

Nature Networks Film Screening and Panel Discussion – Online Event



Scottish
Environment
LINK

Thursday 3 December 2020

Purpose of the event

This event was used to launch LINK's [Nature Networks Matter film](#) to an audience of parliament, government and NGO representatives. The film screening was followed by reflections and discussion with a panel of four speakers. LINK's aim is to explain what we mean by a Nature Network, increase understanding of the value, and encourage willingness to implement the approach in efforts to tackle both the nature and climate emergencies.

Event format

- 13.30 – 13.35 Welcome and introduction from Dr Deborah Long (Scottish Environment LINK)
- 13.35 – 13.40 Nature Networks film screened
- 13.40 – 14.00 Panel discussion with Alistair Whyte (Plantlife Scotland), Dr Alessandro Gimona (James Hutton Institute), Emma Cooper (Scottish Land Commission) and Claudia Beamish MSP (Member for South Scotland)
- 14.00– 14.25 Q&A with audience
- 14.25 – 14.30 Closing remarks from Dr Deborah Long

Welcome and introduction

Deborah Long, Scottish Environment LINK's Chief Officer, welcomed everyone to the event. She explained that LINK is a 40 strong network of member organisations. These members are all eNGOs working in Scotland towards the joint aim of building a sustainable Scotland where Scotland's nature, land and seascapes are healthy and resilient, supporting thriving communities and flourishing people.

Deborah highlighted that we are all too aware we are in the midst of world changing events. We are suffering a global pandemic, and human disease on a scale not seen since the Spanish flu of 1918. On top of that, we are in a climate emergency with global temperatures rising at unprecedented rates. This is already having a severe impact on coastal communities and islands and coral reefs – among other impacts. And, at the same time, we are in a nature emergency where the rate of species extinctions is rising exponentially, characterising the new geological period, the Anthropocene, where global changes are for the first time being caused by human activity.

It is enough to make you want to give up all hope! But we can do something that would make a significant impact on all three - build a nature network.

The **covid-19 pandemic** has reached us as a result of close contact with wild species. Changes in the way we use land; the expansion and intensification of agriculture; and unsustainable trade, production and consumption disrupt nature and increase contact between wildlife, livestock, pathogens and people. This is the path to pandemics. Almost all known epidemics, including HIV/AIDS, SARS, and

COVID-19, are caused by microbes from animals. Moreover, the frequency of new diseases emerging in the human population is increasing and the reservoir of currently undiscovered viruses thought to exist in mammals and birds is massive (c1.7 million; 48% of which could have the ability to infect humans). This is clearly not going to be the last pandemic to come to us via broken natural systems.

The **climate emergency** is driving habitat loss and species extinction further: species – plants and animals - move or die. Scotland holds 40% of the world’s populations of gannets and more than 30% of the world population of grey seals. However, we are witnessing massive drops in the numbers of seabirds, driven by changes in fish distribution and numbers, driven in turn by climate change and fishing practices. Species need space to move. The same goes for our unique mountain species: Scotland has a unique assemblage of species that live on our mountains – we have species only found in the Alps and others only found in the arctic. Scotland is the only place you’ll find arctic bearberry and alpine meadow rue, without having to get on a plane. But with climate change and land use practice, their habitat is changing and shrinking. Where do they go?

And then we have the **nature emergency**, where all these factors culminate to drive species towards extinction: in Scotland 1 in 9 species is at risk of extinction¹ because of the way we manage our land and our seas and because of climate change. Habitats are fragmented into pieces, and species can’t move from one area to another.

So you see, reconnecting nature isn’t just about rebuilding large populations of the species we love to see and live amongst - grey seals, ptarmigan, flower rich grasslands or temperate rainforests – it is also about halting diseases, mitigating the impact of extreme temperatures and storms and also about making sure future generations benefit from the rich natural heritage we are lucky enough to have inherited from past generations. If we are to do just one thing, it should be this. This film shows us why.

Screening of the Nature Networks Matter [film](#)



¹ <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2019-10/State-of-nature-Report-2019-Scotland-full-report.pdf>

Panel Discussion: reflections

Alistair Whyte, Head of Plantlife Scotland, thought the film was inspiring. There is growing awareness that we need to work with nature, not against it, in order to deal with climate change and the biodiversity crisis. Plants are the building blocks of all ecosystems. Currently, 1 in 4 plants are threatened with extinction in Scotland but Nature Networks can help us turn that around. Alistair gave a couple of specific examples of Nature Networks for plants but noted that the principles are the same for all wildlife.

