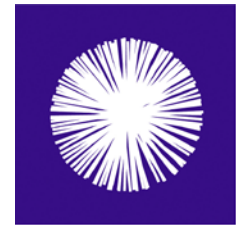


# Scottish Environment LINKS's Species Champions Initiative: A review 2013-2016



The voice of  
Scotland's  
environment  
community



## What is the species champions initiative?

The Species Champions initiative invites MSPs of all parties to choose from a list of species facing specific threats, and to champion their survival. Since its first launch in 2013, 76 MSPs, over 60% of the Scottish Parliament, have championed species from iconic animals and plants to lesser-known lichens and invertebrates.

## Why did LINK launch it?

To enable us to bring species pzazz into parliament. Species provide us with a way to interact directly with parliamentarians and it provides a way for their constituents to engage directly too.

## Why is the focus on species important?

The State of Nature report, supported by LINK, shows that species continue to decline. Ecosystems are made of species, and without species ecosystems can't function and can't provide the ecosystem services we rely on. Declining species, in numbers and diversity, means fragmented and less resilient ecosystems. Species champions provides us with a way to get our messages across to policy makers about how important species are to the everyday running of Scotland. It also helps them meet and engage with their constituents in projects that care directly for native species.

State of Nature Report: [https://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/stateofnature\\_tcm9-345839.pdf](https://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/stateofnature_tcm9-345839.pdf)

Response for Nature: [https://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/responsefornature\\_scotland\\_tcm9-407743.pdf](https://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/responsefornature_scotland_tcm9-407743.pdf)

## Why is it important going forward to the next Parliament?

We are not making sufficient progress towards our target in Scotland and across the EU to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2020. By building a strong relationship between parliamentarians and species in their constituencies we can engender more support for action that will halt the loss of Scotland's native species.

## A great success.

There has been great interest by MSPs of all parties, with several championing more than one species. Congratulations on all your hard work. We want to see this translated into ambitious policy and effective action for nature protection particularly in the context of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.

## Contact

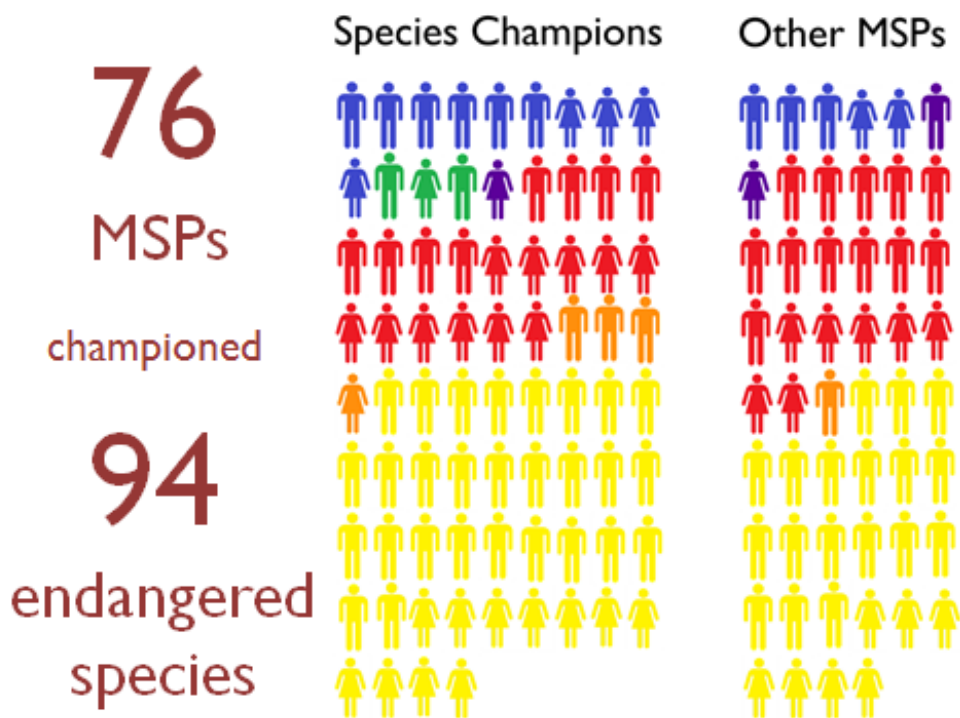
[www.scotlink.org/work-areas/species-champions](http://www.scotlink.org/work-areas/species-champions)

