

WARDEN'S REPORT 1992

As usual I will begin with a summary of the weather. 1992 was a year to remember! What started in an excellent manner, became a hooligan for the second half of the year. Two months, August and November, were in the top five wettest months since rainfall recording started on Lundy, in 1971 (fig. 1). From mid July the weather was consistently wet with an almost daily helping of rain. Superb weather in May and June was a mixed blessing, as it brought with it predominantly easterly winds. Oldenburg crossings had to be cancelled in the spring and early summer because of the wind direction. When it finally did turn to blow from the south west, crossings were still cancelled because of the strength of the wind. In all we lost out throughout the holiday season.

In early spring there were nearly twice as many frosts recorded as in the previous three years, but in common with most offshore islands, a frost is a short lived phenomenon and almost never remains after mid day. Probably the only plus points of the year are, that on at least two days, we had the greatest number of hours of sunshine in the UK and there wasn't our usual water shortage from June onwards.

MARINE NATURE RESERVE

The Lundy Marine Nature Reserve is still one of only two statutory reserves in the British Isles, and yet very few visitors understand its significance. We have to demonstrate to the public the importance of protecting our marine environment and the best way to do that, is to give people the opportunity to see it at first hand. Over the next few years, we aim to give the reserve a much higher profile, with some projects already underway. Last season I introduced a snorkelling trail (fig. 2) and whilst it was not possible for everyone who wanted to try it to do so because of the weather, those that did 'have a go' enjoyed it. This year the equipment has been extended and there will be underwater identification sheets for snorkellers to take with them.

Not everyone is willing to get in the water and for these people I hope to extend the present Shore Walks. There will be a new guide to the Lundy Littoral marine life and this will be supported by new interpretive boards both on the island and at various local ports. An exciting piece of equipment that should arrive in the next few weeks, is an underwater remote controlled video camera. It will have a 300 ft umbilical and once I have learnt how to 'fly' it, it should give a whole new dimension to the reserve. The camera is being provided by English Nature and will also be used for research and monitoring. If global warming is a reality, it will be the marine environment that will give us our most accurate and positive proof. Sites such as Lundy will play an important part in monitoring any long term changes.

Diving remains popular and we had resident diving groups staying throughout the season. From mid July, however, the visibility was very variable, with the easterly wind making the east side particularly poor. Our air compressor let us down just before the last group arrived and we had to rely upon air being brought out on the Oldenburg. Sublittoral monitoring of the reserve has been carried out for many years and forms a valuable database - one of the most complete in the British Isles. But, even this work has gaps which need to be covered. We need to create monitor sites on the west side of the island, stocks of crustacea and the effect of potting should be properly established and sea temperature and turbidity will become increasingly important.

The reserve may be threatened by several commercial undertakings and we must be sure what effect they may have upon our marine life. There is a probably 3.5 kilometre sewer outflow from Applefore, planned sand and gravel extraction north east of the island - with other sites in the pipeline - and a possibility of oil exploration off the west coast. What use is a Marine Nature Reserve if it is going to end up as polluted as any other part of the United Kingdom coast?

Within the next few weeks, we will have a printed Management Plan for both the MNR and the SSSI. By combining the two plans as one overall programme, we are acknowledging the fact that there are inseparable links between the terrestrial and marine

FIG: 1

LUNDY RAINFALL 1992	JAN	FEB	MAR	APL	MAY	JUN	JLY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
Rainfall (mm)	56.8	52.0	61.0	61.9	27.0	16.1	59.3	190.7	83.0	65.7	186.4	106.5	966.5
Highest rainfall in 24 hour period (mm)	33.7	16.4	8.0	9.4	6.5	11.4	6.7	27.6	15.6	9.3	27.3	21.0	
Longest period without rain	15	7	2	5	12	21	4	5	1	9	1	10	
Total days without rain	21	12	6	14	24	25	12	8	6	12	1	13	
Days with rain > 0.2 mm	7	16	19	15	7	5	19	22	20	17	28	18	
Days with rain > 5 mm	3	2	3	6	2	1	5	11	7	5	12	7	
Days with rain > 10 mm	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	8	2	0	8	4	
LUNDY AVERAGES - 1971 to 1992													
Average rainfall (mm)	100.4	73.9	70.5	47.0	44.1	59.8	52.2	78.4	86.4	100.7	103.0	102.1	1149.9
Average days without rain	9	12	12	15	17	16	18	16	14	12	10	12	
Days with rain > 0.2 mm	19	15	17	11	12	11	11	13	13	17	18	17	
Days with rain > 5 mm	7	5	4	3	3	3	3	4	5	6	6	7	
Days with rain > 10 mm	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	

environments and that it is desirable to treat the island as a whole. The plan, although flexible, will form the basis for conservation and protection for Lundy from now onwards. In producing the plan, care has been taken to include the management principles highlighted by the National Trust's Archaeological and Biological surveys.

However good the plan can be made, its implementation will always depend upon a great deal of help from volunteer groups and we are lucky to have LFS members who are willing to give us that help.