Plantlife has been targeting their work in Important Plant Areas (IPAs). These areas can be isolated fragments of favourable habitat that are surrounded by more intensively managed areas. Some plants within these areas are at risk of extinction because they are too isolated. Plantlife identify 'zones of opportunity' which are areas close to an IPA with potential to provide the conditions needed to enable plants to disperse into, allowing the IPA to expand.

The species rich grasslands of Caithness are threatened by lack of management. It is important to have them managed extensively as they would be in High Nature Value farming and crofting systems. Alistair noted the [Species on the Edge](#) project, a collaboration between NatureScot, eNGOs, land managers and others, to facilitate conservation action for Scotland's most vulnerable species.

Another example is the rainforest on the west coast of Scotland. It is known as Atlantic woodland but technically it is coastal temperate rainforest. Plantlife and partners, including Woodland Trust Scotland, have had an opportunity to undertake mapping to identify where conservation work should be targeted. The aim is to reach their ambition of having a resilient and connected rainforest. In effect, this work is the beginnings of a Nature Network.

Alistair also highlighted the multiple benefits that landscape scale management can bring including flood risk management, and noted the importance of working with land managers and communities to make these networks work. Alistair is keen to discuss further how Regional Land Use Partnerships can help deliver these benefits.

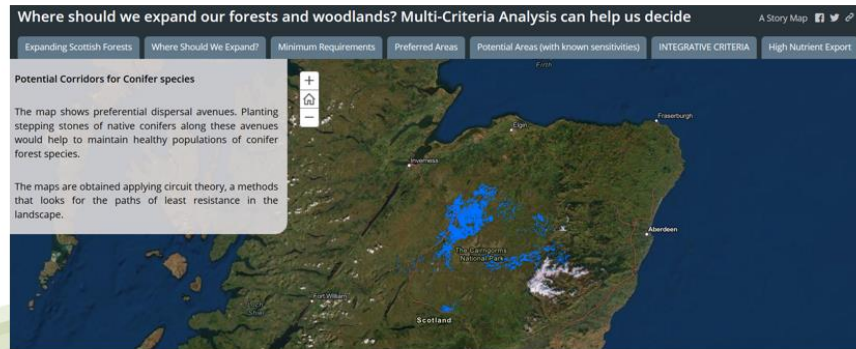
Alessandro Gimona, Senior Landscape Scientist at the James Hutton Institute reflected that there is good reason to have ecological networks. Having failed to meet Aichi targets and with the climate crisis, there is a real need to take a landscape wide approach with ecological restoration required beyond core areas. Integrated ecological networks have potential to provide multiple benefits, not just connectivity for wildlife.

Alessandro showed slides of a study area in the Cairngorms National Park. This work involves mapping to identify where to connect up areas of pine forests. The map gives a good visual of where to target conservation effort eg intense blue areas are best and yellow areas are least appropriate. This work takes into account other factors related to expanding woodland in the National Park eg soil erosion, flood risk management and nutrient leaching. This can help identify areas of benefit as well as constraints, such as not planting on peatland.

Integrated approach to connectivity- CNP as the study area



<http://arcg.is/0Xaqa5>

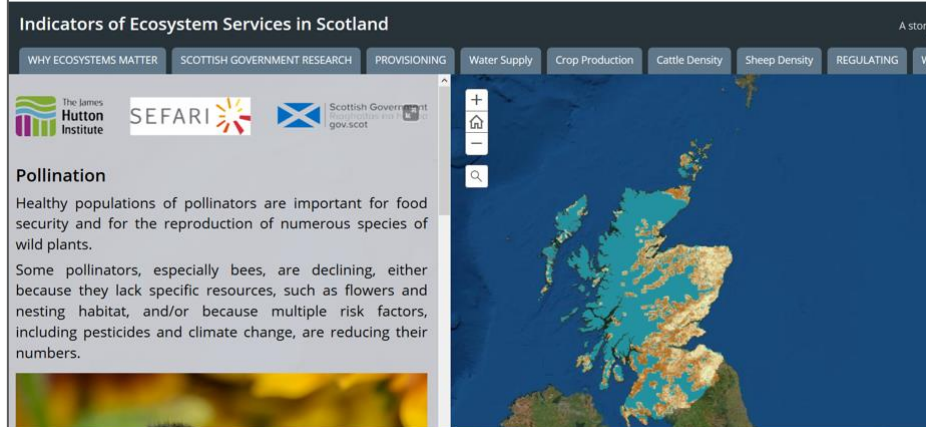


Alessandro was also involved in the mapping of bumblebee habitats, the purpose of which was to inform crop pollination knowledge:

Habitat for Bumble Bees



<http://arcg.is/q08iX>



Emma Cooper, Head of Land Rights and Responsibilities at the Scottish Land Commission, explained her role involves putting the Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement into practice. Emma commented that delivery of a Nature Network will require coordinated work across large areas and need adequate resourcing. The Scottish Land Commission (SLC) believe Regional Land Use Partnerships (RLUPs) can play a key role in the delivery of Nature Networks. The RLUPs must deliver on national and regional targets and will be pivotal in delivering the Scottish Government's climate targets and a just transition to net zero.

