

Letter from Lundy March

Finally Lundy feels like it's shaking off its winter coat. The strong winds are subsiding and the days are mild and spring like. Signs of life are bursting out either into bloom as our spring flowers open up to the sunshine or for our wild sheep that started lambing – the first one was seen earlier this week.

The seabird cliffs are starting to become occupied by Guillemot. Razorbills are also gathering in large rafts on the water readying themselves for the breeding season by restabilising the bond with their mate and finding suitable nest sites – usually in the same place as the previous year. Other birds are already nest building, like Raven, the breeding pairs can often be seen performing wonderful synchronised flight displays. And one of my most favourite birds the Skylark is a constant presence – their beautiful and melodic display calls are enchanting as you walk around the island, it is like being serenaded.

Soon we can expect the arrival of our first Puffins. Often coming back to the island mid to late March to start clearing out their burrows – that's when it really starts to feel like spring with the sailing season and the summer not far from view. Let's hope this year is an improvement yet again on the previous Puffin breeding season – I'll keep you posted on how well they do. We are expecting that three areas of the island will be occupied this year as the trend for burrow distribution has been improving over recent years.

On the island we are all looking forward to the summer as we complete the final jobs of the winter throughout the last few weeks of March. The crew of the Oldenburg are busy at work, painting and lovingly preparing the ship for her return to Lundy with passengers. The conservation team is completing the Rhododendron clearance for the winter season with the help of working holiday groups and we are preparing for seasonal volunteers who help out throughout the year. On the island the new seasons bring with them new work – as a warden I'll soon be heading out on the island boat to survey the seal populations, patrol the marine conservation zone and meet any of the first few boats and yachts which might be visiting early in the season – a favourite summertime job!

This year will mark the completion of the volunteer accommodation building which will be home to all volunteers who give up their time to come and work here for a week. It's a beautifully constructed wooden building, with sustainable energy provision in place. It will be a great place for volunteers to come and feel part of the fabric of the island and be able to relax in the comfort of their own property. We are really proud of it and will be marking its opening in a few weeks time with a naming ceremony. If you think you might like to spend a week on Lundy helping out on the outdoor conservation team then get in touch and we'll send you some information.

If not as a volunteer then maybe we'll get to see you as a visitor to Lundy throughout the season – come and say hello to the Wardens we are always happy to chat about the recent wildlife which has been spotted. There are so many subtle signs of nature which mark the changing seasons and which are easy to miss in our busy world today – so the next time you walk outside spend a bit of time just looking and seeing what's about. You might be surprised by the spring like signs right under your nose!

Sophie Wheatley, Lundy Warden

Letter from Lundy - May 2012

Spring is in the air....

Well, it's been the usual busy start to Spring here on Lundy. It's been a bumper year for the domestic lambs and the feral Soay flock have also done well with over 40 lambs up at the north end of the island. More new arrivals came in mid May with our two Gloucester Old Spot sows (Wet and Windy!) having piglets. On the wildlife front we had the usual good spring, with exceptional numbers of both swallows (an estimated 15,000 in one day) and swifts ($\approx 1,000$) passing through the island on their way north. Good numbers of very smart looking Greenland wheatears stopped off on the island as well, but the highlights of this season had to be the male and female golden Orioles and a red-rumped swallow in early May.

The Old Light received much needed attention this spring, with repairs to the stone work, glass and roof and bright new paint job, the our most famous landmark is looking better than ever. The tourist season got into full swing, with four cruise ships visiting the island so far already this year and divers and climbers returning to the island with the good weather to enjoy Lundy's extraordinary marine habitats and inspiring rock faces. Day tripper numbers are increasing as the summer rolls on and the weather improves too.

Our annual Lundy calendar competition goes from strength to strength, with some fine images making it into the 2013 edition. Now in its sixth year, the calendar is available to purchase from the island shop.

May saw the issue of a new set of stamps from Lundy, these fine watercolours celebrate life on Lundy through the ages including building the Marisco Castle, the days of the Granite Company and the building of the new jetty. The stamps are available now from the Lundy postal office, the UK's oldest operating private postal service. Contact the Lundy Shore office for further details

Being the largest seabird colony in southwest Britain, it's great to see life returning to the windswept west coast cliffs. The apparent chaos and raucous calls of the guillemots, razorbills, and fulmars and the piecing cry of the kittiwakes is a sight and sound to behold. Lundy's famous puffins have started to return to their nesting burrows and although it is still early in the season, it looks like it will be another good year for our iconic namesake (Lundy means puffin island in Norse), as its population recovers following the Seabird Recovery Project. The other benefactors of the SRP, the Manx shearwaters, are filling the night sky with its evocative calls as they return to their summer breeding grounds on the steep sidings.

As one of the wardens here I've started our annual seabird productivity monitoring. This gives us an idea on how well the population is doing and letting us know how the marine ecosystem around our shores is fairing. By following a small sample of the birds throughout the breeding season, seeing how many nests are built, eggs are laid and finally chicks have fledged we can see how the breeding season has gone. This information feeds into a national scheme to build up a picture of the UK's population as a whole; vital to helping us monitor and protect our marine environment.

Lundy being a remote island, cut off from many of the usual amenities and facilities on the mainland, means we have to be prepared for more than the usual turn of events. This means regular training

for the islands volunteer fire and coastguard teams, keeping the islands visitors and residents safe and well.

Summer is rapidly approaching us here, with warmer weather and a breathtaking display of flowers across the island. The west coast is quickly becoming smothered in a blanket of sea pink (or thift) flowers that form a colourful fringe to the cliff tops. The very rare and endemic Lundy cabbage is bursting with colour on the more sheltered east coast. This plant, found nowhere else on earth, is a driving force behind our ongoing rhododendron eradication program that carries on throughout the year, as we strive to both protect and increase the population.

We hope to see you soon here to experience some of the magic and beauty that this little gem of an island has to offer.

Derren Fox, Wildlife Warden

For more information on Lundy, visit www.lundyisland.co.uk or email info@lundyisland.co.uk