VOLUNTEERS

It was a bumper year for volunteers. John Morgan's 'Quick Response' groups were out in force and many of the paths bear testament to their hard work. Helen Coles' larger groups drew the short straw and got to know Brazen Ward reasonably well - at long last the thicket has gone. Although other methods of removing 'rhodi' were tried, I still feel it is safer, even if slower, to concentrate on cutting and grubbing - I want to assure you that it is a malicious rumour that members of 'rhodi' groups will be frisked for matches when they arrive. As a diversion, some volunteers assisted John Steer with the reconstruction of Threequarter Wall. The wall is complete and only needs the fences at each end and a gate, to be stockproof. It makes a dramatic improvement to the North End. We do appreciate all the help given by volunteers and long may it continue. The new four-bed accommodation of Old Light West will be a useful place for volunteers to stay and hopefully, will enable me to have help during the summer months.

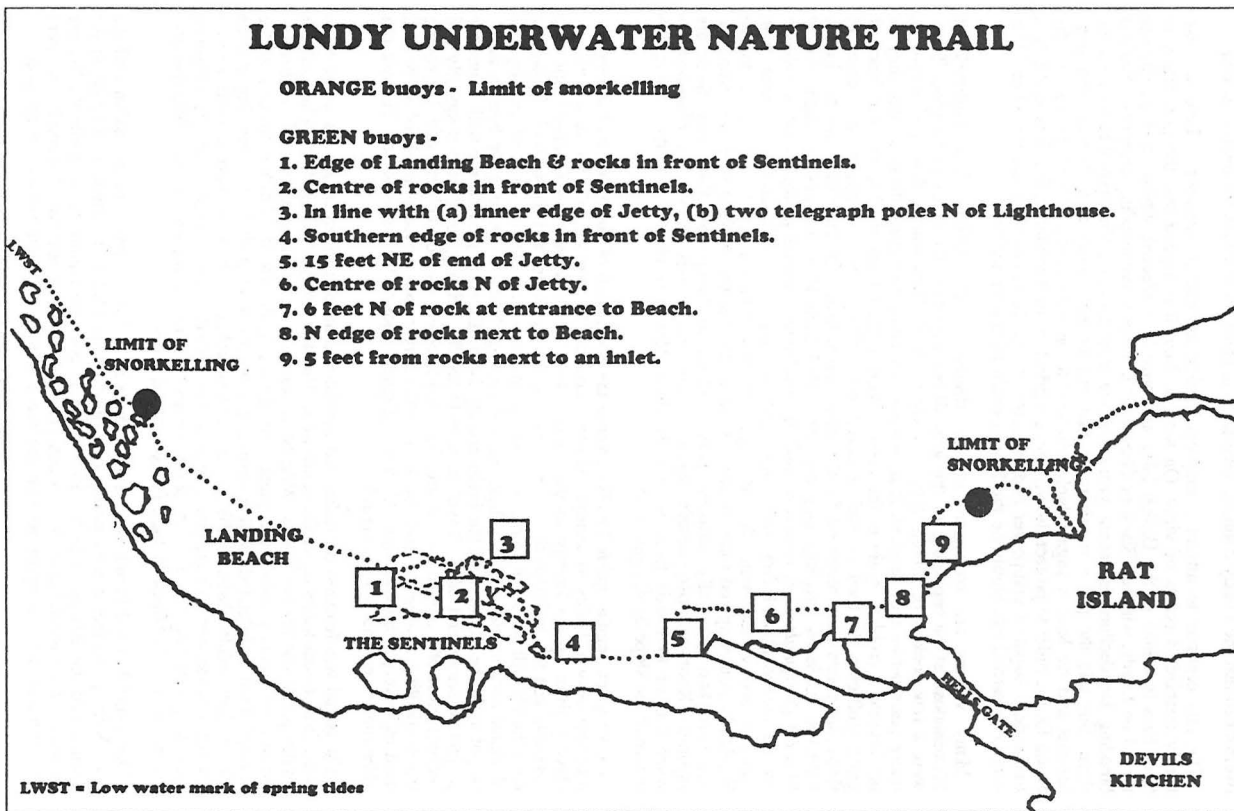
WILDLIFE

The birds of Lundy are reported separately, but during June, David Price and Mark Robbins continued the four yearly census of breeding seabirds. Their findings show an oddity which has yet to be investigated. Most seabirds are maintaining similar numbers to the last count, but in the case of Kittiwake, their numbers have fallen by 40%. The drop is not consistent, with some sites apparently unaffected, whilst others have disappeared completely. One possible cause, may be the rise in the number of Ravens. They have given the breeding birds a great deal of hassle and are responsible for much of the predation, however they appear to have favourite feeding sites and leave others undisturbed.

