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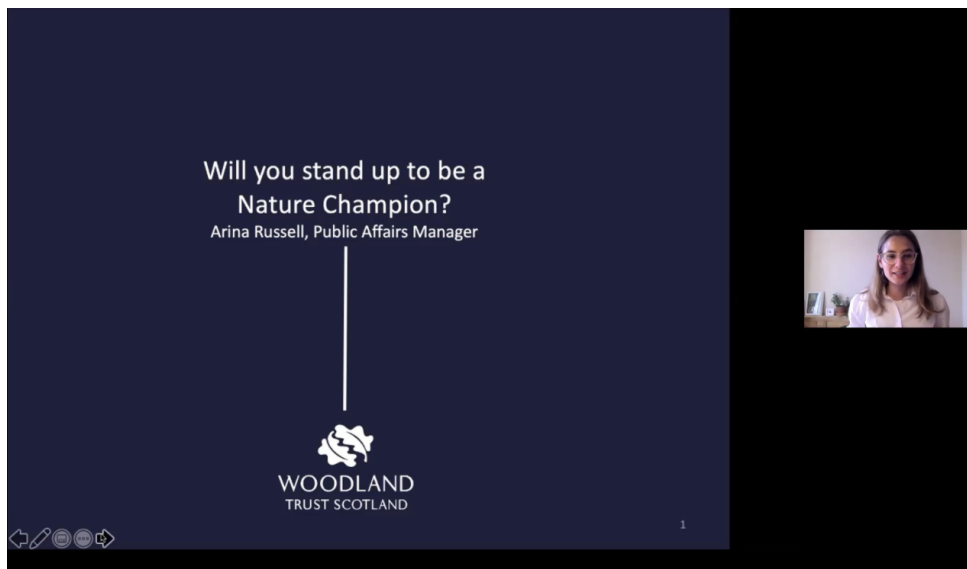
**Members of the Scottish Parliament lending political support to the protection of Scotland's threatened wildlife and habitats by becoming Nature Champions**

## Meet our Nature Champions



**A warm welcome to our 57 Nature Champions who are the voice in the Scottish Parliament for our most iconic and threatened species and habitats.**

## Nature Champions Launch



On June 3rd we launched the new [Nature Champions initiative](#). The Nature Champions initiative enables MSPs to champion endangered or iconic species and priority habitats, raising awareness and promoting action to restore and safeguard Scotland's environment. We were very pleased to welcome many MSPs to the launch event! Colin Smyth MSP, champion for badger, hosted the event with brilliant presentations from Woodland Trust Scotland, Marine Conservation Society and RSPB Scotland.

Nature Champions refreshes and develops the award-winning project, Species Champions. Since its launch in 2013, the Species Champion initiative went from strength to strength: with 56 MSPs signed up at the start of the parliamentary session in 2016 to 105 MSP champions at the end of the session, representing 80% of the Chamber.

MSPs have the opportunity to champion iconic habitats such as Caledonian pinewoods or threatened species such as the bog sun-jumper spider. Champions have the opportunity to meet and learn about their species and habitats on site visits, participate in conservation work and stand up for nature in parliament. The Nature Champions initiative puts the spotlight on our amazing species and habitats by encouraging MSPs to work together with environmental organisations and other MSPs, for the benefit of Scotland's natural environment.



Maree Todd MSP  
Champion for Flame Shell

At the launch event, a [film](#) which showcases the highlights and successes from the Species Champion initiative was shown. Many thanks to Claudia Beamish, John Finnie, Bill Bowman, Finlay Carson MSP and Maree Todd MSP for sharing their experiences of being Species Champions in the last parliamentary session.

## Nature Champions Back Biodiversity

**Clare Adamson MSP** @ClareAdamsonSNP  
I am proud to be #SpeciesChampion for the beautiful Small Pearl-Bordered Fritillary.  
Learn more about this magnificent creature and the threats to its habitats in Scotland @savebutterflies.  
#IBackBiodiversity  
[bit.ly/3IU1b3I](https://bit.ly/3IU1b3I)

**Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP** @alexcolehamilton  
I am proud to be a Scottish Environment LINK Nature Champion.  
Rusty bog-moss is an important peat-forming species found in wet bogs or at high altitudes. Sphagnum are 'keystone species' producing an environment which many other species need to survive  
#IBackBiodiversity #COP15

**Liam McArthur MSP** @LiamsOrkney  
Part 1 of #COP15 kicks off today and as a @ScotLINK Nature Champion - #IBackBiodiversity!  
I'm proud to champion the Scottish Primrose, now endemic to just a few places like #Orkney  
An international deal for nature must protect and restore our wildlife.

