

The LINK Newsletter

Scottish Environment LINK update
Autumn 2012



LINK Congress

Congress on 22 November in Birnam, Perthshire, will focus on the contribution the business and environment NGO sectors are making towards a sustainable Scotland, particularly in relation to our ambitious climate targets. Working with the 2020 Delivery Group, chaired by Ian Marchant (Scottish and Southern Energy), the event will contribute to better understanding of others' perspectives and help to clarify where we can work better together. There will be workshops on Energy, Transport, Food and Drink and Drivers for Change: exploring the contexts in which we operate. Each workshop will be jointly led by a LINK and business sector representative. The [programme](#) is on the website, (see under Events) if you would like to take part.

There will be a social gathering after the conference including a ceilidh with the Blackford Fiddlers providing the music to celebrate LINK's 25th anniversary. LINK is grateful to Perth & Kinross Council for a grant towards the costs of this event.

[Referendum Challenge](#)

LINK launched its referendum strategy in late June, challenging the campaigns engaged in Scotland's referendum debate to demonstrate why their approach will be best for environmental imperatives such as sustainable use of resources, addressing climate change appropriately, valuing landscape and cultural heritage, measuring success intelligently, and protecting and enhancing ecosystems. The campaigns are invited to reply and their responses will be published by LINK.

Inspire Environment

LINK's Inspire Environment event at the Parliament on 28 June brought together over 120 artists, eNGOs, creative networks and MSPs. The event was in part a follow up to the LINK [Wildlife Proclamation](#) targeted at candidate MSPs in 2011, with the aim of increasing awareness and understanding of Scotland's natural heritage to gain their commitment to its better protection. Thirty-three MSPs have so far made the pledge. LINK's Wildlife Forum plans to build on their support to champion particular species.

At the event Glasgow artist Siobhan Healy (pic, centre) whose delicate *Ghost Orchids* subsequently won the public prize in the prestigious International Glass Prize 2012 awards, donated her sculpture to LINK's Chair, Deborah Long, who seamlessly donated it to the Scottish Parliament, where it will be on permanent display. LINK is very grateful to Siobhan for her generosity, to David Stewart MSP for hosting, to Julia Harrison (RSPB) who organised the evening, and to Rory Crawford (RSPB) and his band who provided the music. See [Briefing](#) and [Presentation](#).



Climate Adaptation

LINK's [Climate Adaptation taskforce](#) organised a workshop on 4 September to inform members of climate adaptation issues and to develop LINK's position ahead of the Scottish Government's Adaptation Programme consultation due in October. Simon Pepper was contracted to organise and chair the event and to draw together conclusions which will be available shortly on the LINK website. The morning session drew in experts from SEPA, SNH, Forestry Commission, Adaptation Scotland and Climate research institutes, bringing delegates up to speed with climate projections, the ecological response, and Government's process. Smaller groups then considered sectoral action plans for marine, forestry, agriculture, biodiversity and freshwater in more detail, reconvening to discuss cross cutting generic issues, including concerns that LINK had raised in its earlier response and briefings on Scotland's Climate Change Adaptation Programme.

After lunch members discussed LINK's input to the consultation and our advocacy strategy in relation to some fairly fundamental changes in traditional approaches required to meet the challenges ahead.

LINK is very grateful to the experts who gave their time to contribute to the workshop and to the Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation for providing the venue.

LINK Marine project

After a fairly comprehensive consultation process, including a series of stakeholder workshops to explore the issues and in which LINK's Marine taskforce (TF) was fully engaged, the Scottish Government has to decide where Scotland's Marine Protected Areas will be located. The TF is working hard to ensure that, in accordance with the ambition of the Marine (Scotland) Act, MPAs will form an ecologically coherent network that will allow marine life, including

seabirds and cetaceans, to be protected and recover. The areas initially proposed are seriously inadequate for seabirds, dolphins and whales, which, valuable in their own right are also of increasing value to Scotland's economy. The TF coordinated a [joint letter from tourism operators](#) and businesses to the Minister for Tourism, Fergus Ewing, spelling out their concern that inadequate protection would jeopardise the jobs, income and opportunities Scotland receives due to its spectacular wildlife. Government figures show that £63m of the £100m contributed by tourists visiting Scotland's coast are generated by those enjoying its wildlife. The TF's [Save Scottish Seas website](#) was launched at the end of August to publicise the issues and to encourage people to communicate why they love Scotland's seas by contributing their videos and spreading the word on social media. The third in a series of [briefings on MPAs](#) was prepared in advance of the stakeholder workshop in late June.

