden’s walk and we can show you around. Winter days can be wonderfully crisp and clear, even in the howling wind the island still maintains its beauty and magical feel.

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Warden.

Letter from Lundy Christmas and New Year

Imagine our surprise when a few days before Christmas we were waking up to find Lundy covered in a thick blanket of snow! It wasn't the usual light dusting which normally only lasts a few hours before melting away into the ground. This was the real deal. At least three inches deep and set in for the week, it was long enough for some islanders to get out with their cameras to take lots of photos of this novel landscape. I think you'll agree that Lundy looks magical, but thankfully the snow has cleared now.

While the problems that the snow caused on Lundy were incomparable with those experienced on the mainland, in the short time it was on the island it made life a little more challenging and extra consideration was needed to complete everyday tasks. Like feeding the farm animals - extra feed had to be put out for the sheep and ponies which are grazed in different areas of the island. Also, making sure the animals water is not frozen over makes a normally routine trip round so much longer. The housekeepers also struggled to get around in the Landrover, as we have no way of ploughing the snow from the steep and uneven roads. Fortunately we don't see this sort of weather very often, so it remained a fairly novel experience.

One bonus that the snow brings is a variety of bird life. Cold snaps on the mainland often see birds like lapwing and golden plover moving regions to avoid the cold and arriving on the island to take advantage of the warmer climate and softer ground, not yet frozen by the cold. That was until snow arrived on Lundy and the ground froze solid. This is when a bird's winter fat reserves become so important. Long days of not being able to feed in the hard ground can see many go hungry. Now the snow is melted the island is busy with redwing, fieldfare, blackbird, song thrush, lapwing, and many more, which rely on the soft ground to feed on worms and grubs in the soil and now all feeding happily.

This year as well as birds to Lundy, we saw our usual number of Christmas visitors to the island, many of which are regulars and come to spend Christmas week on the island. It's a lovely traditional way to spend the week, with little else to do except enjoy each others company and combine relaxing in front of the fire in a cosy property or the Tavern and venturing out onto the island for a bracing walk. Winter days on the island can be clear and crisp, with the low winter sun making for some incredible sunsets.

No rest after Christmas as we welcomed another group of revelling visitors with which to see in the New Year. Celebrations in the Tavern on New Years Eve went on into the small hours with a fancy dress competition for islanders and visitors. The next day I led the traditional Warden's Walk. It's one of my favourite walks of the year. Setting out onto the island into a New Year with feeling of anticipation for the year ahead and contemplating the year just passed. Its great way to clear the cobwebs and we are often rewarded with some great wildlife sights. This year we spotted a female Sika deer and her calf as they emerged from sheltering in a gorse patch, we saw peregrine falcon hunting along the cliffs, a buzzard languidly flying across the island and about forty lapwings feeding in the farmer's fields – and that was just for starters! A great walk to the start of a hopefully great year!

We wish you all good health and happiness for the New Year and hope to welcome you to the island at some point during the season. All the Very Best, from Lundy!

Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Warden.