

The LINK Newsletter

The quarterly update from Scottish Environment LINK
Spring 2010



Scottish Environment Week 2010



The sixth Scottish Environment Week in the Scottish Parliament was held in the last week of February.

Scotland's Environment, It's GREAT was the theme with various aspects of this explored during the Week's events.

Living Streets, Mountaineering Council of Scotland, and Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society held their event on Health and Wellbeing on Tuesday, sponsored by Nanette Milne, MSP. Sheila Beck of HealthScotland introduced the presentations which covered opportunities for healthy activity from the street to high mountain tops.

Robin Harper, MSP sponsored an event that evening which heard from Buglife, the Woodland Trust, the John Muir Trust, Grounds for Learning and Scottish Natural Heritage about inspiring initiatives which engage young people in caring and learning about their natural environment.

Scotland's Past was the theme for Wednesday's event sponsored by Sarah Boyack MSP, where Dr Noel Fojut from Historic Scotland introduced projects involving community archaeologists working with professionals to explore their heritage. As Dr Fojut remarked, active engagement builds support. It is the voice of an informed and interested public which carries real weight, not the submissions of government experts. He noted the advantages of working with volunteers: the pleasure of working with enthusiastic participants; their desire to communicate results to anyone who is interested, and a meticulous attention to detail and respect for the evidence.

Archaeology Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland, Scottish Countryside Rangers Association and Scottish Native Woods jointly organised this event with support from Historic Scotland.



Scotland Businesses was the focus for Thursday lunchtime's event sponsored by Alison McInnes MSP. David Sigsworth, chairman of SEPA which supported this event, introduced presentations from RSPB Scotland, WWF Scotland and the Scottish Wildlife Trust, citing

their work with Scottish companies on a whisky brand, sustainable palm oil, and the environment as cultural capital.

Thursday evening's event on Communities was hosted by Bill Wilson, MSP and was introduced by Roddy Fairlie of SNH. Plantlife, Marine Conservation Society and Friends of the Earth Scotland engage communities in different ways, from organising family activities to learn about wild plants, to caring for local environments and wildlife and building communities for change around various environmental issues.

The traditional mid-week reception in the Parliament was well attended with short speeches from event sponsor Elaine Murray MSP, Environment Minister Roseanna Cunningham MSP and LINK President Helen Zealley. The Minister noted the value of LINK as a civic network, acknowledging that consensus could not be expected on every issue and praising the way stakeholders worked together on the Marine Act to enable very good legislation in Scotland.

Helen Zealley, responding, thanked MSPs of all parties for working together to bring forward excellent environmental legislation on Marine, Climate and Flooding over the year.

LINK is very grateful to all sponsors, organisers, hosts and participants, and to SNH and Historic Scotland for funding.

Scotland's Marine Environment Protected



Following a decade of campaigning by LINK members, the Scottish Parliament passed legislation on 4 February that will improve the health of Scotland's seas - a cause for great celebration. In the weeks leading up to the vote, well over six thousand emails and letters

were sent to MSPs by members of the public calling for the Bill to be strengthened leaving them in no doubt that their constituents demanded a strong Marine Bill.

Crucially, the legislation now puts in place a general duty on Scottish Ministers to protect and, where appropriate, enhance the health of Scotland's seas. Taken together with duties to deliver marine planning, environmental targets in plans and a network of marine protected areas that also contributes to a UK network of sites, there is now real hope that Scotland's seas can be returned to a healthy state. As the sea knows

no boundaries, future management must also join up with the UK Marine Act and EU legislation.

LINK's [Marine task force](#) is looking forward to working with the Scottish Government and other stakeholders to help implement the Act, improving the health of our seas for the long-term benefit of marine wildlife, coastal communities, environmentally sustainable activities and all who enjoy the food, recreation and energy they provide.

Single Outcome Agreements and the environment

In February LINK published the report [Working for Sustainable Development through Single Outcome Agreements](#) commissioned from Helen Todd. It was circulated to all local authorities and stakeholder organisations.

It identifies 10 key areas for attention which will benefit the environment and improve Scotland's health, communities and the economy. These are Biodiversity, Climate Change, Ecological footprint, Education/Volunteering, Historic and Built Environment, Landscape, Physical activity/Health, Recreational access, Transport, Water and Flooding.

LINK members will monitor how these issues are addressed within Local Plans and SOAs and will overview emerging trends in the

lead-up to the national and local elections in 2011 and 2012. In doing so, LINK members are keen to work with 'volunteer' Councils across the urban-rural spectrum and to engage with other stakeholders at the local and national level.