Wildlife Forum Convenors:

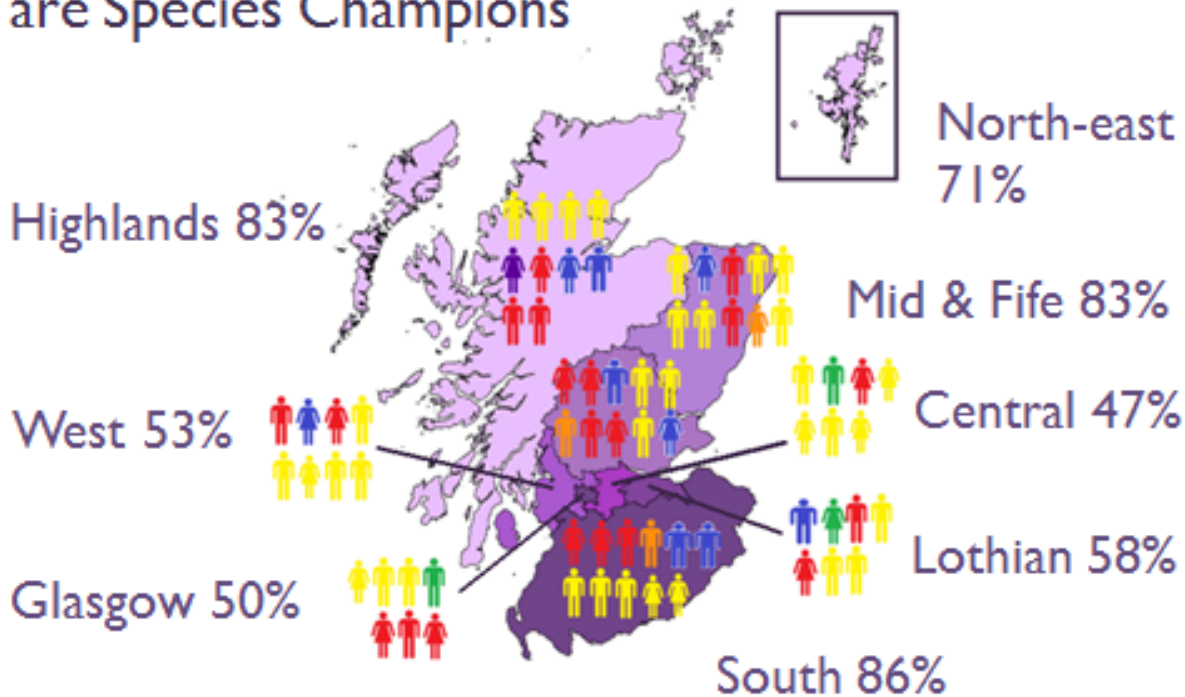
Deborah Long: [Deborah.long@plantlife.org.uk](mailto:Deborah.long@plantlife.org.uk)

