

A SENSE OF BELONGING

When Sian Scott visited Lundy Island for a short break, she had no idea that within a few months she would be an integral part of this magical enclave on the North Devon coast

WORDS *Natalie Millar-Partridge*



Sian Scott lives and breathes the great outdoors. 'I've been passionate about nature and being outside for as long as I can remember,' says the assistant warden and education officer for Lundy Island, off the coast of North Devon. 'Growing up, I was a tomboy – always climbing trees, making bows and arrows and constructing dens in the local woodland. I gravitated towards reading and writing about travel adventures, stories of isolation, remote wilderness and faraway worlds.' How apt, then, that in her current role she

helps protect the diverse wildlife of Lundy, from puffins to wild Soay sheep to grey seals, monitoring the rugged coastal paths as she goes and leading visitors on guided walks, snorkel safaris and rockpool rambles.

Sian, 31, first came to Lundy as a visitor, booking three days on the island in February 2017. 'I was having a bit of a tough time in life and work, and a trip to Lundy for my birthday to stay in the Old Light Cottage seemed like the perfect tonic.' As luck, or serendipity, would have it, on the day she was booked to leave the island by

helicopter, Storm Doris hit the island and she was stranded for 10 days, allowing her to fall for Lundy's magic. She was struck by its contrasts: 'Within one square mile of land there are so many diverse habitats. On the sheltered east side, the sika deer hide among the few copses of trees, while to the wild west coast the Atlantic Ocean crashes against the rugged cliffs and seabirds swoop and dive. At the south end, wild flowers grow all the way up the beach road to the village, and at the north end Soay sheep and feral goats graze on windswept plains of heather. ➤➤➤

PHOTOGRAPHS **SIAN SCOTT**
PORTRAITS OF SIAN SCOTT **ALICE CLARKE**

The captivating island of
Lundy lies 23 miles north
of the Devon coast





Sian loves her work on Lundy, which she says is different in all seasons and constantly amazing in the diversity of its wildlife and flora

It felt like a place with so many treasures waiting to be discovered.'

ISLAND HOPPING

By April 2017 she had returned to the island from South Wales, where she was working as an assistant ranger for the National Trust, and took up the role of temporary volunteer assistant warden. By January 2018 she had impressed her boss, Derek Green, Lundy general manager, so much that – as well as continuing with her conservation duties – she was offered the role of education officer, a new island post financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of the St Helen's Centre Appeal, the island's church where a new centre for study and research is being built.

During the summer season Sian's week is defined by 'boat days' and 'non-boat days'. When the island's boat, the MS *Oldenburg*, arrives with visitors for the day, it's all go. She helps bring the boat in and greets visitors off the gangway before leading a guided walk that offers a glimpse into island life. Often this includes observing the popular puffin colony at Jenny's Cove before embarking on Land Rover runs

back down to the boat, carrying equipment and tired visitors down the steep beach road. After the boat departs, Sian gives an introductory talk about wildlife and conservation, entitled 'Above & Below the Waves', in the Marisco Tavern to those who are staying on the island – there are 23 self-catering properties run by the Landmark Trust, plus a campsite.

On non-boat days, she fits in her warden-led activities such as snorkel safaris, rock pool rambles and longer guided walks, with her conservation tasks and planning sessions for school visits. Sian is grateful for the opportunity to help children explore Lundy and, along with new family packs and education resources she's devised, she delivers a host of fun activities and workshops to engage and enlighten school children.

During the winter season, the boat is replaced by a helicopter service, meaning there are no day visitors. This gives her the opportunity to do longer guided walks and organise different talks, along with catching up with conservation tasks such as seabird and seal surveys, and assisting the ranger with practical tasks demanded by the

wild land, which might include beach cleans and transplanting trees. 'The winter season has less routine to it but is certainly no less busy,' she says.

SHARING THE JOY

Sian regards her position on Lundy as privileged, and loves to teach others about nature in this unique environment. 'It's humbling to reveal some of the hidden wonders of the natural world to so many people and hugely satisfying to see the joy on a child's face when they see a puffin for the first time, or hear their reaction when I turn a Dor beetle upside down to display its surprising metallic blue underside. I also have a quiet sense of achievement that perhaps, through showcasing the island and teaching about the conservation successes, visitors will be encouraged to take a more pro-active approach to protecting their own local environments.'