The environment has received a disappointingly low profile in the official advice given to local authorities though we know this gap is recognised, at least in part, and we are keen to work with the Improvement Service to address it. LINK's report represents a good contribution towards further analysis and has been welcomed by a number of councils who have responded positively.

In the guidance from the [Improvement Service](#) to local authorities there is welcome attention to public and active

transport, recycling and carbon emissions per capita, and many local authorities are making a real effort; 13 are using the carbon or ecological footprint as a measure of progress and 8 have included a biodiversity indicator.

This is not in itself sufficient if we are to flourish. That needs action across the length and breadth of Scotland in all 10 areas identified in the report. A success would be to see all local authorities and community planning partners improving habitats for local wildlife, increasing opportunities for recreation and community gardening, tackling climate emissions across their areas and helping schools to become truly sustainable. We believe these priorities create better places to live, work and play - all working towards a more sustainable Scotland.

More Network News

Sustainable Land Use Strategy

A task force (TF) of 10 member bodies is taking forward LINK's contribution to Scotland's first Sustainable Land Use Strategy. It is convened by Vicki Swales (RSPB), Tony King (SWT) is vice-convenor. Following a meeting with civil servants in January LINK was encouraged to identify a small number of priority issues on which we would wish to see the Government focus. LINK submitted a short paper outlining [5 key steps](#) we consider fundamental to the success of the Strategy. These are:

- Defining the status of the SLUS
- Defining its scope
- Establishing the formal process for producing this and subsequent versions of the SLUS
- Achieving better policy integration
- Underpinning the SLUS with the ecosystem approach.

LINK's vision for the SLUS is that it should be the parent of all other strategies that have implications for or guide land use in Scotland. Members have been attending Scottish Government's regional land use workshops across Scotland and will be represented at a forthcoming meeting convened by Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead to discuss agriculture and forestry.

Agriculture In February Scottish LINK and Wildlife & Countryside Link met George Lyon, EU Commissioner for Agriculture to discuss current concerns around CAP reform and the aims of Mr Lyon's report to the European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development. The Links followed this up with a joint letter in March, after publication of the working document, to reiterate their concerns. The Links recognise that building support throughout the EU for an environmentally focused evolution of the CAP into a European Sustainable Land

Management Policy is a challenge, but are concerned that the proposals will not move the CAP into the public goods delivery mechanism that it needs to become in the next decade.

LINK's response to the Brian Pack Inquiry's Interim Report into Future Support for Scottish Agriculture welcomed the excellent analysis within it and the interesting questions raised. Food security, energy supply, water supply, biodiversity loss and climate change are named as the five major global challenges the world needs to face. The TF supports the aims of the Report and the rationale for future payments but remains very concerned that the proposed funding mechanisms do not address the environmental challenges the Report itself highlights as being of vital importance, and that they may encourage further environmentally damaging activities.

Wildlife & Natural Environment Bill

LINK's WNE group, a combination of Deer and Biodiversity TFs, met the Environment Minister on 6 January to discuss the forthcoming legislation proposal with a focus on deer management planning and non-native invasive species. The meeting was followed up with a letter outlining further proposals from LINK recommending a fully statutory deer management programme to integrate deer management protection with other rural management objectives, and removal of closed seasons for male deer. LINK welcomes the proposals to introduce a general presumption against the release of any organism into the wild (with specified exceptions). On wider biodiversity, LINK notes experience of engagement in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy that the process needs more detailed statutory underpinning in order to generate more robust delivery. In her response to LINK on the latter point, the Minister confirmed that officials will be discussing this

further and registered concern that we do not put in place provisions that cause further effort to be devoted to the production of documents, rather than to the protection of biodiversity.

Marine Renewables As Scotland forges ahead with marine renewables and recognising the importance of the industry, LINK organised a workshop for member bodies to develop a commonly agreed set of recommendations which will be ready shortly.

Scottish Environment Fund raisers' Forum

SEFF's March meeting was attended by a representative of the Big Lottery Fund. Responses from the sector to the consultation in 2009 have been successful in raising awareness of the needs and the expertise of the environmental NGOs, and positive discussions continue.

Mike Robinson and Pam Judson delivered a lively informative fundraising training day in January, much appreciated by the 13 member bodies taking part.

Parliamentary LINK and its member bodies have been attending the Spring party conferences. Anticipating the general election member bodies and LINK are organising [public hustings](#) on environmental and climate issues across the Central Belt, Dumfries and Galloway. More events will be added to the website as they are confirmed so please keep an eye if any are happening near you and come and join in the debates.