Having maintained an almost total indifference for over a year, our original goats and the new ones from the Valley of the Rocks finally joined up as one group in December. Although since that time they have split up again. One of our oldest nannies had an eventful year. In March she became stuck upon a ledge in Gannets Bay about 100 feet up. She spent three weeks on the ledge and at one time the old billy spent several days on the next ledge up trying to encourage her back. In the first week of April she disappeared from the ledge, we had to assume that if the fall didn't kill her, she would have drowned. Then on April 9th she was sighted on Gannets Rock. She has been there ever since despite several attempts to get her down - on one of these ten climbers spent four hours being very skilfully avoided. In theory at any rate she should have been able to scramble back to the mainland at low tide on the springs, something which seems to have had no interest for her. The goat has not been seen for some three weeks, and sadly I think we have to assume that she has now been lost.

Our Soay flock number 96 Ewes, 17 Rams and 45 Lambs. This year's lambs are starting to be born and it will be interesting to see if the barrier of Threequarter Wall has any effect upon their behaviour. We have recently culled a number of Rams and all the culled animals were examined for genetic characteristics and parasites. The flock is in excellent condition with fewer parasites than the domestic sheep. Since their introduction in 1944, the flock has been completely feral with no new blood introduced. Modern sheep farmers become paranoid about inbreeding, but here is a prime example, where constant inbreeding has produced a flock that is healthier than the majority of domestic flocks. The Soays on Lundy are a very important 'source flock' of primitive sheep, very little changed from the type of animals which would have been farmed on the island, at the time when the North End hut circles were built. With only two other island flocks of Soay, outside the St Kilda archipelago, ours has a strong scientific interest, as long as they remain feral. The Soay introduced to Hirta when the human population was

FIG. 2



evacuated in 1930, are the subject to a great deal of research, but it tends to be overlooked that the Lundy animals have lived in similar conditions for nearly as long.

The rats continue to attract a disproportionate amount of attention. There are two firmly established points of view. On the one hand it is argued that the population of Ship Rats is unique in the British Isles and must be protected, whilst other people see the rat on Lundy, whether Black or Brown, as a threat to the breeding seabirds - Seabird breeding has declined in recent years and we must do everything possible to preserve them. Stir into the pot a requirement that rats be kept away from human and farm habitats and we have a saga which will rumble on indefinitely. I continue to bait the South End in order to protect the village, confident in the knowledge that it would take a tremendous input of manpower and resources to eradicate rats from the island and if it was to be carried out, would be the largest eradication ever achieved.

Many visitors are conscious of the demise of the rabbits. The outbreak of Myxomatosis at the beginning of the year all but wiped out the entire population. There were a few pockets of rabbits left - mostly north of Threequarter Wall and it will be many years before they recover. It is however important to control them, so that they do not become a problem again in the future. Without the rabbits, we had an abundance of grass (sufficient to feed several hundred extra sheep) and a number of species of flowering plants were recorded for the first time in years. On the flora side, the Lundy Cabbage (*Coincea wrightii*) and the other Red Data Book species of Balm leaved Figwort (*Scrophularia scorodonia*) and Adders Tongue Fern (*Ophioglossum azoricum*) are all increasing and they will continue to be monitored. We have a problem with Bracken and in line with the Management Plan will attempt to restrict it to the Sidelands. A new spiked roller which can be attached to the ATVs is being investigated. We have two potentially invasive plants, which are being controlled, and these are Japanese Knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*) and Alexanders (*Smyrniolum olusatrum*) - when I came to Lundy there were only three Alexander plants, now they cover the whole of the slope by the gas store.

I have given regular guided walks around the South End of the island and during the breeding season, walks to Jennys' Cove. Some of the evening talks were a problem. Having given up the Linhay to the shop, I had to use whatever accommodation was available and this included the Barn, Quarters, the restaurant and the Church. Hopefully the Church will be made more useable in the next few months, by the addition of blackout curtains and possibly lighting and heating. Some of our display boards are to be put up in the Church and the Field Society have offered to provide me with a suitable projection screen and table. It will be nice to see the building used more frequently and become more of a community centre. The Field Society are also helping with improving the snorkelling equipment and the two field microscopes provided in April were well used by visiting school groups. All this equipment adds to the range of activities we can offer and is very much appreciated.

The island was featured on radio and television a number of times. At one stage there were three media teams on at the same time. The item on snorkelling, filmed last July, is finally going out on the Really Wild Show on 26th March after several date changes. Because of easterly winds the piece was filmed in the Devils Kitchen instead of the Snorkel Trail as intended. Whilst snorkellers do see a great deal of interesting marine life - to have adult lobster, edible crabs and sea urchins in the same dive is remarkable - my son Christopher isn't always sitting on the seabed behind a rock, releasing creatures from a 'goody bag' on cue. A short feature will be shown on the new Westcountry television on 30th March in Jack Pizzys' island series.

The island had a difficult year from a financial point of view. The recession and the poor holiday weather forced nearly one third of the staff to be made redundant in the autumn and this has put a tremendous pressure onto the remaining community. We are all hoping for a much better season this year and I am sure that with favourable weather and your continuing support, we can achieve a more comfortable stability once more.

ANDREW GIBSON
MARCH 1993