The TF has worked with sister Links across the UK to [respond](#) to the *Marine Strategy Directive Consultation: UK Initial Assessment and Proposals for Good Environmental Status*. While welcoming some parts of the document the Links are disappointed with the level of ambition for recovering Good Environmental Status. The Links consider Government has set a very low bar. The Directive, originating from an agreed real necessity to counter human induced impacts on the marine environment, provides an opportunity to really extend environmental protection to the whole sea area (beyond the few protected areas and species) and to apply measures to all human activities having an impact on the marine environment, an opportunity that today's Government should not miss.

Lindsay Roberts, Marine Policy & Advocacy Officer moved on in July, with our thanks for her valuable work on behalf of the TF. Nick Underdown was recruited in July joining MPAO Sarah Archer from August. Nick is a lawyer graduate, with good knowledge of the marine environment and extensive

News and Views from Members

The next four pages contain articles from LINK member bodies and guest contributors

Scottish Ornithologists Club

Alan Fox, Treasurer



The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (www.the-soc.org.uk) was established in 1936. Now, more than 75 years on, the club has over 2700 members. Our members range from novice birders to professional research ornithologists. The main object of the club is to advance the education of the public in the study of birds in Scotland.

SOC and its members are active throughout Scotland, learning more about Scotland's birds and contributing to key surveys. An important example of this is the fieldwork for the upcoming Bird Atlas 2007-11, which will inform conservation policy. The SOC organises the recording network throughout Scotland, helping to produce local bird reports. The Scottish Bird Report [online](#) project has recently made much of these data available in an easily searchable format accessible via the SOC website. SOC is also a partner in the [BirdTrack project](#), a facility for observers to store and manage their observations online while making those observations available to support species conservation at local, regional, national and international scales.

In 2007 the SOC published the award-winning, two-volume avifauna, [The Birds of Scotland](#). This has recently been launched in a digital version. Monies accrued from this successful project allowed the founding of [The Birds of Scotland Fund](#) which awards grants to assist related publications and special projects supporting bird recording and understanding in Scotland.

At heart, the SOC is a club, providing a focus for anyone with an interest in the study of birds in Scotland. We have 14 branches throughout



the country, from Shetland to Dumfries & Galloway. Local branch meetings, held during the autumn, winter and spring months, present a programme of guest speakers and provide an opportunity to share observations and information. Many branches also run a programme of outings throughout the year, for all birders from beginners to experts.

All members also receive our quarterly journal, *Scottish Birds*, which has been received with much acclaim since its facelift in June 2009 when it was re-launched as a 96-page full-colour publication containing peer-reviewed papers and short notes, topical articles of Scottish interest, club news, and details of the latest sightings, complete with excellent photographs.

Our headquarters at Waterston House, Aberlady, holds the George Waterston Library and the Donald Watson Gallery. The library is the most comprehensive ornithological library in Scotland. Anyone wishing to use the library, whether a club member or not, is most welcome to do so. A [library catalogue](#) can be found on the SOC website. The gallery is a favoured exhibition space by many of the UK's leading wildlife artists and photographers.

Exhibitions are held throughout the year. Staff at our headquarters also organise the SOC Annual Conference held in October.

The SOC was last a member of LINK around 11 years ago, and during those years SOC has continued to be active in conservation through the efforts of many volunteer observers and production of important publications. We hope that by re-joining LINK now we will also be able to share the skills and knowledge of our members, and help to move towards a more environmentally sustainable society.

Unfinished Business National Parks in Scotland

*John Mayhew, Project Manager,
Scottish National Parks Strategy Project.*

There are nearly 3,000 National Parks across the world, including for example 60 in Canada, 29 in Norway and 14 in New Zealand – yet Scotland has only two. Also, for example, 20% of Wales and 12% of Iceland are covered by National Parks – yet only 8% of Scotland is.

The [Scottish Campaign for National Parks \(SCNP\)](#) and the [Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland \(APRS\)](#) have been campaigning for more National Parks for over 60 years. Both bodies feel that Scotland's world-class landscapes merit more National Parks. We think that the Scottish Government should have a strategy for implementing their 2011 Manifesto commitment to 'work with communities to explore the creation of new NPs'. However, as they don't have such a strategy, in time-honoured non-government organisation fashion we're writing one for them. Since 2010 SCNP and APRS have been running a [joint project](#) to promote a strategy for more National Parks in Scotland.