Liaison meetings February's quarterly meeting with the Environment Minister discussed the Scottish Landscape Charter, which SNH, as the lead agency, will publish without a ministerial foreword or formal endorsement. LINK confirmed support for the initiative and noted that Scottish Landscape Forum members were keen to regain the position Scotland had achieved in

implementing the spirit of the EU Landscape Convention. Other issues covered at the meeting included wild land, air quality and acidification of water courses.

LINK and SNH held their annual high level meeting on 18 March where funding for biodiversity work, marine renewables, the Sustainable Land Use Strategy, and Peatlands were discussed. LINK was very pleased that its grant from SNH was confirmed at the level requested for 2010-11.

LINK's Board and Network meetings in January had a good turn out from trustees, members and task forces, with useful

discussions following on from November's strategic planning day.

Remembering Fred Edwards

Representatives of LINK, Capability Scotland, faith groups and other sectors will launch a new Trust later this autumn, to commemorate the life of Fred Edwards, who died in 2008, and to promote values which Fred firmly espoused – social justice, ecological integrity, economic literacy and a global world view. The Trust will support development of self-belief, active citizenship, to encourage people to help shape the future and breathe fresh life into the resolution of old, intractable problems in Scotland. The steering group behind the

initiative would be delighted to hear from organisations and individuals who feel there is something they could do to help. Please contact the Perth office (see contact details below).



LINK Further Information

For information about reports and initiatives referred to in this newsletter please visit the [LINK home page](#) Task Force outputs are listed under 'Work Areas'.

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News and Views from Members

The following are articles from LINK member bodies and guest contributors

SCNP

Scottish National Parks, Conservation or Cosmetics?

Bill McDermott, Vice Chairman, Scottish Campaign for National Parks

Some years ago, I was a senior manager in the Peak District National Park Authority. I recognised that I was part of a uniquely privileged think tank of people striving to exercise a vision for the Peak Park, participating in debates on the contribution of national parks to the wellbeing of countries. We argued our case from an exalted position as a comparatively well resourced, independent authority at the forefront of government initiatives such as Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Countryside Stewardship, and we developed initiatives to break down sectoral barriers through partnership working with national agencies and local government.

All of this is grist to the mill now for much of the public sector, but in those days it was fairly revolutionary. At the time two seminal works by Malcolm and Ann MacEwan; *'National Parks – Conservation or Cosmetics?'* argued that all National Parks in England and Wales should be independent authorities with full planning powers like the Peak Park; and *'Greenprints in the Countryside'* covered much of what the Peak Park had been doing to present Parks as test beds for rural land management in the context of the need for major changes to the Common Agricultural Policy. These aspirations were eventually realised with the creation of a national parks inquiry and the enactment of the Environment Act in Westminster in 1995, but not without a great deal of leadership from the parks themselves, together with the Countryside Commission and the Campaign For National Parks.

All of this is by way of introduction to a sense of *déjà vu* when I look at Scottish national parks now. Much has been made of the difference between Scotland and the rest of the UK. This centres on the fourth aim of 'promoting sustainable development' and the need to hold all four aims in balance, but another difference is the legal status of the National Park Plan, which elsewhere in the UK is an advisory, partnership document.

When primary legislation for Scottish National Parks was enacted in 2000 we were concerned that their conservation purpose would be lost amidst the arguments over what constitutes sustainable development, despite the caveat that where there is conflict between the conservation aim and the other aims, the conservation aim should have priority. As for me, I had been part of a pro-active park authority which recognised the absolute need for thriving communities within national parks and sought to secure that, even though there was no duty as such, so I was slightly wistful as to the need for this additional duty. However, we also recognised the political need in Scotland to sell the concept to often reluctant communities.

We can congratulate the Scottish parks on producing National Park Plans which espouse visions in which the natural and cultural heritage are to be strengthened and where, on the whole, communities want to be inside rather than out. However, in a wish to be all things to all men, when it comes to local planning, there is now an evident reluctance to think

through the consequences of planning decisions.

Take for example the proposed housing provision for the Cairngorms National Park as articulated in the Local Plan (Deposit Edition). Despite a legal requirement to follow the guidance of the National Park Plan as signed off by Ministers two years earlier, the Local Plan almost *in vacuo* allocates land for 1,850 houses despite an identifiable need over the period of the Plan for less than half that number. To add to the problem, the Park Authority has rejected any notion of placing residency qualifications on new housing to avoid the difficulty of over 60% of open market housing being sold to second home owners, as continues to happen in Badenoch and Strathspey. To add to this unimaginative approach, the Authority continues to depend on planning gain to secure affordable homes for those in need. In other words, for every 100 houses provided, only 25 – 40 % will be affordable, the rest will be open market, with 60% of these second homes. The Plan envisaged no increase in population over the next 30 years, so what is sustainable about all this proposed housing development? It appears to amount to trashing the National Park to keep a few large scale developers happy.