**Martin Whitfield MSP** @MWhitfield  
Did you know adders are not only the UK's most venomous snake but also an important indicator species? If they are in decline it suggests that other species who share the same habitat may also be in trouble 🐍 #IBackBiodiversity #COP15  
[scotlink.org/species/adder/](https://scotlink.org/species/adder/)

**Finlay Carson MSP** @fincaron  
Native oyster beds are among the most threatened marine habitats on 🌍! They are important ecosystem engineers, filtering millions of litres of seawater and helping to draw carbon down to the seabed.  
#IBackBiodiversity #COP15  
[scotlink.org/species/native...](https://scotlink.org/species/native...)

**Ariane Burgess** @ArianeBurgess8  
Part 1 #COP15 kicks off today and as @ScotLINK Nature Champion, of the Eurasian Beaver 🦫 and the Aspen 🌲 #IBackBiodiversity! The next 5 days, Nature Champions will highlight 10 species that play an important role in ecosystem 🌱  
[scotlink.org/nature-champio...](https://scotlink.org/nature-champio...)

**Nature Champions Back Biodiversity: Rusty Bog-moss**  
Sphagnum masses are essential building blocks of peat bogs. They are keystone species on which other peatland wildlife rely.  
They form peat by holding water, providing essential nutrients and preventing the decay of dead plant material.  
Working to restore the Flow Country to its original state. <https://www.rdgfloriculture.org.uk/flow-3/>

**Nature Champions Back Biodiversity: Adder**  
Adders are an indicator species. If they are in serious decline, this suggests many other species who depend on the same habitats are likely to be suffering too.  
Once its habitat is lost through climate change or habitat loss, it cannot migrate. Nature networks are vital.  
Creating habitats for adder & other species: Come Forth for Wildlife! <https://www.froggip.org/natur-heredonness-come-forth-for-wildlife/>

**Nature Champions Back Biodiversity: Native Oyster Beds**  
These 'ecosystem engineers' filter water and provide vital food and habitat for coastal wildlife.  
1 adult oyster can filter 50 litres of water in a single day. They bury carbon in the seabed and remove nitrogen from the water, recycling it into their shell.  
Supporting the construction of marine European oysters to the Dornoch Firth after a century's absence: <https://naturkeystonetwork.org/pa/fish/dnsp/>

**Nature Champions Back Biodiversity: Eurasian Beaver**  
The beaver is a keystone species that plays a vital role in its ecosystem. It creates wetlands, filters water and provides habitat for other wildlife.

COP15: the UN biodiversity summit tasked with agreeing the next set of 10-year targets to half and reverse nature's decline is hosted by China, and held in two parts. The first part took place between the 11th and 15th October. Part two will commence next May in the city of Kunming with the completion and adoption of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, a crucial stepping stone towards the 2050 vision of



“living in harmony with nature”. Over the course of the first part of COP15 , MSP Nature Champions provided real-life examples of crucial species and habitats that maintain ecosystem function whilst raising awareness of the inextricable link between the nature and climate crises.

The [Nature Champions Back Biodiversity](#) social media initiative shone a spotlight on a variety of plants, marine wildlife, pollinators, animals, peatlands and native woodlands that are vital in maintaining ecosystem function. The initiative also highlighted the importance of nature in tackling the climate crisis on the run up to the [UNFCCC COP26 which happened in November](#). People depend on nature, from oceans to forests, to supply clean air and water, and to pollinate crops vital for food supplies. If too many species vanish, and ecosystems start to fail, our natural life support services will falter. Political support for protecting our precious natural environment has never been more critical. The Nature Champions initiative puts biodiversity at the centre of the parliament’s attention. Our environment has no voice so we need Nature Champions to stand up for it and back biodiversity.