'National Park' is the leading internationally-recognised designation for places of the highest national importance for natural or cultural heritage, including landscape,

wildlife and recreation. It is the highest accolade which can be given to a place within its national context. Many are truly wild; others, as in Scotland, are wholly or partly lived-in, working landscapes. The sort of world-renowned places designated as National Parks include Jotunheimen in Norway, Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, the Galapagos in Ecuador, Cradle Mountain in Tasmania, the Karakoram in Pakistan and Yosemite in the USA.

We believe that National Parks bring many environmental, social and economic benefits to the country in which they are situated. However, many of these benefits can be delivered in other ways and by other bodies, so the obvious question is what can National Parks deliver better than any of the other options? We feel that the key issues are the high profile it generates, the close focus on a particular area it enables, the integration of planning and delivery between public bodies, the investment of additional national resources and its inherent permanence: other arrangements may come and go, but National Parks are rarely abolished.

The Ramsay Report immediately after the Second World War recommended five areas of Scotland as National Parks, and in 1990 the former Countryside Commission for Scotland recommended four areas. Thanks in part to pressure from LINK, Scotland eventually joined the National Park family through the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. Scotland was therefore one of the last countries on earth to have National Parks, with the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs both designated as National Parks in 2002-03. In recognition of our world-class marine environment, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Executive put a great deal of work in 2005-07 into preparing for Scotland's first coastal and marine National Park; however this was shelved after the 2007 election in favour of working on the Marine (Scotland) Act, which was eventually passed in 2010.

Our joint report *Unfinished Business* will summarise the benefits which National Parks

bring, and propose a number of improvements to the operation of the two existing and any future National Parks. It will set out criteria against which any future National Park should be assessed, and will propose seven further areas which we consider merit National Park status, including at least one coastal and marine National Park. The report will be launched in April 2013, after which we will campaign to the Scottish Government to implement its proposals. We would welcome support for its proposals from any other LINK member body, and I would be pleased to receive invitations to write articles for other newsletters or to speak to its conclusions at conferences and other events. Please contact me at the APRS office (0131 225 7012) if you would like to get involved.

**Towards a New Paradigm for the Ecology of Northern and Western Scotland.
A Synthesis of Issues**

Reviewed by Alastair Lavery, LINK Honorary Fellow

In this [publication](#), James Fenton takes a look at the much discussed issues around ecology and land use in the north and west Highlands. The nature of the contribution is summed up in the author's note; it is "an easy rather than a referenced scientific paper".

Using a series of topics, the author explores some of the assumptions that underlie current thinking on the ecology of north and west Scotland and goes on to critique the consequences of this view on conservation and land-use planning. Again, the stance is neatly summarised; "degraded ecosystems, largely through past and present human action" as the old paradigm, to "one of the most natural vegetation patterns in Europe", the new paradigm. Fortunately for the reviewer, the purpose of a review is not to agree or disagree with the conclusions, but to assess if it is a useful contribution.

The debate, in various forms, has been around for a long time, a probable starting point with Fraser Darling in his 1955 *West Highland Survey*. My paradigm-shift moment came in 1969, when as a student I bought, and devoured in one night-long read, McVean and Lockie's *Ecology and Land Use in Upland Scotland*, completely changing how I viewed a landscape I had known and loved, uncritically, from early childhood. Much has been added to this debate in the 40 years since then and by many people.

Does this publication add to our understanding? It did to mine. The effect of hill tracks as corridors for invasive species had never occurred to me, though a more benign view of bracken as a climax community will take longer to accept. The impact of the basic assumptions made about the naturalness of communities on conservation status and "favourable status" are well made in the second part of the essay and add to concern about using a static model of communities to plan conservation action.

There are, inevitably, places where I would want to argue with the author. Is it really possible to dismiss the differences between Scotland and Norway as mainly due to climate, with human history (and herbivore density, which is surely part of human history) in second place? Can peatland development and erosion be considered a cycle or is it simply a process that can recover from perturbation?

