



Species Champions

Members of the Scottish Parliament lending political support to the protection of Scotland's threatened wildlife by becoming Species Champions

News Update: Spring 2019



Meet Our Newest Species Champion

A warm welcome to **Shona Robison MSP**, who has recently agreed to become Species Champion for **wild cherry**, hosted by LINK member, Woodland Trust Scotland. Shona becomes Species Champion number **103!**



Species Champions Urged to Fight For Scotland's Nature



35 of Scotland's environmental charities have launched the [Fight for Scotland's Nature campaign](#), calling for a **Scottish Environment Act**. As our network of MSP Species Champions are well aware, Scotland's natural environment is amazing, with a diverse range of globally important habitats and species.

But our nature is in trouble. Climate change, pollution and habitat destruction are making themselves felt, reducing the resilience of the natural environment. Today, 1 in 11 of the country's species is at risk of extinction.

And now, the prospect of Brexit threatens to unravel the legal protections that help Scotland care for its nature and hold back further decline in biodiversity. 80 per cent of environmental protections stem from EU membership, and these have played an extremely positive role in protecting our environment by combining strong legislation, mechanisms for effective implementation and funding opportunities.

In light of this, Scottish environmental charities are calling for a Scottish Environment Act to:

1. Embed much needed EU environmental law principles in Scots law.

Scotland's environment has been shaped by these principles, from action to address GMOs and fracking to the introduction of a deposit return scheme. These principles need to continue forming the basis of Scotland's environment policy in

the future and to do that they need to be legally binding.

2. Create an independent and well - resourced watchdog to enforce environmental protections.

On leaving the EU, Scotland and the rest of the UK will lose the oversight and enforcement roles of EU bodies. These institutions perform key functions and have played an invaluable role in giving a voice to the public on environmental matters and holding governments to account.

3. Set clear targets for environmental protection alongside adequate financial resources.

Experience shows that legally binding targets provide a clear direction for government and stakeholders. We need to build on the Government's commitment to bring forward the first Scottish Environment Strategy and ensure that its provisions are legally binding through a Scottish Environment Act.

As Species Champion, you can help protect your species and the habitats that they rely on by supporting the call for a Scottish Environment Act through the Fight for Scotland's Nature campaign and by ensuring protections for Scotland's wildlife are maintained and enhanced ahead of international discussions for a new global deal for nature in 2020.

LINK members urge Species Champions to support legislation that retains and builds on existing standards to safeguard and enhance our important and diverse natural environment, and the species that depend on it.

At a time of global ecological crisis, we cannot afford for our nature to be left behind, this is why we need a Scottish Environment Act to set clear ambitions to protect our environment now and in the future.



Species Champions Out and About



National Curlew Conference

Lewis Macdonald, MSP Species Champion for curlew delivered a presentation at a conference highlighting the decline of breeding curlews, commenting that a greater focus on curlew is needed in the parliamentary sphere, and while discussion was important, action is needed.



Scottish Raptor Study Group Conference

Alison Johnstone, Andy Wightman, Claudia Beamish, John Mason and Mark Ruskell, MSP Species Champions for hare, golden eagle, forester moth, kestrel and white-tailed eagle respectively, attended the Scottish Raptor Study Group annual conference.



Natterjack Toad Conservation

Emma Harper, MSP Species Champion for natterjack toad, visited Powfoot near Dumfries and spoke with experts involved in the conservation of her species.

Flame Shell Conservation



Maree Todd, MSP Species Champion for flame shell and Minister for Children and Young People, met with Ullapool Sea Saver, Caillin, who is a species ambassador for flame shell, to discuss this species and the issues affecting it.



Grand Avenue: Chatelherault Country Park

Monica Lennon, MSP Species Champion for oak, has been helping plant oak trees, part of the Grand Avenue at Chatelherault Country Park in Hamilton.



Species Champions In Parliament



Restoring Scotland's Caledonian Pinewoods

Joan McAlpine, MSP Species Champion for Scots pine, led a member's debate on restoring the Caledonian pinewood forest. All MSPs who participated in the debate were Species Champions, speaking of the importance that protecting and restoring Scotland's Caledonian pinewoods would have in supporting their species.

Debate Participants and Species: Edward Mountain (Golden plover), Claudia Beamish (forester moth), Andy Wightman (golden eagle and mountain everlasting), Gillian Martin (yew), Finlay Carson (leisler's bat), Gail Ross (red squirrel), Keith Brown (sticky catchfly), Bill Bowman (twinflower) and Mairi Gougeon (hen harrier).

Global Decline in Insect Life

Patrick Harvie, MSP Species Champion for red mason bee lodged a motion highlighting a recent report on declining insect populations, the causes of declines and to call on the Scottish Government to take action.

Sustainable Marine Tourism

Stuart McMillan, MSP Species Champion for basking shark, asked a PQ to find out what action the Scottish Government is taking to work with the marine tourism sector to deliver a cleaner and greener marine environment.

