

LUNDY'S MARINE NATURE RESERVE — FIVE YEARS ON

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The 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act made provision for the establishment of statutory Marine Nature Reserves and on the 21st November 1986 the waters around Lundy became the United Kingdom's first statutory Marine Nature Reserve (MNR). Its declaration was the culmination of a number of years' hard work, most noticeably by staff of the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) (now English Nature). The Lundy Field Society, largely through the efforts of Dr Keith Hiscock, had played an important role in shaping the NCC proposals in the years prior to declaration. A full account of the steps leading to the MNR's establishment can be found in Hiscock (1986).

This contribution summarizes the main developments which have taken place during the five years since statutory status was conferred on the Marine Nature Reserve around the island. It also presents the aims and rationale of the Lundy Marine Consultation Group and summarizes the topics which have been discussed by the Group during that period.

MAIN DEVELOPMENTS

Employment of a Warden. The presence of a warden in a Marine Nature Reserve is important for a number of reasons: he can act as a guardian, ensuring that visitors to the reserve adhere to the code of conduct and that vulnerable habitats and species are protected from damage caused by human influences; he can act as an educator, informing visitors about the wildlife of the reserve, both on the shore and also below water; he can perform an important role as a recorder of events throughout the seasons, and thereby build up an important historical record for the reserve as the years go by; he can carry out monitoring work within the reserve, noting such things as occurrence or absence of certain species and their growth rates, together with changes in physical parameters such as water temperature; and he can act as a policeman, ensuring that those who obviously flout the bylaws of the reserve are brought to justice. Of course, there are many other tasks which a warden is called upon to do besides these.

The Lundy Field Society employed wardens on the island when funds allowed from 1947 until 1973. The main duty of these wardens was to monitor birdlife, and to keep records of breeding and migrating species. Following the establishment of the voluntary marine reserve around the island in 1973, the NCC, by way of a pilot project, employed a marine warden, Nigel Thomas, during the summer of 1978. There then followed a period with no warden until February 1986 when Neil Willcox was appointed. His post was funded by the NCC and his duties were split between terrestrial and marine matters. After two years, Neil left the island and Andrew Gibson, the current warden was appointed in his place.

Production of a Code of Conduct for the reserve. In addition to the bylaws for the reserve, which incidentally are overseen jointly by English Nature and the Devon Sea Fisheries Committee, there is also a voluntary Code of Conduct which visitors to the reserve are asked to abide by. The Code is set out, together with the reserve's bylaws, in a small leaflet published by the NCC. It is also featured on display boards on the island and at Bideford quay, and in Hiscock (1986).

Production of a colour booklet about the reserve. A sixteen page colour booklet entitled "Lundy Marine Nature Reserve" was published in 1988, and has been on sale in the island shop.

Continuation of monitoring studies. Marine biological monitoring studies, designed to provide more information on species and communities of nature conservation

importance, were initiated in 1984 (Hiscock 1985). Intertidal and subtidal recording at the same sites has taken place during the summers of 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1990. It is likely that future recording work will take place every other year. At the time of writing (March 1992), a full review of the results acquired so far by English Nature has just been completed. It is hoped that a summary of this review will feature in next year's LFS annual report.

Declaration of two protected wreck sites within the MNR. During 1990, the Department of Transport notified two protected wrecks within the reserve (fig. 1). The first was the "Iona II", a paddlesteamer which was wrecked in 1864 when setting off to be an Americal Civil War blockade runner. What remains of her lies in about 24m of water off the east coast at 51°11'03N 4°38'78W, and an area within 50m is out of bounds to all divers unless they possess a special licence to dive on her. Many artefacts from the "Iona II" were brought to the surface during the early 1980s and now reside in the Glasgow Museum, the ship's home port. (Incidentally, the more recent wreck of the "Robert", which went down in 1979, lies just outside the protected area and so may still be dived by visiting divers.) The second wreck to receive special protection also lies off the east coast, though closer inshore at 51°11'11N 4°39'41W. Stone cannon balls, wrought-iron breech blocks and a wrought-iron cannon believed to date from the sixteenth century are the only indications of the shipwreck which lies under sand. An area within 100m of the given position is protected, which still means divers may visit the near-by Knoll Pins without hinderance. Responsibility for these two sites has now passed to the Department of the Environment, Heritage Division.

