

## PLYMPTON SECONDARY MODERN SCHOOL EXPEDITIONS, 1952 AND 1954

Two parties of ten boys each, aged between 13 and 15 years, accompanied by their Biology Master, Mr V. C. P. Almy, have visited Lundy. This was an experiment, and the following is an account of its purpose and results.

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Our venture had a double motive. It was primarily regarded as a means by which a group of boys could be given a fairly safe outlet for their natural daring, in circumstances likely to require qualities of resource, endurance and self-reliance. The second, more tangible, but less important intention, was the pursuit of some original field studies in a place which had hitherto received little treatment. Lundy was an ideal location; its splendid variety of plant and animal life, its turbulent history, its variable weather conditions, and its great natural beauty, made this remote place in every way attractive to us.

On reading the LUNDY FIELD SOCIETY'S ANNUAL REPORTS, it became quite obvious such admirable technical work was already being carried out, that it was very unlikely our expeditions could add anything of any value to the rapidly accumulating data. Nevertheless, this did not stop the boys from being given a very formidable programme of simple field studies, covering almost every aspect of the Island's fauna. Although the bird-life focuses the attention of almost every visitor, and probably gets more than its fair share of attention, it would have been foolish to neglect the fact that most of the sea birds were at their nesting sites whilst we were there, and it was possible for the boys to acquaint themselves thoroughly with species which they were unlikely to see in their home area. In order to give these observations a novel twist, however, we gave ourselves the rather difficult assignment of photographing the Manx Shearwater at night in its natural surroundings, both in black and white and colour. This was in fact, achieved.

Little work appeared to have been done on the Lepidoptera for some years, and since the list of moths seemed rather low, it was decided to do something about this. Frequent night excursions with search lamp and sugaring compound to all parts of the Island added thirty species to the rather meagre records. Since exploration loses much of its savour when one is led, leadership was kept as unobtrusive as possible, and subject to reasonable precautions being taken, the boys were frequently allowed to make these moth-collecting trips unescorted.

The school's biology syllabus is based entirely upon ecological studies and it was therefore most valuable to have one of those rare opportunities to study in the field, the relationship of soil

conditions, climate and plant life. Dozens of pH tests were made, many plants were collected and simple experiments performed. Over one hundred and sixty species of plants were located and a large number of the less rare ones preserved. During the course of their school-room biology, most of the boys had studied the natural history of Dartmoor, and this had involved reference to the many evidences of ancient settlements there. It was to be expected, therefore, that the enclosures, hut circles, and other relics of prehistory on Lundy were keenly examined. In this way, the boys were enabled to make their only important contribution to the mass of information compiled by more scientific workers. In the vicinity of the hut circles, and the supposed round tower foundations, on the north end of the Island, a considerable number of fragments of flint and chert were found ; some loose, on top of the bare peat, and some embedded. Three or four of these are undoubted artefacts showing signs of a worked cutting edge. The rest of the fragments are apparently knappers' waste. One complete flint pebble was found, one piece of clear rock crystal, and two elongated pieces of sandstone. The whole have been submitted to some of the highest experts in the country, and the opinion has been expressed that they are Neolithic or early Bronze Age in origin, that the pieces of sandstone are possibly whetstones, and that one fragment of flint seems to have been intended as a small hand-saw. It seems probable that the source of the flints were the beaches of Lundy where flint and chert pebbles have been found in the past.

It was very fortunate that we were able to film the whole of this incident. In fact on the occasion of the 1954 visit to Lundy, the boys' activities were recorded on 800 feet of colour film. Photography played an important part on both occasions. Time was generally too short for sketching. The boys were so overwhelmed by new experiences, it was almost impossible to record everything adequately. Cameras, therefore were used to capture many moments which would otherwise have been completely lost. In this way, altogether nearly nine hundred pictures were taken. Two boys managed to get excellent flashlight pictures of the Shearwaters ; one spent a whole day stalking seals until he was able to bring his box-camera to bear upon an animal basking in the sun, eight feet away from him ; yet another played a similar game with the semi-wild goats, and having rounded up thirty of them in a prominent position obtained a most dramatic picture.

It has been observed by psychologists that the best methods of teaching, are, as a matter of fact, echoes of the ways in which the race learned. But the solicitude with which the modern community treats the education of children fails to give sufficient scope for innate stimuli and the pent-up emotional energies, which is so necessary for the development of a healthy balanced outlook. On Lundy, we were able for a while to return to a simple, primitive existence, wherein many of the natural and healthy instincts usually

suppressed by civilized society could be given rein. It was then possible in some measure to begin to direct them from their primitive source to some valuable end. In such circumstances, curiosity could become science ; pugnacity, strength of purpose ; and gregariousness, loyalty. The more elemental the experience, the more easy the process seemed. The proof of this was established by the way the boys reacted to their living conditions. In 1952 we lived under canvas, with more than the usual inconveniences. But in spite of this it seemed to bring out splendid qualities in some boys, in whom they had never been detected. In 1954 we lived in one of the outbuildings of the Old Light. It was much more comfortable than camping, but less comfortable than home. It thus had neither the tough independence of the one existence nor the luxuries of the other. It was obvious from the start that the 1954 group were missing some subtle enjoyment which had been felt by all those who went on the 1952 expedition. They were less emancipated. Possibly the entire task of education is the emancipation and sublimation of crude instinct, and perhaps the undefinable quality in the pleasure which we all felt whilst on Lundy was the stimulus that the experience gave to this process.

## WILD AND FERAL MAMMALS

### *Oryctolagus cuniculus*. **Rabbit.**

No change in status has been observed.

### *Rattus rattus*. **Black Rat.**

Has not been seen this season.

### *Rattus norvegicus*. **Brown Rat.**

Still abundant in spite of efforts to distribute poison. Several have been seen suffering from some skin disease being hairless over much of their body. A young rat was seen on the Great Shutter on the night of August 4th-5th.

### *Dama dama*. **Fallow Deer.**

The single doe has not been seen since the beginning of August.

### *Sika nippon*. **Japanese Deer.**

The greatest number seen was sixty-nine in June. A young fawn was disturbed from the bracken on August 9th, it was alone and thought to be two or three days old. No other fawns were seen until October when they were well grown and running with the herds. The challenge wail of the stags was first heard on October 6th and continued at least up until the end of November, although in the latter half of the month it was normally only heard at night.