While a Land Use Strategy is very important, it is not practical for decisions about the uses of land to be made at national level – it is more beneficial for decisions to be made at a regional level. At a local level, we can consider how to deliver local targets and contribute to national targets.

Community engagement is crucial to enable RLUPs to be effective, and a key purpose of them is to help engage with people on the ground.

We need to consider how we use land for social, environmental and economic benefit, and bringing local skills to the table is beneficial. The RLUPs will also help funding to be targeted in a more regional targeted approach rather than using a 'scattergun' national approach. There are likely to be 12-15 RLUPs across Scotland (covering rural and urban areas); these are likely to be based on the geography of planning authorities since it is important to have that link to facilitate regional spatial planning. There will be an appointed board made up of public bodies and individuals with relevant expertise.

SLC advice to the Scottish Government on Regional Land Use Partnerships is available [here](#).

Claudia Beamish MSP, member for South Scotland, said she thinks the film will resonate with members of the public, which is important because delivery of Nature Networks can't happen without public engagement. All have a role to play whether it is a window box of wildflowers in a city tenement or a farmer applying for agri-environment funding. There are so many potential opportunities for partnerships, including local authorities, NGOs, land managers, community groups.

Claudia stressed the interwovenness of climate, biodiversity and the pandemic - they are inextricably linked. There are opportunities arising from all of these challenges and we need to see it that way. Claudia noted that she had hosted a Nature Networks (then National Ecological Network) event for LINK in the Parliament in June 2019. We were talking about similar issues then in terms of how to realise these networks. It's time for action now. It is important to ensure Nature Networks get into all party manifestoes, and she knows how much MSPs cross-party are positive about such a network.

Claudia talked about a recent television piece about hedgehog routes in Oxfordshire and how the community have worked together to improve connectivity across gardens, schools and in the wider landscape - inspiring! Cases like these highlight the issue of connectivity, something that we need to grapple with.

Claudia commented on the value of LINK's Species Champion initiative and how she had been delighted when asked to be a moth Species Champion. Claudia noted that her colleague Colin Smyth MSP, Species Champion for badger, took forward positive amendments to the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill. This interest was fostered by his role as Species Champion – a very positive initiative. In summary, Claudia noted that all is still to play for in terms of Nature Networks, both on land and at sea.

Panel Discussion: Q&A

Rachel Tennant asked **How will the Scottish Government's updated Land Use Strategy help Nature Networks?**

Emma commented that the Land Use Strategy is an important document. There has been progress in some areas but still more to be done in others. We need to identify the things that still need to be taken forward within the LUS. There is an opportunity to make sure that Nature Networks are getting the profile they deserve.

Claudia commented that, along with Graeme Dey MSP, they had argued for the LUS to be on a statutory footing. The LUS is a good way to involve everyone. The Tweed LUS pilot was robust and has been cross-organisation but, in spite of that, they can't run without sufficient funding. Thus the public

consultation on the Land Use Strategy will be important to make that point. She noted that ECCLR Committee will be scrutinising LUS.

Hebe Carus said we have some great habitat and species group-based initiatives (eg. species on the edge, Cairngorms Connect) and focus areas (eg. Important Plant Areas, Important Bird Areas). At the more national level we have National Planning Framework (NPF) which somewhat unspecifically supports nature networks, and other strategies and asked if the panellists could **offer comment on integrating these across species, habitats, and policies which will give the greatest impact and genuine delivery of a nature network at a national-level?**

Alistair noted that there are many partnerships and so many layers but do we have examples where it is working. The Atlantic Woodland Alliance for Scotland's rainforest which has diverse partners (NGOs, land managers, community groups) is a good example. We have a lot of evidence on the ecological state of nature but now it's time to start big thinking, and strategizing about how to deliver.

Alessandro thinks RLUPs are potentially a good way to deliver integrated planning - but they need real powers to be able to work effectively. Land managers need to be involved in the delivery of Nature Networks. Important that 'top down' meets 'bottom up' in order for delivery to be effective.

Juliette Camburn and Eve Keepax from Keep Scotland Beautiful asked **how can community groups get involved? How can they promote the film and materials to their networks? What is the film asking people to do – will LINK promote specific projects for people to engage with or particular opportunities for individual action?**

The LINK [webpage](#) has a link to the film and will be kept up to date with Nature Networks briefings and outputs which we would encourage all to use.

