

Plea for ‘species champions’ in Scottish Parliament

Environmental groups are calling upon MSPs to lend their political support for protection of the country’s threatened wildlife by becoming ‘Species Champions’.

The initiative coordinated by Scottish Environment LINK’s wildlife forum invites all MSPs to choose from a list of 93 species that are currently facing significant threats to their future – and then champion their survival. In the run up to an awareness-raising event hosted at the Scottish Parliament on Thursday, 18 MSPs signed up to become Species Champions.

Species on the list include iconic animals such as the critically endangered wild cat, declining plant populations that play a vital role in climate change such as baltic bog moss and marine species such as eelgrass which provides vital habitat for sea life. Each of the listed species is currently affected by a range of human impacts such as development-driven habitat loss, climate change and pollution.

Each ‘species champion’ MSP will be able to learn first-hand from organisations with strong environmental expertise throughout Scotland. The initiative will see MSPs working with members of Scottish Environment LINK to identify ways to provide a brighter future for these species and the places where they live, spread this knowledge throughout Scotland’s political community and shape policy to promote and secure biodiversity.

The organisers hope to push Scotland’s nature up the political agenda during the Year of Natural Scotland and ensure that Scotland’s environment is respected and protected for the benefits it brings to society: from tourist-attracting landscapes and clean water to crop pollination and food production. The Species Champion initiative will be launched formally in Spring.

Deborah Long, Programme Manager at Plantlife Scotland and chair of Scottish Environment LINK said: “Each species symbolises the importance of diversity in maximising ecological resilience to environmental change and sadly they are also under threat. This is an opportunity for our generation of Scotland’s politicians to develop their collective expertise to address the challenges facing the fauna and flora of our country. All of the species listed need representative champions. We hope that every Member of the Scottish Parliament will sign up in the coming months.”

Craig MacAdam, Director of Buglife Scotland said: “Scotland’s wildlife is undervalued. It is part of our country’s environmental, economic and cultural fabric, underpinning many sectors of our economy and delivering wide-ranging benefits. By championing individual species, our politicians can help to promote biodiversity and contribute to informed debate within the Scottish Parliament.”

ENDS

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Scottish Environment LINK

(Pictures are available on request)

Notes for editors:

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 30 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society. http://www.scotlink.org/public/about/link_is.php

Scotland failed to meet its biodiversity target in 2010. The Scottish Government is now aiming to halt biodiversity loss by 2020, as per the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. <http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

MSPs who have signed up to become a Species Champion are listed below.

Rhoda Grant MSP for Highlands and Islands (Scottish Labour): **Golden Eagle**

Rob Gibson MSP for Caithness, Sutherland and Ross (Scottish National Party): **Rusty Bog Moss**

Dave Thompson MSP for Skye Lochaber and Badenoch (Scottish National Party): **Sandeel**

Liam McArthur MSP for Orkney Islands (Scottish Liberal Democrats): **Scottish Primrose**

Dennis Robertson MSP for Aberdeen West (SNP) **Capercaillie; Corn Bunting**

Aileen McLeod MSP for South Scotland (Scottish National Party): **Red Squirrel**

Graeme Dey MSP for Angus South (Scottish National Party): **Woolly Willow**

Dave Stewart MSP for Highlands and Islands (Scottish Labour): **Great Yellow Bumblebee**

Angus MacDonald MSP for Falkirk East (Scottish National Party) **Bog Sun Jumper Spider; Eelgrass**

Alison Johnstone MSP for Lothian (Scottish Green Party): **Brown Hare**

John Wilson MSP for Central Scotland (Scottish National Party): **Great Crested Newt**

Drew Smith MSP for Glasgow (Scottish Labour): **Common Toad**

Elaine Murray MSP for Dumfriesshire (Scottish Labour): **Tadpole Shrimp; Natterjack Toad**

Claudia Beamish MSP for South Scotland (Scottish Labour): **Sea Trout**

Claire Baker MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife (Scottish Labour): **Puffin; Lesser Butterfly Orchid**

Fiona McLeod MSP for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Scottish National Party): **Pond Mud Snail**

Mary Scanlon MSP for Highlands and Islands (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party): **Freshwater Pearl Mussel**

Jamie McGrigor MSP for Highlands and Islands (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party): **Narrow-Headed Ant**

An updated list can be found here: <http://www.scotlink.org/public/work/species-champions.php>

The Species Champion initiative will be launched formally in Spring to promote the Year of Natural Scotland.

http://www.visitscotland.org/business_support/advicelink/year_of_natural_scotland.aspx