Introduction of a trial "No Fishing Area" off the East Coast. In June 1991, a gentleman's agreement was reached between the Devon Sea Fisheries Committee and local fishermen to introduce a "No Fishing Zone" off the east coast between 1st July and 30th September, with fishing by permit holders only being allowed for the rest of the year (fig. 1). The agreement will operate initially for a period of one year after which it will be subject to review by interested parties. The purpose of this Zone is to facilitate the safe navigation of vessels to and from the Lundy landing beach and the Lundy Roads anchorage, as well as aid the conservation of marine life in the area.

THE LUNDY MARINE CONSULTATION GROUP

The Lundy Marine Consultation Group is an independent body set up in April 1985 to provide an informal "talking shop" for the regular exchange of views between all parties interested in the waters around Lundy. The aims of the Group are as follows:

1. To provide a nucleus of expertise on the marine habitats and waters surrounding Lundy;
2. To provide a forum for exchanging views on present and proposed activities around Lundy;
3. To safeguard the interests of all those who use the waters around Lundy and its natural resources.

The following organizations are represented on the Group: British Sub-Aqua Club; Devon Sea Fisheries Committee; Devon Wildlife Trust; English Nature; The Landmark Trust; Local Sea Fishing Interests; The Lundy Company Ltd.; Lundy Field Society; Marine Conservation Society; Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Plymouth); National Trust; Royal Yachting Association; Torridge District Council; Worldwide Fund for Nature. Peter Cole, honorary secretary to the Lundy Field Society, acted as honorary secretary to the Group from its first meeting until 1990.

The Group meets in the spring and autumn of each year in Bideford. The Group has no statutory powers and should not be viewed as a steering committee for the MNR. Rather, it provides a forum for issues concerning the MNR to be raised and discussed, and by doing so, dissipate the possibility of confrontation arising between member organizations. The major concerns which have been raised by Group members over the past few years are presented here.

Increase in the number of divers visiting the reserve. Reports from the local Ilfracombe and North Devon Diving Club, who visit the island regularly, indicate that the number of

