



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

There are now 105 Species Champions in the Scottish Parliament

Meet Our Newest Species Champions



A warm welcome to Willie Coffey MSP who has recently become a Species Champion! Willie is Species Champion for Whinchat, hosted by LINK member RSPB.

Nature Recovery Targets Letter from MSP Species Champions to the Cabinet Secretary



30 MSP Species Champions [signed a letter](#), organised by **Scottish Environment LINK**, to the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform calling on the Scottish Government to deliver an ambitious, legally binding set of targets and milestones to secure nature recovery.

Real action is needed to protect our environment so that it can continue to amaze us but also to continue performing the critical functions that enhance our health and wellbeing and are the foundation of our prosperity as a nation. In order to be world leading on nature recovery, Scotland must support a clear global goal to restore nature, with legally binding targets to address the nature emergency.

At a time when environmental issues are increasingly brought to the fore, the need to have informed, passionate and supportive MSPs in Parliament ensuring our wildlife has a voice has never been more critical. By signing this letter, MSP Champions have taken the opportunity to champion not just their given species and its habitat but also wider policies and strategies with a significant impact on Scotland's environment, climate, land and sea management.

Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) Bill



"We had regular contact with **Colin Smyth MSP**, our Species Champion for badgers, all the way through the early part of 2020, due to concentrated work on the Animals and

Wildlife (Penalties) Bill. There have been few contacts since then, but Colin was part of our very successful Virtual Annual Conference on 10 October, with 200 participants. Currently, he is keeping an eye on the attempts by both farmers and landowners to try to establish criteria to 'manage' i.e. kill, badgers who they purport do harm to other wildlife, and also hinder farming. A recent research report commissioned by NatureScot found no or minimal effect by badgers on either biodiversity or agriculture by badgers, good news indeed".

Eddie Palmer, Chairman of Scottish Badgers

Species and Habitats at Risk



We know about the climate emergency, and the impacts of burning fossil fuels on our most vulnerable habitats and species. But there's something else causing significant harm to our wildlife – **nitrogen**. The disruption of the global nitrogen cycle, caused by intensive farming and the burning of fossil fuels, is slipping under the radar. Plantlife Scotland have set out to change that.

Last year, Plantlife Scotland brought together NGOs, academics, agencies, the agricultural sector, species experts and Scottish Government staff, to discuss the impacts of nitrogen on our habitats and species, and to develop recommendations on how to tackle the problem. These recommendations, for those who own and manage our land, for the Scottish Government and other public bodies, and for the public, are summarised in a new report.

Scotland's rare temperate rainforests, its vast peatlands, species-rich grasslands and even its world famous mountain tops have nitrogen levels higher than they can tolerate. Data suggests that just under half of wooded habitats, and a quarter of open habitats within Scotland's [Important Plant Areas](#) have exceeded their critical load – the point at which nitrogen harms habitats. This is causing a rapid decrease in plant,

lichen and fungi diversity. Species supported by our Species Champions, such as [tree lungwort](#), [mountain everlasting](#) and [rusty bog-moss](#) are bearing the brunt of the impacts.

More than a third of all Scotland's nitrogen-sensitive habitats and 80% of its land within Special Areas of Conservation such as the Cairngorms, have intolerable nitrogen levels. Excess nitrogen pollutants in the air from transport, power stations, farming and industry, are being deposited into the environment, directly damaging Scotland's unique biodiversity.

The good news is that it's not too late to change this, and we've identified a series of actions that can and should be taken to ensure the survival of our most fragile habitats and species. There are huge opportunities for conservationists, agriculture and Scottish Government to work together to implement the recommendations in our report. Our environment and our farmers will benefit from a clear strategic vision for the future of agriculture in Scotland, and from properly targeted support measures to help tackle this problem.

We're using this report as our response to the current consultation on the Cleaner Air for Scotland strategy and its Nitrogen Balance Sheet, and we're encouraging others to do the same. There's a great opportunity to work together across sectors to tackle this problem once and for all. The Plantlife Scotland report can be downloaded [here](#).

Alistair Whyte, Head of Plantlife Scotland

Animals and Wildlife Bill



In June 2020, the **Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill** was passed by the Scottish Parliament. LINK welcomed the Bill and the amendments which ranged from increasing penalties for serious animal and wildlife crimes to offering new and increased protections to animals and wildlife in Scotland.

The LINK Wildlife Crime Group provided evidence to the ECCLR Committee during its earlier consideration of the Bill.