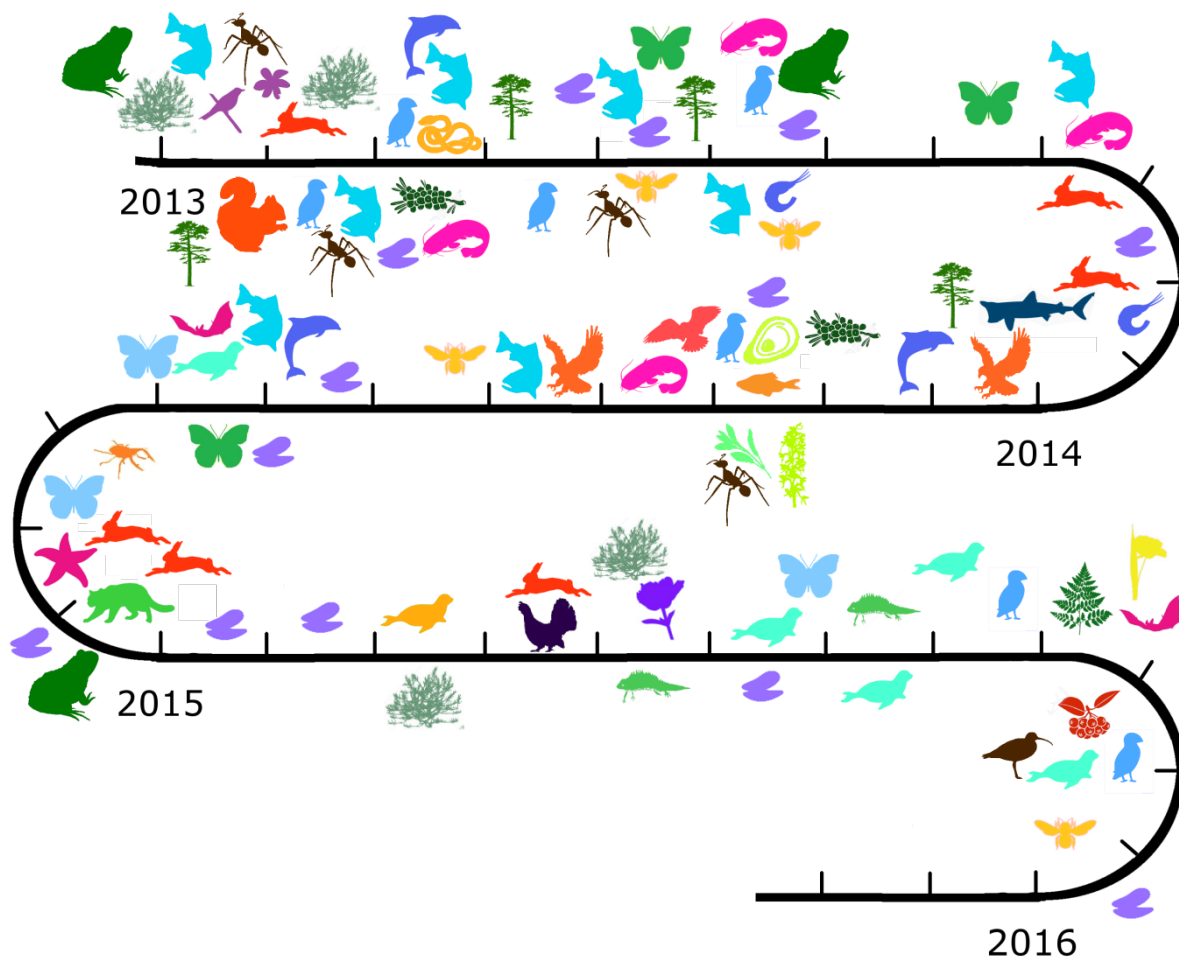
Craig Macadam: [craig.macadam@buglife.org.uk](mailto:craig.macadam@buglife.org.uk)

# Vital statistics



Excluding ministers, 81% in rural regions  
and 52% in urban regions  
are Species Champions





**53** Mentions in Parliament

**36** Parliamentary Motions

**51** Parliamentary Questions

**6** Parliamentary Debates:



## Developing relationships between experts and politicians



Mary Scanlon (above) said she was inspired by the infectious passion of the experts whom she'd never have met otherwise. Bill Kidd (Common pipistrelle) and Elaine Murray (Natterjack toad) both commented on how good support was from Bat Conservation Trust and Amphibians & Reptiles Conservation.