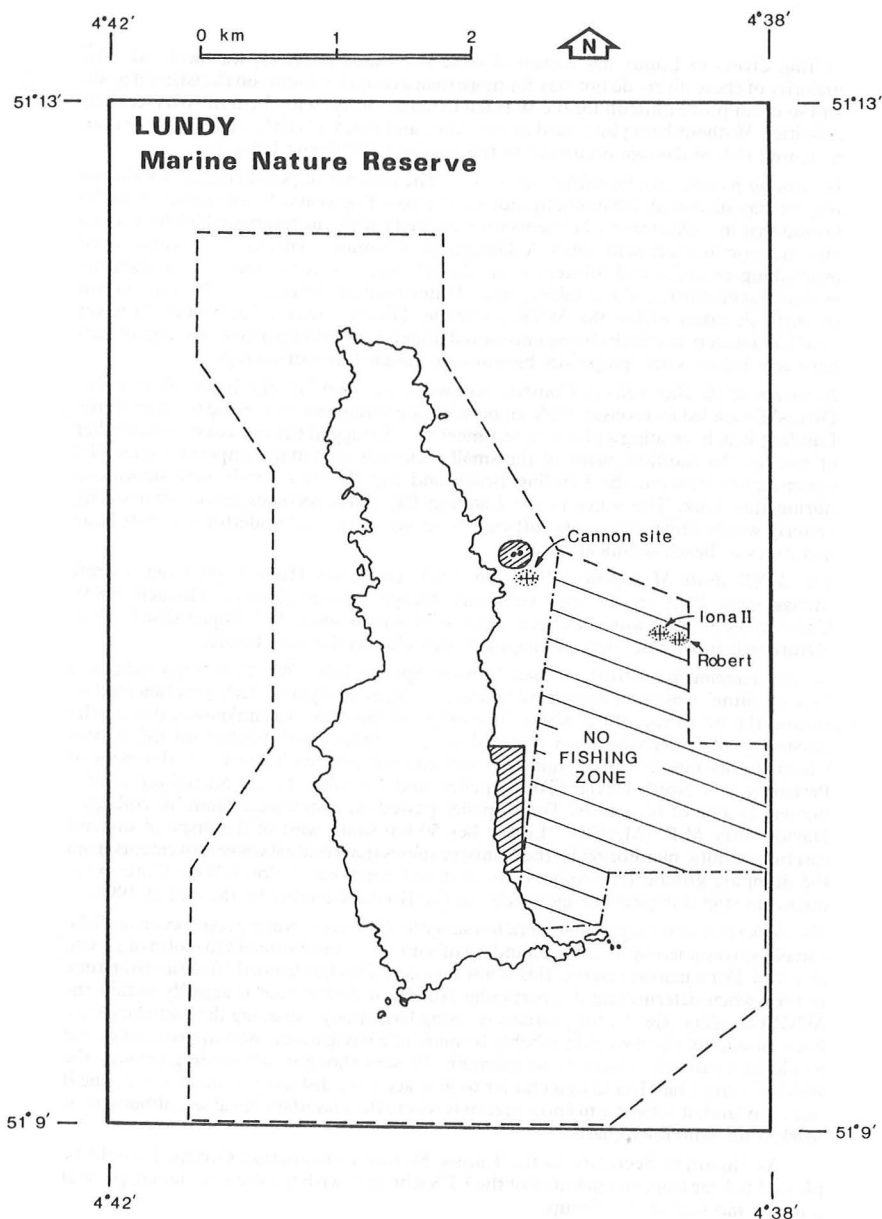


Fig. 1. Area included within the Lundy Marine Nature Reserve (continuous line). The broken line is the area within which no person shall fish by trawling; using tangle, moored or fixed nets; or using gill nets except with written permission. The area around the Knoll Pins where potting is prohibited is shaded. The area between Sugar Loaf and Quarry Beach where fixed gill netting is permitted is shaded. The recently introduced "No Fishing Zone" is also shaded (wide spacing). The wrecks mentioned in the text are also shown.

visiting divers to Lundy has increased since the statutory MNR was declared. The majority of these divers do not stay for more than a couple of nights on the island if at all, and so it can prove difficult for the Warden to make contact with them and oversee their activities. Without being informed of the "do's and don't's" of the reserve, there is an increased risk of damage occurring to the marine wildlife and habitats.

Increase in potting activity within the reserve. The number of pots being set within the reserve has increased substantially during the past five years. It was reported to the Group that in 1990 a total of 1750 pots were worked within the reserve, which indicates a 50% increase in effort since 1988 (A. Gibson, pers. comm.). This has led to concerns of overfishing of crabs and lobsters from the reserve, but as yet there is no scientific evidence available that this is taking place. Unfortunately, no records of landings of fish or shellfish taken within the MNR are made. Divers however have reported fewer crayfish, lobsters and crabs being encountered under water. Poorly marked strings of pots have also led to boats' propellers becoming entangled in surface ropes.

Extension of the Beach Road. Construction work on extending the Beach Road to the Divers' Beach led to a considerable amount of fine shingle and silt being washed off the Landing Beach, creating a plume of sediment which hugged the east coast for a number of months. In addition, many of the small rockpools containing important intertidal communities between the Landing Beach and the Divers's Beach were smothered during this work. The water in the Landing Bay often becomes murky after strong easterly winds which can create sufficiently strong waves and undertows to shift large quantities of beach sediment naturally.

The MNR draft Management Plan. In 1983, Dr Keith Hiscock prepared a draft Management Plan for the then voluntary Marine Nature Reserve (Hiscock 1983). Unfortunately, little work has been done on this plan since. It is hoped that English Nature will further develop and augment this plan in the near future.

Sewage dumping in the Bristol Channel. From April to July 1990 divers reported that a "greasy slime" was covering vertical bedrock surfaces (and particularly jewel anemones) around the north end of the island. The origin of the slime was unknown, though the possibility of it deriving from dumped sewage sludge from further up the Bristol Channel was raised. Correspondence was entered into with the local Members of Parliament for North Devon (Tony Speller) and Torridge (Emma Nicholson) on this matter. In one of his letters, Tony Speller passed on a statement from his colleague David Curry M.P. (MAFF): "Lundy lies 50 km south west of the disposal site and careful scientific monitoring by the Ministry shows that residual water movements from the dumping ground tend to be to the east and north east." South West Water p.l.c. intend to stop dumping sewage sludge in the Bristol Channel by the end of 1993.

The difficulties of having an unmarked boundary to the reserve. Nature reserves on land are usually surrounded by a visible boundary of some sort, most often in the form of a fence or a wall. For a marine reserve, this is not the case. This has led to difficulties from time to time when determining if a particular fishing or diving boat is actually within the MNR boundary (fig. 1). Suggestions of using large buoys set along the boundary have been raised, but these would probably be more of a navigational hazard than an aid, and would be extremely expensive to maintain. Present thoughts are tending towards the warden using a hand-held rangefinder to give accurate distances. Clearly this is fine if one is on land; it is harder to know precisely where the boundary lies at sea, although it is marked on Admiralty charts.

As Honorary Secretary to the Lundy Marine Consultation Group, I would be pleased to hear from any member of the LFS who may wish to raise a discussion point at a future meeting of the Group.

REFERENCES

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