At Stage 3 of the bill's passage the passion and commitment from LINK's Species Champions was clear to see with **Alison Johnstone MSP** (Mountain Hare), **Colin Smyth MSP** (Badger), **Mark Ruskell MSP** (White Tailed Sea Eagle) and **Claudia Beamish MSP** (Forester Moth), all pressing their cases strongly.

In the words of the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment, Mairi Gougeon MSP (Hen Harrier), *"If anything can be taken from the debate, it is the passion and strength of feeling that members across the chamber have for animal welfare and our wildlife, and the seriousness with which we treat those issues not just here in Parliament but more widely in Scotland"*.

Several positive outcomes were secured with Scottish Badgers quoted as saying *"Our thanks to badger Species Champion Colin Smyth MSP who did an amazing job, tirelessly and patiently seeking the right outcomes"*. **Bob Elliot** from OneKind said *"The passing of this amendment is a triumph for Alison Johnstone MSP"*.

Logan Steele, Convener of LINK's Wildlife Crime Group said: *"Those Species Champions who took part in the debate showed themselves to be informed, passionate and knowledgeable, an excellent illustration of why Species Champions is such an effective initiative."*

Native Woodland Creation Targets



The Climate Change Plan update provides the opportunity to address the climate and nature crisis together. We know that **native tree planting and native woodland creation** (including through natural regeneration where trees self seed and regenerate themselves) is one of the solutions to our crisis, and it can also provide green-collar

jobs from nursery work through to woodland management.

This is why the **Woodland Trust** is calling on Roseanna Cunningham MSP as the Cabinet Secretary responsible for the Climate Change Plan to introduce an updated native woodland creation target for Scotland. The last time this target was updated was in 2015 but since then Scotland's overall targets have been increased twice and are now aiming to get to 18,000ha per annum by 2024/25. Increasing the native woodland creation target has to be in line with the overall targets, and it should be at least half of the overall targets. A 50:50 broadleaf to conifer ratio is also advised by the Committee on Climate Change in its scenario where the focus is on biodiversity in the latest sector plan for forestry for Scotland.

In the [Emergency Tree Plan Policy Paper](#), the Woodland Trust highlights that in order to address the nature and climate emergency the majority of woodland creation should be with native tree species and that we need quality and quantity targets. This means expanding but also managing our existing woods. We need policy support and resource allocation for both, not one or the other. Woodland expansion AND management are important areas for investment by the Scottish Government. The expansion has been highlighted as part of Scotland's green recovery by the Advisory Group on Economy Recovery, the statement of Intent on biodiversity, and the Just Transition Commission to name a few, and this must be done with the right trees in the right place.

Alongside woodland expansion, management of our existing woodlands also needs to be supported better than it is now. This management needs to be for a variety of purposes from increasing biodiversity to quality timber extraction. Our ancient woodlands are significant carbon stores, for example. But we keep losing and fragmenting these due to inappropriate development and overgrazing by herbivores. These are issues that need to be addressed if we are to have truly sustainable forest management in Scotland, create new carbon sinks and also look after existing carbon stores.

As a Species Champion MSP, your support to ensure the native woodland creation targets are significantly increased for Scotland would be very much welcome, alongside support for managing existing woodlands. **Now is the time to act** and our next best opportunity is to secure this in the Climate Change Plan update.

Arina Russell, Woodland Trust Public Affairs Manager for Scotland

Species Champions Activity

We are thrilled to see Species Champions learning about, engaging with and visiting their species. With 49% of species having declined, and one in nine species facing extinction in Scotland, we need action for nature like never before.



Ullapool Otter Signs

The **Ullapool Sea Savers** contacted the Highland Council Roads Department in October to request support for a project they are currently working on to save Ullapool's otters. The young marine group have managed to secure two signs which will be put up on either side of a blackspot, warning people to be aware of otters crossing. The easing of lockdown and the influx of motor vehicles from the NC500 route has put otters more at risk, as well as red squirrels, badgers, owls and deer. Noel Hawkins, the Living Seas Community Officer at the Scottish Wildlife Trust, ran a JustGiving fundraiser which raised just over £1,600. The signs are soon to be put up and will help towards protecting Ullapool's amazing wildlife.



Marine Protected Areas

The Scottish Government's announcement of four new Marine Protected Areas and 12 Special Protection Areas is a welcome step forward for the protection of Scotland's seas. Thank you to **Stuart McMillan MSP** for all his support championing the Basking Shark and a basking shark MPA over the years.