There are places to disagree. The long and complex history of human use of the Scottish landscape, covering some 9,000 years and going through many phases, is not dealt with fully. Was the impact of cattle grazing in the late mediaeval highlands, with a large human population, the same as the sheep and deer economy that replaced it? If soils can be irreversibly damaged by modern tree planting (pages 38 and 39), how can we consider communities natural if they have had dozens of poorly understood and largely undocumented human interventions over millennia?

And then detailed quibbles. *Rhododendron* (there is no argument from me about its status as a pest species) is described as “*Rhododendron x ponticum*, a Victorian cultivar”, suggesting that it is both a hybrid and a horticultural invention. The Scottish plant is mainly the Iberian sub-species *R. ponticum* ssp *baeticum*, with hybridisation detectable in c12% of UK wild plants from 1 of 3 North American species (Stace, 2010).

The layout of the essay is unconventional, as a series of topics, which helps to make the material easy to assimilate and clarifies the complex of issues and agreements. You are not going to agree with everything and should find much to argue with, but this is a useful contribution to a long debate and marks one experienced and thoughtful observer’s view of where the pendulum lies at present.

References:

Darling, F.F. (1955) *West Highland Survey: an essay in human ecology*. Oxford

McVean, D.N. and J.D. Lockie (1969) *Ecology and Land Use in Upland Scotland*. Edinburgh

Stace, C (2010) *New Flora of the British Isles*. Cambridge

Towards a New Paradigm for the Ecology of Northern and Western Scotland is published at www.james-hc-fenton.eu/ and is available from the author in a print version. Version reviewed published April 2011.

Global effort on Peatlands given a boost

Clifton Bain, IUCN UK Peatland Programme Director

Scottish Environment LINK was present at the recent IUCN World Conservation Congress in Jeju, South Korea, and helped place peatlands firmly on the agenda for the IUCN’s next five year strategy. Labelled as the ‘Environment Olympics’ the event had over 10,000 attendees from 153 countries and was focussed on the theme Nature plus, highlighting the wider benefits that wildlife conservation can bring.

Clifton Bain, [IUCN UK Peatland Programme](#) Director and Jonathan Hughes, Conservation Director at the Scottish Wildlife Trust, ran a workshop on ‘Peatland Restoration as a Nature-based Solution to Climate Change’. Participants learned of the UK’s successful peatland conservation and restoration projects along with examples from China, Russia, Germany and Australia. With over 6% of global greenhouse gas emissions coming from damaged peatlands this restoration work can make a significant contribution to tackling climate change. The workshop concluded with a series of recommendations for action. High on the list of priorities were:

- For the IUCN to provide an international focus for peatland action through its work on ecosystem management.
- To work with the business and private sector to secure funding that reflects the huge benefits of peatlands for biodiversity, water and carbon.
- Support international effort to share good practice in managing peatlands
- International sharing of science to quantify the carbon and other benefits of peatland conservation and restoration.

Following on from the IUCN UK Peatland Programme [Inquiry on Peatlands](#), the respective governments in all four UK countries have recently indicated their support for improving the condition of peatlands, with a forthcoming joint statement to include intentions and highlight actions.

The Scottish Government has taken this commitment further with its draft budget for 2013-2014 which includes specific mention of peatlands as a valuable part of Scotland’s economy.’ Investment in peatland restoration has been identified as a priority which will bring benefits for water quality, biodiversity and climate change. This is a very positive move which will help the environment and save money by reducing the long term costs to society from damaged peatlands. The IUCN UK Peatland Programme will be working with international organizations to help showcase the world leading example of peatland action from Scotland and the UK.

More Network News

Agriculture and Sustainable Land Use

The Agriculture TF circulated a [briefing](#) for CAP reform debate in the Scottish Parliament on 27 September. As protracted negotiations between the 27 Member States of the EU, the European Parliament and the Commission continue, agreement on a final reform package is not expected before June 2013 but could be delayed. The TF wants to see a CAP reform which leads to more sustainable farming systems and practices and the enhanced provision of public goods and services from agricultural land management. LINK considers that the only valid purpose of taxpayer support for the agricultural sector is to secure provision of those goods and services which the market fails to deliver.

A further [briefing](#) *Developing the Scotland Rural Development Programme 2014-20* was circulated to MSPs. The SRDP remains the most significant funding stream through which the Scottish Government can securely maintain or change land management practices for the benefit of Scotland's natural and cultural heritage. The TF wishes to see sufficient importance placed on the environment, reflected in the distribution of funds between programme elements and via a commitment to the principles of public money for public goods and no environmental harm across the whole programme. LINK highlights the need in the next programme for better prioritisation of desired outcomes and improved targeting of funding to achieve these. Development of an effective advisory service to support delivery of the Programme is essential too.