The [findings](#) of the Reporters to the Cairngorms National Park Local Plan Inquiry, (December 2009) gave a devastating critique of the lack of logic applied to the housing issue. To address housing needs, the Authority dealt in overall figures. For a young couple requiring affordable housing in Kingussie, they may have to have

their needs met in Aviemore or Cromdale for all that the Authority knows, since there is no evidence of housing land allocations in individual settlements being equated to housing needs for those settlements.

Perhaps the biggest lemon was the allocation of land for 1,500 houses just over the Spey from Aviemore - the much vaunted An Camas Mor. The arguments presented by the Park Authority for its inclusion in the Local Plan are that it will be a sustainable community, separate from Aviemore, with its own sources of employment. It will constitute sustainable development because it meets the criteria set by the Government's own Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative. It will be a real community and not a second home enclave. It will contribute to the biodiversity of the national park and it will contribute to the cultural heritage of the area.

But wait a minute. This huge development would be wholly within a National Scenic Area, occupying a vital buffer zone between Aviemore and Rothiemurchus. It would adjoin the very sensitive River Spey Special Area of Conservation. The developer argues, contrary to the planning authority, that it would complement Aviemore on the other side of the Spey and have social and physical links to it. The outline application is vague on use of alternative energies. The sewerage would, in utilitarian fashion, simply plumb into the existing infrastructure, thereby increasing the point-source nutrient load on the Spey. Most crucial of all, there is no justifiable need for this development according to the Reporters. And to crown that, there is a complete absence of any strategy for ensuring that the houses will not be sold to second

home owners, further exacerbating a major problem in the area.

How is it that a national park authority finds itself in this position? I confess I don't know the answer. What I will say is that Scottish national parks, in trying to be all things to all men, are in serious danger of losing their way. A final decision will be made soon so there is still time to recover the situation. Meanwhile, I agree with the Reporters when they state that the only basis for development in a national park is when that development is predicated on sound environmental principles. Building 1,500 houses in a National Scenic Area, next to a very sensitive Special Area of Conservation in a national park without an identified need is *ipso facto* environmental vandalism. Perhaps, like Malcom MacEwan, I feel a book coming on!



Investing in Peatlands

Clifton Bain, Director, IUCN UK Peatland Programme



Peatlands are entering the spotlight with global climate change talks recognising their importance as a carbon store. At Copenhagen new draft rules were agreed which would mean that restoring peatland habitat could be included in national greenhouse gas inventories. Scotland, which has over 80% of the UK's peatlands, could make a significant contribution to its climate change targets through restoring damaged

peatland. But its not all about carbon. With new water and flooding legislation in place, EU agriculture and budget reform just a few years away and reinvigoration of the international biodiversity commitments, now is the time to be making the case for peatlands as a key part of the toolkit in all these areas.

The IUCN UK Peatland Programme has launched a year long Commission of Inquiry on Peatlands to help understand the wide range of benefits that peatland restoration can bring for biodiversity, water and climate change. This Inquiry is aimed at encouraging action and building partnerships between academics, policy and practitioners, in order to make real progress in peatland restoration

Investing in peatlands means that we recognise the long term benefits of delivering healthy functioning peatland ecosystems with their full natural complement of species and habitats. More importantly it also means that we understand that allowing peatlands to continue to deteriorate will be more costly in the long term as we have to deal with the consequences of carbon emissions, loss of water quality and biodiversity. The longer we delay in our restoration the more difficult it becomes.

The IUCN UK Peatland Programme strategy is to promote early action on peatland restoration with active involvement across Government, its agencies and in partnership with NGOs and landowning interests. To find out more about the work of the Programme [see the website](#).



The RZSS Centenary

Rob Thomas, Conservation & Research Manager

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland is coming to the end of celebrating its Centenary Year. There have been a number of milestone events over the past 12 months that recognise the history and the current work and ambition of the Society. A major initiative triggered by and in celebration of the centenary is the RZSS Wild Bus. This refurbished double-decker bus has enhanced substantially our outreach programme in Scotland, so far reaching 3322 students in 61 schools. In 2010 it has an even more ambitious schedule and will be setting sail for Shetland and completing its target of reaching 100 schools. This mobile Zoo classroom has attracted much attention and funding given its unique profile from both Scottish Government and corporate sponsors. In February our Royal Patron the Princess Royal presented our Centenary Medal to Sir David Attenborough for services to conservation and the communication of the natural sciences. We recognised these services as being very closely aligned with our own charitable objectives of Conservation and Education and Research.