## MSPs became 'lay experts'



The picture (above) shows Jayne Baxter learning about bats. Mary Scanlon and George Adam said they had never heard of Freshwater pearl mussel and Flame shell. Sarah Boyack said she knew what swifts were but realised she knew little about them and this was an opportunity to find out more. Graeme Dey said he was fascinated by a trip to see Woolly willow. SWT took Alison Johnstone to look for hares and saw three.

## Collateral awareness, eg amongst staff



The fact that the Holyrood Bat Walk (above) attracted more staff than MSPs did not prevent it being a success. George Adam's assistant was something of an expert on the Flame shell, having researched it for him.



## MSPs championed ecologists as well as species



Anne Youngman said it was the first time bat ecologists had felt noticed for something other than causing expensive delays to planning applications. David Knott of RBGE heard we were reviewing Species Champions and volunteered how good it was having MSPs come to visit. Annabelle Goldie unveiled a plaque (above) about Arran Whitebeam which she had begun the day knowing nothing about. Craig Macadam said that invertebrates had never been mentioned in Holyrood before

LINK organisations with a wide policy agenda were able to use the species as a hook for issues like bog restoration or Marine Protected Areas. Scottish Wildlife Trust didn't just want to talk to the environment minister about red squirrels but a cuddly one created opportunities.

## MSPs became advocates for species



## Species were a route in to wider policy discussions



Bill Kidd said he has taught children about Common pipistrelle in 6 or 7 schools. Graeme Dey talked to a similar number about Woolly willow, and featured it in his newsletter (above) to all his constituents. Mary Scanlon spoke to whisky distillers, farmers, salmon fishers and SEPA about conservation issues around the Freshwater pearl mussel. Joan McAlpine promoted Scots Pine as national tree and hopes to initiate an arts project about it

## Species Champions consulted for the Review



Bill Kidd  
Red kite,  
Common pipistrelle  
Glasgow, SNP



Claudia Beamish  
Sea trout,  
Forester moth  
South, Labour



Mike Russell  
Corncrake,  
Tree lungwort  
Highland, SNP



Elaine Murray  
Tadpole shrimp,  
Natterjack toad  
South, Labour



Mary Scanlon  
Freshwater pearl  
Mussel. Highland,  
Conservative



Graeme Dey  
Woolly willow  
North-east, SNP



George Adam  
Flame shell  
West, SNP



Jamie Hepburn  
Pine Marten  
Central, SNP



John Wilson  
Great crested newt  
Central, Green



Fiona McLeod  
Pond mud snail  
West, SNP



Sarah Boyack  
Swift  
Lothians, Labour

## Recommendations

1. LINK will revisit species criteria and ensure more species are available for MSPs across Scotland and in every constituency, and will include species with opportunities for action eg habitat restoration, as well as a threat, such as habitat loss.
2. LINK representatives' biggest frustration was lack of time, and MSPs' was lack of contact. LINK needs to increase capacity to enable members to prioritise Species Champions action and support
3. The importance of a designated staff-member was emphasised by both MSPs and LINK for keeping Species Champions on the agenda, perhaps facilitating some kind of 'annual review' with Champions.

## Next steps

1. LINK's Wildlife proclamation runs from end of March – 5 May, encouraging all candidate MSPs to pledge their support for action on nature in the next Parliament: [www.wildlifeproclamation.org.uk](http://www.wildlifeproclamation.org.uk)
2. September 2016: launch of new Species Champions initiative, having learnt lessons from this review and aiming to engage 80% of all MSPs as active Species
3. Funding is being sought for a designated staff member to ensure continuity and provide support for MSPs and LINK members.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our thanks to all our Species Champions over the last 3 years for all the work they have done for their species. Thanks are also due to the LINK member organisations and staff who have supported and run this initiative. LINK and Buglife have supported the 6 month internship, which Eleanor Harris has ably carried out.