## B-Lines in Scotland win prestigious Nature of Scotland Innovation Award



The Buglife B-Line map for Scotland won the prestigious innovation category at the Nature of Scotland Awards 2021. The award ceremony in November was organised by RSPB Scotland, was co-sponsored by NatureScot and hosted by TV and radio presenter



Arlene Stuart.

B-Lines are Buglife's response to the decline of bees and other pollinating insects, a plan for how to reconnect our wild places by creating a network of wildflowers across our landscapes. They were mapped by local communities across Scotland, from the Scottish Borders to the Highlands & Islands, with support from a team of conservation scientists and GIS experts from Buglife.

The Scotland map was completed in December 2020 and the [full B-Lines report](#) for the UK launched in March 2021 with support from Patrick Harvie, Nature Champion for the Red mason bee, MSP for Glasgow, Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights and co-leader of the Scottish Green Party. Buglife are delighted that Patrick is once again our Nature Champion for Red mason bee this year.

*Claire Pumfrey, Buglife Conservation Officer, said "Our pollinators are in decline for a number of reasons, but the main cause is the loss of wildflowers in our countryside and urban areas. B-Lines maps and then creates a network of wildflowers, creating connections for our wildlife to move more freely across our landscape. Thank you to everyone who has helped with the map and been involved with B-Lines projects so far, now we need to continue to make this happen on the ground"*

Buglife is still looking for Nature Champions – the New Year would be a perfect time to join us, especially a [Northern February red stonefly](#) champion. This is an endemic freshwater species, found in Scotland and nowhere else in the world. It mainly occurs in northern Scotland, particularly the north-east and the Highlands. The adults can be seen emerging on riverbanks in sunshine, from February to March, and hence Buglife will be launching our annual Northern February red survey in January – we would love you to be a part of that with us. Help us continue to save the small things that run the planet!

*Natalie Stevenson, Scotland Manager of Buglife Scotland*

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**What happens to badgers?**



The crux of the problem about badgers could be 'out of sight, out of thought', because it's not easy to see a nocturnal mammal. Badgers are our fourth largest UK mammal species (after red deer, roe deer and beavers), and one of our oldest. They have been persecuted continually since the 1400s, and maybe before that.

Overall, we are probably at a tipping-point now – badgers could possibly be totally wiped out as a species in the UK in the near future. Badgers are probably only surviving in the UK nowadays because they can firstly live in almost any type of habitat, and they are truly omnivorous, feeding on almost anything. However, because they tend to live in semi-permanent setts, they are very vulnerable.

So, what happens to badgers? A whole variety of acts by humans;

- Many badgers are being killed (at a cost of about £7k a time) via the badger cull in England, due to go on for a further 4 years
- Badgers are persecuted by fox hunts, because foxes tend to go and hide (sometimes) in badger setts, so the setts are (illegally) torn apart.
- Human development, whether road or house or rail development, together with forestry and agriculture results in a loss of foraging habitats, and loss of connectivity between setts.

Let's look at the place where most people see badgers – roads and deaths. This kills most badgers in numbers – badgers do not know about motor vehicles and roads. They just follow paths known to them by smell towards food.

In Scotland, we collect about 1,200 reports a year of badger Road Traffic accidents (RTAs), each year, and research has shown that the true number killed each year is possibly some 4,500 – 5,000 deaths. Badger paths in tunnels under new roads, help reduce deaths, but they are costly. Badger setts with resident badgers can also be

moved. The recently opened Western Aberdeen Peripheral Road had some 19 or so new setts constructed away from the road.

There is in addition, the impact of badger baiting, the why, where and how, which takes place in every very part of Scotland, and involves many different types of people. For more information, visit the [Scottish Badgers website](#). [Click here](#) to read more of Eddie's blogs on the Wild Mammal Persecution UK website.

