

NOTES ON SOME MAMMALS ON LUNDY

By

A. J. PARSONS

Barnfield, Crewkerne, Somerset

Goats Highest number recorded was thirteen on 260683, including two adult males and one goatling.

Soay Sheep Highest number seen together was twelve on 260683, although it would seem likely that there may have been at least sixteen, in three groups, on 300683.

Sika Deer Sightings of three stags together and of four hinds over three occasions which were probably all different individuals.

Rabbits I have been informed that myxomatosis has recently arrived on the island. It would also appear that this was no accident. I have had considerable veterinary and ecological experience of myxomatosis and the advent of the disease on Lundy will undoubtedly have far reaching consequences. My reasons for believing that the disease was introduced deliberately are, briefly, as follows:

1. Myxomatosis reached the adjacent mainland in 1954 and was widespread and severe initially. If spread to an adjacent island were to occur naturally, one would expect it to occur during the peak years, not over 25 year later.
2. The disease is only spread (in Britain) by the rabbit flea. It is not likely that living fleas would both be carried to the island on a carcass by (say) a gull or a buzzard and then pass to a living rabbit.
3. If the disease was of natural occurrence, one would expect it to occur initially around a gull colony or other 'wild' site. In fact, the disease has originated from the south-east (populated) area of the island and is gradually spreading out from there, having reached just north of the quarter-wall by this June.

I am one of the trustees of Steep Holm and have seen at first hand the marked effects which can occur on the ecology of an island due to the introduction of myxomatosis. It took not much over twenty years for Steep Holm to change from an open limestone grassland to dense scrub over most of the island. Admittedly, we have no domestic animals grazing on Steep Holm and there were other factors involved, but I believe that this will only reduce the rate of change on Lundy, not stop it. Myxomatosis will not eradicate the rabbit from Lundy but, once present, will periodically recur indefinitely. It can only be removed by total eradication of the rabbit population, which would not be practicable.

The truth of the introduction of the disease may never be known, but I believe L.F.S. records should contain some degree of documentation of the progress and effects of the disease. It makes little difference now who introduced the disease but I hope that such an irresponsible act, taken without consultation, was not a policy of any specific organisation.