In terms of specific projects, Claudia noted there are many individuals and groups doing work on, for example, food poverty and climate and nature challenges. One example is the Glasgow coalition which is potentially [converting a golf course into a community growing area](#). They received money from the National Lottery. It is important for all manifestos to note the need for robust funding to ensure these types of community projects can be realised.

Emma noted that community land ownership has allowed communities to deliver a wide range of outcomes for nature.

Alistair commented that they are doing work at local level in the Cairngorms with community groups. Important to enable people to see how their activity is making a contribution at a broad scale. If we hang this work onto frameworks with planned partnership approaches, then that could make it easier?

Francesca Osowska of NatureScot asked **What needs to happen to make nature networks happen? And what (if any) is the connection between nature networks and designations?**

Alessandro suggested there needs to be a combination of scientific analyses and social processes in order to make implementation on the ground possible. Further evidence and data collection is needed to support this. There is NPF 4 and the direction of incentives for land managers to collaborate at a landscape scale. One thing that we haven't covered but is important to raise is that Nature Networks are essential for climate change adaptation – species need a permeable landscape to adapt as climate changes.

Debbie Bassett of NatureScot asked **Will the regional land use partnerships have a facilitation role in helping land managers and communities to agree regional priorities and facilitate delivery on the ground?**

Emma said the hope is that RLUPs will bring people together to discuss and find ways forward. The benefits of collaboration are rarely one-off and tend to spiral into many more wonderful outcomes. Therefore, sharing examples of good practice is important to bring about cultural change - this happens when people can see the benefits of projects.

Debbie Bassett highlighted that Scottish Government has recently published a report written by NatureScot on Delivering Scotland's ambition to secure positive effects for biodiversity <https://www.transformingplanning.scot/media/2131/securing-positive-effects-for-biodiversity.pdf>

Closing remarks

Deborah noted the need to work together. RLUPs could be the glue - tying national to regional priorities, building support, making more of opportunities and resources.

It is clear that we all need nature and nature needs us. A nature network offers a pragmatic solution that contributes to the current pandemic and helps prevent future ones, mitigates the impact of climate change and provides space for nature and for people to enjoy nature. To implement it, we need to see a shift in how we manage our land through planning, farming and upland management, forestry, marine habitat and species management and exploitation and green space management. We are seeing some of the changes needed: the grouse moorland management announcement last week, the four new Marine Protected Areas announced this morning (to safeguard species including basking sharks, Risso's dolphins, minke whales and sea fans), the thinking on future farming support, the inclusion of green and blue infrastructure into infrastructure planning and the potential of the National Planning Framework 4. But we need to see a strategic approach that brings it all together. This is where a nature network comes in.

Deborah asked everyone to spread the word about Nature Networks, to share the [full film](#), [introduction](#), [wild salmon clip](#) and [rainforest clip](#). Also, to read the LINK [Nature Networks briefing](#), the [Nature Based Solutions briefing](#), the [State of Nature report](#) and the [IPBES report](#). Above all, continue to connect to nature yourself and talk to as many people as possible about why you do that and why we all need to do more for nature and support those who can make the most change.

Deborah thanked Claudia for hosting the event, all speakers and participants for their contributions.

Attendees

Phil Baarda	NatureScot
Allan Bantick OBE	Scottish Badgers
Debbie Bassett	NatureScot
Claudia Beamish MSP	Member for South Scotland
Juliet Caldwell	Scottish Environment LINK
Juliette Camburn	Keep Scotland Beautiful
Hebe Carus	Scottish Wild Land Group
Nora Casey	RSPB Scotland
Emma Cooper	Scottish Land Commission
Cecilie Dohm	John Muir Trust
Emma Eastcott	WWF Scotland
Alessandro Gimona	James Hutton Institute
Emilia Hanna	ERCS
Peter Hutchinson	NatureScot
Eve Keepax	Keep Scotland Beautiful
Deborah Long	Scottish Environment LINK
Scot Mathieson	SEPA
Francesca Osowska	NatureScot
Roger Powell	Scottish Countryside Rangers' Association
Nina Schönberg	Ulster Wildlife
Julie Stoneman	Plantlife
Rachel Tennant	Landscape Institute Scotland
Naïma Todd	Woodland Trust Scotland
Vhairi Tollan	Scottish Environment LINK
Lottie VanGrieken	RSPB Scotland
Lisa Webb	Scottish Environment LINK
Alistair Whyte	Plantlife
Beatrice Wishart MSP	Member for Shetland Islands