*Eddie Palmer, Chairman of Scottish Badgers*

## RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch



RSPB's [Big Garden Birdwatch](#), the UK's largest citizen science project on garden wildlife, is back on 28<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> January. 2021 saw a record of over 78,000 people taking part in Scotland, with participants in every corner of the country, a mark of how important it's been to connect with nature in our local area during the pandemic. The [results](#) show us how bird populations are changing due to climate change, habitat loss and other pressures on the planet we call home. House sparrow numbers have dropped by over half across the UK since Big Garden Birdwatch started in 1979, with similar declines in garden favourites like starlings, blackbirds and robins. This is similar to other measures of how well nature is doing, such as the [State of Nature Report](#), which says that 1 in 9 Scottish species are threatened with extinction, and the [Biodiversity Intactness Index](#), which shows that Scotland has lost over half its natural diversity. We all need to work together to restore nature and guarantee a future for garden birds in Scotland.

We are grateful to the MSPs who have supported Big Garden Birdwatch through counting birds in their park or garden and through publicising the event and



encouraging their friends and constituents to take part. Participation packs will be sent out soon and we hope that you sign up – all you need to do is count the birds that land in one area for an hour, and it can be anywhere you like. You can talk about your Big Garden Birdwatch experience online using the hashtag #BigGardenBirdWatch. If you'd like help with encouraging your constituents to take part, please contact [Nora Casey](#) for a template press release or anything else we can help you with.

*Nora Casey, Parliamentary Officer of RSPB Scotland*

## Nature Champions Activity

We are thrilled to see Nature 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.



### River Woods

**Rachael Hamilton MSP**, Nature Champion for riparian woodland visited Scottish Wildlife Trust Pease Dean reserve with Woodland Trust Scotland to discuss the Land Use Strategy and how expanding native riparian woods can benefit wild salmon.



### Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels

**Alexander Burnett MSP**, Nature Champion for red squirrel, met with Scottish Wildlife Trust online to discuss the work of the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels partnership and activities that Alex can get involved in as an MSP to help the species.

### On the hunt for Bilberry Bumblebees



They are at risk from climate change so we all need to take that seriously and do all we can to protect species like this

### On the hunt for Bilberry Bumblebees

**Graham Simpson MSP**, Nature Champion for bilberry bumblebee and ash, recorded his first ever sighting of the bee on Ben Lawers National Nature Reserve with Bumblebee Conservation Trust.



### Knapdale Beaver Reintroduction

**Ariane Burgess MSP**, Nature Champion for beaver, visited the site of the Knapdale Forest reintroduction with Scottish Wildlife Trust to learn about the multiple benefits that beaver can bring. Unfortunately, no beavers glimpsed on the trip but plenty of signs of them!



### Dundreggan Conservation Estate

**Ariane Burgess MSP**, Nature Champion for beaver and aspen, visited the Trees for Life Dundreggan Conservation Estate to learn about the research and trials done there to support natural regeneration of aspen.



### LINK's first ever Paths Champion

**Sandesh Gulhane MSP**, Nature Champion for paths, met with Ramblers Scotland at Glasgow Botanic Gardens to discuss the importance of paths for people's mental and physical wellbeing.

[Click here](#) to watch a video of Ramblers Scotland Director, Brendan Paddy, and Sandesh Gulhane MSP discussing how they can work together to support more walking in Scotland.



### Shore Watch

**Beatrice Wishart MSP**, Nature Champion for orca, met with Whale and Dolphin Conservation on Shetland to discuss Shore Watch, a citizen science project that records the occurrence of cetaceans during regular, standardised watches from a series of locations along the coast of Scotland.



### North Wood

**Graham Simpson MSP**, Nature Champion for ash and bilberry bumblebee, met with Woodland Trust Scotland at North Wood in Livingston to discuss ash dieback. Graham has backed calls for a new biosecurity strategy to protect native tree populations from pest and disease outbreaks.





## Badger Setts

**Colin Smyth MSP**, Nature Champion for badger, met the Scottish Borders branch of charity Scottish Badgers to visit a sett near Melrose and set up two of the branches new trail cameras to capture activity on the sett.



## Dunollie Rainforest

**Jenni Minto MSP**, Nature Champion for Scotland's Rainforest, visited Dunollie rainforest in Oban with Plantlife Scotland and Woodland Trust to see the amazing biodiversity the rainforest has to offer.



## Moffat Golden Eagle Festival

**Lorna Slater MSP**, Nature Champion for golden eagle, attended Moffat Golden Eagle festival with Scottish Raptor Study Group, RSPB Scotland and John Muir Trust.