Living on Lundy has helped Sian to tap into her creative side, inspiring her to write about the unique landscape, flora and fauna. Surrounded by so much rare beauty, she felt compelled to document her experiences. 'My recent involvement in the St Helen's





I FELL FOR THE
EXPANSIVE SKIES
AND STUNNING
WATERS, AND
THE SENSE OF
BELONGING'



Sian has found that living on the island has made her get in touch with her creative, artistic side





ABOVE Since moving to the island and taking up employment there, Sian has also become involved with the St Helen's Church Centre Appeal project on Lundy

Church project has propelled me to pursue my love of art. I had the opportunity to work with the textile artist Alice Crane, to contribute drawings and creative ideas to a series of textile banners that will hang in the church nave, bringing vibrancy to the space with rich ecclesiastical colours and island images.'

It's the breathtaking landscape however, that inspires Sian to continue living and working in the environment that she now calls home. 'The striking beauty around me is a continual inspiration; particularly the way the landscape differs throughout the year and how island life changes with the seasons. There are seasonal highlights to look forward to every year, such as the puffins returning to their ledges in March, the endemic Lundy cabbage flowering in June, and majestic parasol mushrooms sprouting up in lighthouse field from September onwards.'

SLOW BOAT

Sian's days off are spent getting out and about, her sketchbook in hand, to document the island flora. On warm summer days, she takes to the waters of Lundy's Marine Conservation Zone, where she embarks on a kayak trip up the calm east coast to enjoy the island from a different perspective. 'The diversity of life is astonishing, from

playful grey seals gazing up at you, to alien moon jellyfish suspended in the tide, shoals of sandeels, and giant spider crabs clinging onto the swaying fronds of the kelp forest.'

Being 23 miles away from the closest mainland port of Ilfracombe, a sense of isolation in island life is inevitable. While inhabitants have the *MS Oldenburg* as their lifeline three times a week, it can be challenging to stay in regular contact with friends and family on the mainland. 'Living and working on an island is like being in a bubble – you have to adapt to a different way of life. Though as much as it can sometimes feel isolated, it also offers a sense of freedom. The island has taught me that I'm tougher and far more capable than I realised,' remarks Sian.

She admits that Lundy is a tough place to live at times, testing her limits, yet she can't imagine being anywhere else now. 'It's had my blood, sweat and tears over the past year and a half, but there is something so magnetic about Lundy,' Sian says. 'I love being such a part of the elements and nature, seeing the seasonal changes, in myself as well as the environment, and it is such a privilege to share my home with so many wild animals. The community is fascinating, as well as challenging – I always think the wildest creatures on Lundy are the people who live here.'

NEED to KNOW

i SIAN'S FAVOURITE LUNDY WILDLIFE SPOTS

- Devil's Kitchen – explore the Marine Conservation Zone at the end of the jetty when you get off the *MS Oldenburg*. At low tide many rock pools are revealed, with a wealth of marine life to discover, from coral weed and cushion stars to strawberry anemones and edible crabs. To book on a rockpool ramble, email assistantwarden@lundyisland.co.uk.
- Quarry plateau – four large Victorian quarries where the island granite was briefly mined during the 1860s. Each quarry has its own character and offers interesting finds, including the carnivorous sundew plant. The plateau edge gives a fantastic view over the Bristol Channel, and is a good place to look out for our resident peregrine falcons soaring above.
- Jenny's Cove – the place to go to see puffins on the island! The cove also teems with guillemots, razorbills, kittiwakes and gulls.
- The Battery – a fog signalling station used to supplement the lighthouse, with two 18-pounder cannons still standing proudly. A great place to watch the sun set over the Atlantic Ocean.
- Brazen Ward – a great spot to see kelp forests swaying in the tide and seals lazing around in the water. Perfect for a picnic and a dip!

f TRAVELLING TO LUNDY

In the summer season the *MS Oldenburg* sails three times a week, departing from Ilfracombe or Bideford. In winter, the helicopter service runs from Hartland Point twice a week. View the timetable, along with further information on lundyisland.co.uk or call the Shore Office on 01271 863636. To book a stay on Lundy, go to landmarktrust.org.uk.