

**TERRESTRIAL MAMMALS ON LUNDY:
AN ODD, RICH AND DYNAMIC ASSEMBLAGE**

by

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Twenty-two terrestrial mammal species have been recorded on Lundy, many more than most other islands of similar size and isolation. However, perhaps only three (all bats) are truly native. Of these only one (common pipistrelle) appears to be resident. The remainder are: (1) early accidental introductions (mice, rats, a shrew); (2) livestock (cattle, sheep, goat, pig), horse/pony, dog and cat, some of which were established as feral populations (Soay sheep) or have become so (goat); (3) an eclectic mix introduced mainly in the early part of the last century (three deer, a marsupial, brown hare and red squirrel) of which only sika deer persists today. Rats (both species) were eradicated early this century to benefit burrow-nesting seabirds. Today the high combined biomass of sika, commercial sheep, feral sheep and goats, and rabbits has a major impact on Lundy's vegetation. In order to reduce the grazing pressure on features of nature conservation interest in the SSSI (lowland heath and coastal grasslands) the number of commercial sheep has recently been lowered as part of an agri-environment scheme. Annual counts by the LFS and our teams reveal that the reduction in commercial sheep has not been accompanied by increases in the other large herbivores, the numbers of which are stabilised by annual culls or live sales. However, as commercial sheep are reduced the number of rabbits has tended to increase suggesting competition for forage. The rabbit population, usually high, damages historic sites, buildings, farming interests and nature conservation and has proved very difficult to reduce. The current (2006) rabbit population is very low due to a myxomatosis outbreak. In the absence of culling now and into the winter it is likely to increase to pre-myxomatosis levels. We recommend continued monitoring of the large herbivores and rabbits on Lundy.