The Status and Future of Curlew

Lewis Macdonald, MSP Species Champion for curlew, asked a number of PQs relating to the conservation of curlew, including methods to increase suitable habitat, protected areas and biodiversity funding.

International Year of the Salmon

Michelle Ballantyne, MSP Species Champion for Atlantic salmon lodged a motion recognising that 2019 was International Year of the Salmon; the role of Atlantic salmon as a keystone species and the contribution healthy, thriving salmon stocks have on ecosystem services and economic provisions.

Our Sea, Our Life and Seagrass

Gail Ross, MSP Species Champion for seagrass lodged a motion welcoming the conference 'Our Sea, Our Life', also outlining her role as Species Champion for seagrass, while highlighting the importance healthy, thriving seas have on the wider environment, on efforts to tackle climate change and on the communities around

Aberdeen "DolphinFest 2019"

Maureen Watt and Peter Chapman, MSP Species Champions for porpoise and bottlenose dolphin, both lodged motions welcoming "DolphinFest 2019", which will be Aberdeen's first dolphin festival and aims to raise awareness of the threats facing marine life and how people can play a role in

it.

protecting it.

PQs on Urban Woodlands

Monica Lennon, MSP Species Champion of oak asked a number of PQs relating to the importance and status of urban woodland, access to woodland areas and funding for urban woodlands.

Decline in Kestrel Numbers

John Mason, MSP Species Champion for kestrel asked a PQ to find out what consideration the Scottish Government has given to the decline in kestrel numbers in Scotland.

Raptor Conservation: #DareToSoar

Andy Wightman, MSP Species Champion for golden eagle met with pupils from Sunnyside Primary School to discuss their plans to help Scotland's threatened raptor populations.



Climate Change and the Freshwater Pearl Mussel

Alexander Burnett, MSP Species Champion for the freshwater pearl mussel highlighted his role as Species Champion during his speech in the stage 1 debate on the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill.



Long-Term Decline in Salmon Stocks

Michelle Ballantyne, MSP Species Champion for Atlantic salmon spoke during the member's debate on long-term decline of salmon stocks. She outlined her experience as Species Champion and noted that further action must be taken to halt and reverse the decline of salmon numbers in Scotland



Ullapool Sea Savers Species Ambassadors Reach out to MSP Species Champion Counterparts

[Ullapool Sea Savers \(USS\)](#) are a group of enthusiastic and passionate young people from Ullapool, in the heart of Wester Ross Marine Protected Area, who raise awareness of and advocate for better protection of their amazing, important and diverse local marine environment. They are an active group, involved in a number of local and national campaigns. For example, they took a leading role in ensuring mechanical kelp dredging was banned in Scotland and campaigned against the use of single use plastic straws, resulting in Ullapool becoming the first plastic straw free village in Europe.

More recently, USS have taken on the role of 'Species Ambassadors' and have committed to engaging with their MSP Species Champion counterparts, to promote the work they are doing and to inform and inspire decision makers. Last year, Sea Saver Caillin and Maree Todd MSP met to discuss flame shell and issues affecting its conservation while recently Sea Savers Maia and Arwen have been corresponding with Mark Ruskell MSP and Brian Whittle MSP regarding white-tailed eagle and leatherback turtle. On social media, USS have been showing MSP Champions their species dive signs and have received video replies of MSPs trying them out for themselves.

"Being a species ambassador is an amazing and fascinating experience. You can really learn about one particular species that you find interesting. You can learn about it in your own way and have a great time doing so - especially when you have a species as amazing as dolphins!" - **Maia, 9 years.**

"I like it because I get to learn so much about one creature and it is just really interesting and fun - especially when that creature is as amazing as a White Tailed Sea Eagle! I also like getting to talk to people who know SO much and learn from them!" - **Josh, 11 years.**

"Being a species ambassador means that you can connect to the animal on another level. It makes it more personal to you as an individual. I feel love and I have grown to love flame shells through the process of learning about them." - **Caillin 12 years**

On her involvement with USS, Maree Todd MSP, Species Champion for Flame shell and Minister for Children and Young People said "It's a pleasure to work with Caillin and all the Ullapool Sea Savers. We have some amazing talent in the Highlands and it is brilliant to see young people getting involved in educating the public so creatively. They are tenacious and energetic campaigners too. Having grown up in Ullapool myself, I am acutely aware of the need for good stewardship of our environment. In Scotland we have one of the world's richest marine environments and it is vital we protect it for future generations. With intelligent young women like Caillin involved I am quite sure we will. The future is bright!"

USS is an example of how young people are increasingly taking environmental issues into their own hands, ensuring decision makers are accountable for safeguarding and enhancing our natural areas. The LINK Species Champions initiative presents the opportunity for USS to engage, educate and ensure effective action is taken among decision makers.

Find out more about Ullapool Sea Savers [here](#).



Follow us on Twitter: [@SpeciesChampion](#)

Email Us: specieschampion@scotlink.org

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 35 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.