## Argaty Red Kites

**Meghan Gallacher MSP**, Nature Champion for red kite, visited Argaty Red Kites with Scottish Raptor Study Group and RSPB Scotland to hear more about the project from owner and operator Tom Bowser.



## From the Amazon Rainforest to Scotland's Rainforest

**Jenni Minto MSP**, Nature Champion for Scotland's Rainforest welcomed members of Association Jiboiana from the Amazon rainforest to Scotland's Rainforest at an event organised by Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest. Jenni discussed the connections between tropical and temperate rainforests, nature-based solutions to the climate emergency at Lochgoilhead.



## Migdale and Ledmore Woods

**Emma Roddick MSP**, Nature Champion for capercaillie, visited Migdale and Ledmore with Woodland Trust Scotland to learn about upcoming changes to legislation and protecting native species. Emma mentioned that it was great to hear their plans to introduce capercaillie to the woods.



RSPB Scotland's **Glasgow to Globe** greenspace took place in the Glasgow Botanic gardens. The living exhibition, which was created as part of the RSPB's [Revive Our World](#) project in partnership with the Central Scotland Giving Nature a Home team, provided visitors with an opportunity to explore the role which nature can play in solving the climate and nature emergency.



**Paul Sweeney MSP**, Nature Champion for house sparrow.

**John Mason MSP**, Nature Champion for kestrel.

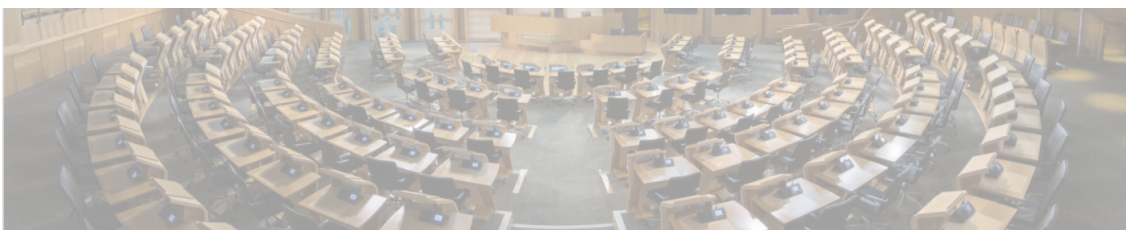
**Monica Lennon MSP**, Nature Champion for oak.

## Nature Champions in Parliament



### Great Borders River Clean Debate

**Rachael Hamilton MSP**, Nature Champion for riparian woodland, stood up for nature at the Great Borders River Clean debate. Rachael highlighted how the Scottish Government should incentivise the uptake of well-planned riparian woodland creation through, for example, the forestry grant scheme. She emphasised how schemes could be extended to include riparian woodland species. Rachael also discussed how creating nature network corridors would be another fantastic way of meeting riparian habitat aspirations in all local authority areas right across Scotland, and the regional land use partnerships could also be used to deliver riparian networks at scale across the country.



## Beavers

**Ariane Burgess MSP**, Nature Champion for beaver lodged a motion to highlight that beavers are a protected species and that translocation rather than killing of beavers is a necessary measure to tackle the nature emergency.

## Marine Species

**Beatrice Wishart MSP**, Nature Champion for orca asked a Parliamentary Question on whether the Scottish Government will support the creation of a strong evidence base on mitigation methods for offshore noise to help reduce any damage to marine species and ecosystems.

## Rhododendron

**Emma Roddick MSP**, Nature Champion for capercaillie lodged a motion to highlight the Woodland Trust Scotland's 'Rhododendron in the rainforest: approaches to a growing problem' report and the challenges of rhododendron eradication.

## Red Squirrel

**Alexander Burnett MSP**, Nature Champion for red squirrel asked a Parliamentary Question on what plans the Scottish Government have to support red squirrel conservation, following the conclusion of the five-year Developing Community Action phase of the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels project.

## Native Woodlands

**Monica Lennon MSP**, Nature Champion for oak asked a Parliamentary Question on what action the Scottish Government is taking to protect and restore Scotland's ancient and long-established woodlands in light of the report, State of the UK's Woods and Trees 2021, which found that these woods are important carbon stores.



Scottish Environment LINK would like to wish all Nature 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 40 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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