

PUFFIN NUMBERS ON LUNDY DURING JUNE 1989

By

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This report contains the results of a series of daily observation counts of puffins on Lundy during early June 1989.

INTRODUCTION

Following the results of a programme of seabird monitoring sites originally established on Lundy by Davies (1981) and the subsequent report on selected monitoring study plots by Willcox (1987), concern was expressed about the future status of puffins on Lundy, even indicating that their future breeding status on the island could now be in doubt.

A simple survey of the number of puffins present on the island was carried out during June 1989. This survey was initiated to give information on birds present throughout the island, not just those restricted to the study plots.

METHOD

From 4-8 June 1989 a count of puffins on land and on the water (within view of telescopes from land) was made during a daily walk from the Old Light to North East Point. The walks were carried out at approximately the same time each day, predominantly during the morning as birds tend to move further out to sea during the afternoon. Observations were made by walking at the best height for each section. This involved some counts being made at the bottom of the cliff and some at the top, or a combination of the two. Binoculars and a telescope were used. Weather conditions and time of count were noted. No attempt was made to distinguish breeding birds.

RESULTS

See table 1 and fig 1.

Table 1. Showing the number of puffins per section of coast. See fig 1 for sections.

DATE IN 1989	SECTION						TOTAL DAILY COUNT
	A	B	C	D	E	F	
4 June	2	18	9	21	2	8	60
5 June	0	2	0	12	0	6	20
6 June	0	14	5	17	0	3	39
7 June	0	10	4	16	3	4	37
8 June	1	10	3	12	5	4	35
SECTION AVERAGE	0.6	10.8	4.2	15.6	2.0	5.0	
SD PER SECTION	0.9	5.9	3.3	3.8	2.1	2.0	

SD - standard deviation

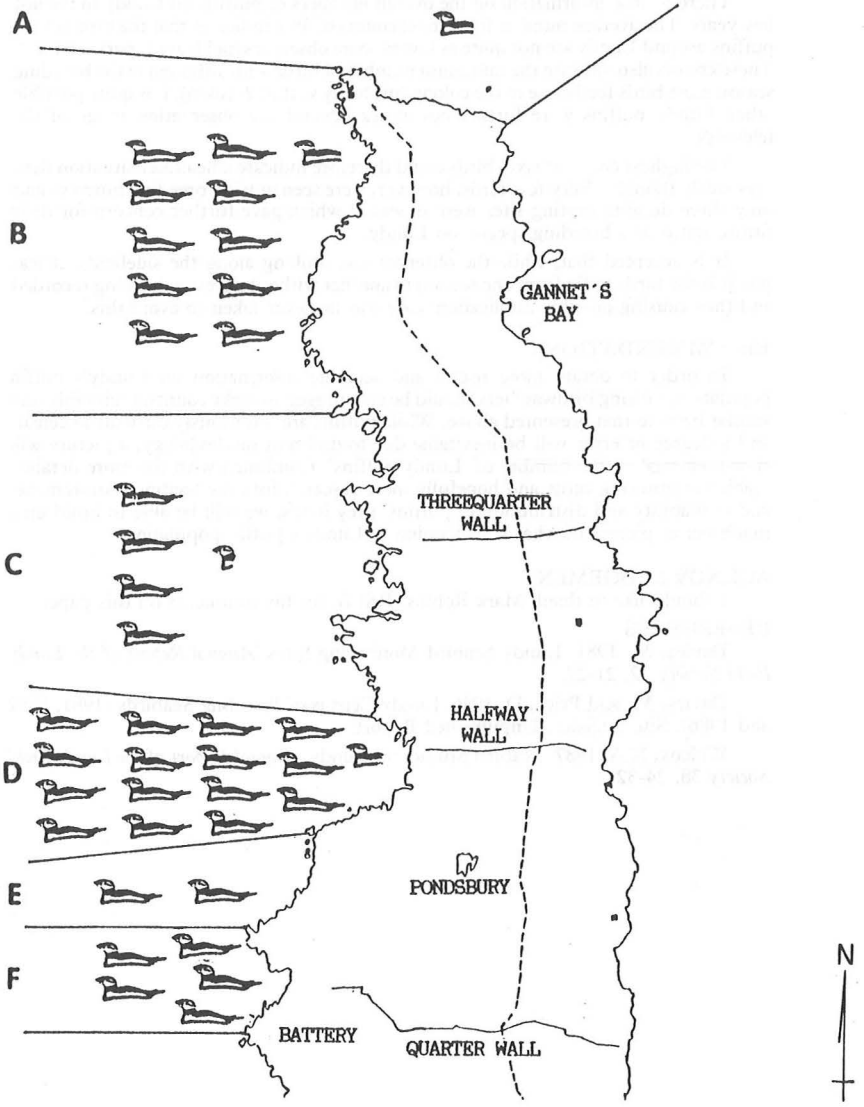


Fig 1. Average number of Puffins present during early June 1989.

DISCUSSION

There is little information on the overall numbers of puffins on Lundy in the last few years. The average number from these counts of 38.2 indicates that the numbers of puffins around Lundy are not quite as low as some observers had feared (pers. comm.). These counts also indicate the minimum number of birds and, although in the breeding season most birds feed close to the colony (probably within 2-10km), it is quite possible other Lundy puffins were further out at sea beyond the observation range of the telescope.

The highest count of sixty birds could therefore indicate a healthier situation than previously thought. Very few birds, however, were seen outside breeding burrows and only three definite nesting sites were observed which gave further concern for their future status as a breeding species on Lundy.

It is accepted that, while the observer was walking along the sidelands, it was possible for birds to fly from one section to another without necessarily being recorded and thus causing possible duplication; care was however taken to avoid this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to obtain more useful and accurate information on Lundy's puffin population, visiting birdwatchers should be encouraged to make counts, preferably on a similar basis to that presented above. While puffins are notoriously difficult to census and a degree of error will be inevitable due to different methodology, a picture will slowly emerge on the number of 'Lundy puffins'. Combined with the more detailed seabird monitoring cards and hopefully more research into the feeding requirements and availability and distribution of puffins' prey items, we will be able to build up a much better picture of what is happening to Lundy's puffin population.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I should like to thank Mark Robins (RSPB) for his comments on this paper.

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