RZSS now provides the Secretariat function for the [IUCN UK Committee](#) of which LINK is a member. A major initiative in 2009 was the launch of the [IUCN UK Peatland Programme](#). (see Clifton Bain's article above) We work closely with the Executive Committee and its Chair in helping to deliver the IUCN thematic programmes of 1) Changing the climate forecast; 2) Naturally energizing the future; 3) Managing ecosystems for human wellbeing

and 4) Greening the world economy.



The international programmes for RZSS have been consolidated into two regional hubs in sub-Saharan Africa and South America, centred in Uganda and Brazil respectively. A shift to regional coordination promotes greater efficiency, reduced international travel and a more effective connection to the regional conservation contexts and infrastructures. We are also in the process of establishing a similar hub to service our conservation interests and links in Asia. Our UK programmes cover both native species and UK Overseas Territories. The latter has focused to a greater extent on the South Atlantic region covering both the Falkland Islands and Tristan da Cunha working in partnership with Falklands Conservation and the Falklands Island Government together with RSPB and the Tristan

Island Council. The Scottish connection is not lost here given the (only) settlement on Tristan being named Edinburgh of the Seven Seas, and many of the islanders being descended from William Glass of Selkirk.

The RZSS flagship for UK native species is the Scottish Beaver Trial in partnership with SWT and 'hosted' by Forestry Commission Scotland. The record low temperatures experienced this winter in Knapdale were taken in their stride by the families of Norwegian beavers. The release of a fourth pair is scheduled for late Spring this year. A visit to the trial area is highly recommended to marvel first hand at the engineering skills of these diligent mammals. We continue to develop the Cairngorms wildcat project with our partners and have recently assumed control of the awareness and fundraising website for the [Highland Tiger](#). We are looking to further our work with water voles particularly in the Trossachs and are working closely with the Highland Aspen Group on an aspen nursery at Kincaig. We also opened our new DNA laboratory on site in Edinburgh in 2009 providing a key facility for wildlife forensics and conservation genetics.

Despite the economic climate both living collections at Edinburgh Zoo and the Highland Wildlife Park recorded excellent visitor numbers with attendances at HWP doubling on 2008 numbers. Both parks provide unique access to an audience of over 750,000 people with key conservation messages from RZSS and our partner organisations.



Fed up with unsightly hill tracks?

*Hebe Carus, Access & Conservation officer,
Mountaineering Council of Scotland*

Want to do something about it, but don't know where to start? The answer: sign the hill tracks petition NOW. After one week 400 people had signed the petition. As there are an estimated 200,000 Scottish adults heading for the hills every month, it is a reasonable start, but we could do so much better.

This petition is a vital tool in helping put pressure on the Scottish Government to listen to concerns over the unregulated damage to our wild lands. If it is to have the maximum impact as many people as possible need to sign up over the next few weeks and show that thousands of Scots take this issue seriously.

Petition sponsors, MSPs Sarah Boyack and Peter Peacock are asking everyone who has signed the petition to date to invite five outdoor friends to sign the petition. This would take the signatories to almost 2500. Please encourage as many people as possible to go to [Hill Tracks Campaign](#) and sign up now!



Join the POD Plod and raise vital funds

Mandie Gray, WDCS Events Team

The Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society is organising the POD Plod, a 26 mile sponsored trek over two days along the breathtaking Moray Coastal Trail from Findhorn Bay to Spey Bay, to raise funds for the protection of the Moray Firth dolphins. It takes place from 27 to 30 August 2010.

The UK government has plans to open up the Moray Firth to oil and gas exploration, and WDCS is tackling the issue head on. When the government announced its plans to open up large areas of the Moray Firth to oil and gas exploration and development in

2008, WDCS launched its Protect our Dolphin campaign to try to make sure that these plans did not happen. The dolphins are also under threat from new plans to allow Whiteness Marina to build a new marina for 500 boats within the Special Area of Conservation, despite a government-funded report that concluded only 220 boats should be allowed to ensure the safety of the dolphins.

We need your help. Joining the POD Plod gives you the chance to really help our campaign. Led by WDCS staff, you will enjoy breathtaking scenery, look out for

dolphins along the way, and much more whilst raising vital funds. For further information please go to the [website](#) or contact the Events Team, tel: 01249 449500, email: events@wdcs.org