Nature Networks Matter

It was great to see **Claudia Beamish MSP**, Species Champion for Forester Moth, on the panel at the LINK's Nature Networks Matter film launch. Claudia said it was wonderful to be asked to be a moth champion. She spoke of a site visit to a forest in Dunfermline where she saw a forester moth habitat and learnt about how important it was. Claudia highlighted how the Species Champions initiative has inspired many MSPs to get to know their species and the importance of their habitats.



Tayside Swifts

Jeremy Balfour MSP, Species Champion for Swift with RSPB Scotland judged the Tayside Swifts haiku poetry competition in celebration of Swift Awareness Week. Congratulations to Robert Childs, the winning entry!



Grouse Shooting Licensing

At the end of November, **Mairi Gougeon MSP** Species Champion for Hen Harrier announced that the Scottish Government will bring forward a licensing scheme to better regulate grouse moors, protecting Scotland's peatlands and birds of prey.

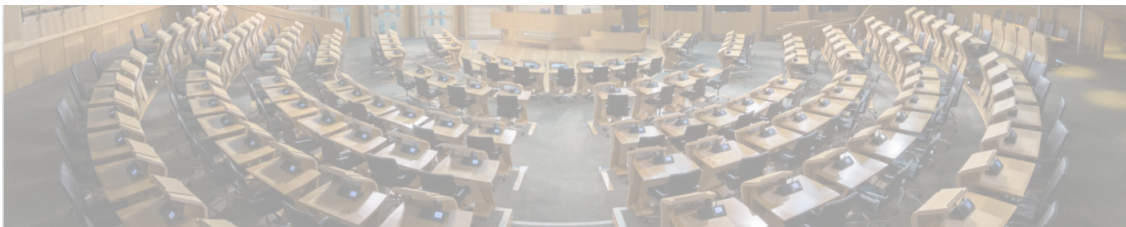
Species Champions in Parliament



Nature Emergency Debate

We were delighted to see Species Champions standing up for nature at the Nature Emergency Debate in November. The Scottish Parliament was asked to vote on a motion to declare a nature emergency, tabled by **Mark Ruskell MSP** Species Champion for White-Tailed Eagle. After considerable debate, including positive interventions from across the political spectrum on major environmental issues ranging from salmon-farming to grouse shooting, consensus wasn't reached on the principle of declaring a nature emergency. The Scottish Parliament decided to remove reference to the nature emergency from the motion, despite the First Minister stating last year that biodiversity loss is of equal importance to the climate emergency.

[Click here](#) to see how Species Champions stood up for nature at the debate.



Coastal Waters

Kenneth Gibson MSP, Species Champion for Blue Whale with Whale and Dolphin Conservation asked a Parliamentary Question on what steps will be taken over the next 18 months to enhance the protection of Scotland's coastal waters as advocated by the #OurSeas campaign group and Community of Arran Seabed Trust.

Sea Birds

Claire Baker MSP, Species Champion for Puffin with RSPB Scotland asked a Parliamentary Question on how the Scottish Government is meeting its duty under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 to ensure protection and enhancement of the health of the Scottish marine area and in particular giving sea birds and their habitats a brighter future.

Flapper Skate

Pauline McNeill MSP, Species Champion for Sea Trout with Scottish Wildlife Trust asked a Parliamentary Question on what urgent action the Scottish Government is taking to protect the eggs of the critically endangered flapper skate, which have recently been found off the northwest coast of Scotland.

Atlantic Salmon

Michelle Ballantyne MSP, Species Champion for Atlantic Salmon with National Trust for Scotland asked a Parliamentary Question on when the Scottish Government expects to engage with stakeholders to support the development of the wild salmon strategy.

Woodland Birds

Mark Ruskell MSP, Species Champion for White-Tailed Eagle with RSPB Scotland asked a Parliamentary Question on what action the Scottish Government will take to reverse the decline in the number of woodland birds.

Common Toad

Mary Fee MSP, Species Champion for Common Toad with Froglife lodged a motion highlighting Froglife's Come Forth for Wildlife project in creating habitats for the common toad and other amphibians by conserving and further improving the unique heritage of the area.

Urban Forestry

Shona Robison MSP, Species Champion for Wild Cherry with Woodland Trust Scotland asked a Parliamentary Question on how the Scottish Government is supporting its Forestry Strategy to increase tree canopy cover in towns and cities.



Scottish Environment LINK would like to wish all
Species Champions and host organisations a **Merry**
Christmas and a Happy New Year.



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.

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