

# Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link



## Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link

Annual Report  
June 1997 - May 1998  
and Summary of Accounts  
1 April 1997 - 31 March 1998





Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is the liaison body for Scotland's voluntary sector environmental organisations. Established over ten years ago (1987), Link provides a forum and network for its member organisations, enabling informed debate, assisting cooperation amongst the voluntary environmental sector and communication between it, government bodies and other interests.

The Link Newsletter, published every quarter for Link member bodies and the network of Link Supporters and Subscribers, carries reviews of Link activity as well as news of particular initiatives or concerns of member bodies.

Link is recognised by the Inland Revenue as a charity. Its Scottish Charity Number is SCN 000296.

Link's core work is supported by: grants from the World Wide Fund for Nature Scotland (WWFS), the Scottish Office (Rural Strategic Support Fund) and Scottish Natural Heritage; subscriptions from the member bodies, Supporters and Subscribers; and donations from the Esmee Fairbairn Charitable Trust and other charitable bodies. Charitable donations and grant-aid are also sought for project work.

Honorary Officers and Staff during 1997-98:

President	Professor Seaton Baxter
Chairman	Michael M Scott
Vice-Chair	Vacant
Treasurer	Jill Harden
Coordinator	Jen Anderson
Secretary	Alice Walsh
Administrative Officer	Nancy Waddell
LEARN Project Officer	Ruth Anderson
Volunteer & Temporary Support	Rosalind Pearson

More detailed information about events and initiatives referred to in this report are available from :

*Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link*  
*PO Box 64*  
*PERTH PH2 0TF*

*Tel 01738 630804*

*Fax 01738 643290*

*E-mail link@swcl.demon.co.uk*

## Chair's Foreword

May 1997 brought the most major shift in our working in the 11 years of Link, with the first change in government since the association was formed. Of course, Link is totally neutral on matters of party politics, and, as I predicted in this report last year, the new Labour administration has brought at least as many challenges as opportunities. However, for the first time, matters for which Link members have campaigned long and hard now seem to be firmly on the political agenda.

The policy shift that has taken the most protracted effort is the long-overdue recognition of the need for a top-tier designation for our most cherished areas of countryside. In retrospect, our document *Protecting Scotland's Finest Landscapes: a call for Action on National Parks for Scotland* is seen as being highly influential in this process. It cannot be a coincidence that the government announced that it was minded to go ahead with "a small number" of Scottish national parks just two days before the first of our two conferences, following on from that report, on September 17 1997. There were senior colleagues at that conference who had been involved in the campaign for national parks for all their professional lives, and they were "shell-shocked" at the news that the objective for which they had striven so long was at last within sight.

Of course there is still a great deal of work to be done to ensure that the models set up for our national parks are indeed tailored to meet Scotland's particular needs, and do bring sustainable benefits both to the natural environment and to rural communities within the parks. Our second national park conference on March 16 1998 - deliberately sited in the Highland capital - saw the beginnings of a significant shift in attitudes to the opportunities that national parks can deliver. Even Highland Council altered its stance from stated opposition to being "unconvinced", and we could not have hoped for more.

In this context, our four ambassadors from the continent of Europe did a wonderful job at

winning hearts and minds, as they shared their experiences back home with some of the key players in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and in the Cairngorms - the two areas so far earmarked as national parks. Their visit, and a structured series of meetings around the conference, did the national parks cause a tremendous service and brought Link considerable credit. All the team who made this success possible, but most especially Simon Pepper of WWF Scotland, deserve our grateful thanks.

The new government has also put land reform and sustainable rural development firmly to the centre of public debate. Whatever our personal views individually, it is not appropriate for environmental NGOs to have a firm view on *who* owns the land; the key question is *how* it is owned and managed. Any significant reform should ensure sound custodianship of the large tracts of land under private (and indeed public) ownership. This is also an issue that links all our member bodies, with implications for recreation and access, wildlife conservation, landscape, archaeology, and even environmental education.

But the most significant change of all over the last year came with the resounding vote on September 11 1997 in favour of Scottish devolution, and the simple but historic clause that opened the Scotland Bill that followed: "There shall be a Scottish parliament". Ahead of the referendum, the majority of Link members signed a public statement noting the potential benefits that such a parliament could bring to Scotland's environment, building on a recognition, that goes back to the *World Conservation Strategy* of 1980 and earlier, that the sound custodianship of the natural environment is best achieved by ensuring that decisions affecting that environment are taken as close to that environment as possible by the people who live in, and can best understand, its special needs.

More recently, we launched in April 1998 a document setting out what we believe must be the key items on the environmental agenda of the parliament, timed to influence the