LINK's report, commissioned from John Thomson, [How can we get the best from our Land? Putting Integrated Land Use into Practice](#) was circulated to participants at the Scottish Government's event on the Sustainable Land Use Strategy on 27 June. LINK continues to advocate greater integration of LUS principles into sectoral and regional plans.

Wildlife Forum LINK's [response](#) to the *2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity* followed detailed discussions of the review document among Wildlife Forum members and Freshwater and Marine taskforces. The response outlines general points on some of the review aims and some of the concepts included within it, with more detailed comments on each of the chapters, making suggestions on the desired outcome and the key steps needed to reach it.

In general terms, LINK would expect a review to assess the successes and failures of delivery of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, to broaden its approach, to include ecosystem approaches, and improve its delivery by enabling organisations and individuals to take action to halt the loss of biodiversity in Scotland. If *Challenge 2020* is designated as part of the SBS whose aims and objectives still stand, (and which LINK strongly supports) it is imperative that the challenge includes clear, measurable priorities for action, as without these the document cannot, yet, deliver the required step change in delivery.

LINK fully supports one of the three overarching aims of the review—to engage people with the natural world. The other aims are unambitious (to increase the 'general level of biodiversity'), or inappropriate (to maximise the benefits for Scotland of a diverse natural environment and the services it provides, contributing to sustainable economic growth). Many of the services Scotland's biodiversity and ecosystems provide are not easily valued and in an ever changing world, tomorrow's services are likely to be ones that today we take for granted and do not value in monetary terms or have not yet identified. Increasing economic growth should not be the aim of this review, though it may well be a welcome by-product of conserving biodiversity.

LINK believes that lack of effective delivery has been the key barrier to success to date, compounded by the lack of compulsion to act for biodiversity. To address this, LINK believes that the key aim of the review should

be to halt the loss of biodiversity through the active engagement and budgeting of the Scottish Government and public bodies enabling them to act and to support action by the businesses and people of Scotland. LINK welcomes further dialogue with government on the points raised in its response.

Economics Forum A report commissioned from Simon Pepper *Environment and the economy—helping Scotland to flourish* articulates LINK’s plea for a shift of emphasis to the core purpose of government from economic growth to sustainable wellbeing. It will be published for discussion at the autumn party conferences, and will be available on the website.

Freshwater It has been a busy period for the TF with four consultations and related meetings. In its [evidence](#) to Stage 1 of the Water Resources Bill the TF welcomed provisions that will help deliver a sustainable catchment management approach but expressed concern over proposals to bring large scale abstractions under Ministerial control. In the [response](#) to the consultation *Investing in and Paying for Your Water Services from 2015* LINK was concerned by the statement that investment priorities must support Government’s core purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth, and urged that this must not happen at the expense of Scottish Water’s existing statutory duties in relation to sustainable development and conservation of biodiversity. LINK supports steps that can be taken to make Scotland’s water industry truly sustainable, and to facilitate positive land management practices in drinking water catchments. While fulfilling all statutory duties in respect of biodiversity conservation, water quality and delivery of Water Framework Directive objectives, sustainable flood management, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change.

The TF’s [response](#) to the consultation on *Proposals for an Integrated Framework of*

Environmental Regulation broadly supports steps that can be taken to integrate and streamline regulation provided that this is not at the expense of environmental protection. LINK would be extremely concerned by any move towards deregulation for the purpose of reducing administrative burden, and it is crucial that any new regulatory regime is adequately monitored and reviewed to assess how well it is protecting and improving Scotland’s environment.

Networking Staff, President and several members joined sister Links in Belfast on 26 & 27 September for productive discussions of cross cutting issues. Andy Myles (Parliamentary Officer) represented network views at the STUC’s conference *A Just Scotland*, where matters also raised in LINK’s [Referendum Challenge](#) leaflet were discussed. The members’ network meeting in August was well attended with useful discussion on integration needs ahead, including an energy workshop planned for November.

Further Information

For information about reports and initiatives referred to in this newsletter please visit www.scotlink.org. Task Force outputs are listed under [Our work](#) accessible from the home page.

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