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Nature Champions

Summer Newsletter 2022

Scotland's Nature Champions - Summer 2022



A warm welcome to the **75 Nature Champions** of this Parliamentary Session!

In this Nature Champions Newsletter, you can catch up on all of the Nature Champions activity from the past few months - from motions to site visits - as well as hear a bit more about what some Scottish Environment LINK members have been up to!

Thank you, as always, for your support and for being the voice for Scotland's threatened species and priority habitats in the Scottish Parliament.

LINK Members - New Faces



Dan Paris

Advocacy Manager
Scottish Environment LINK



Mirran Trimble

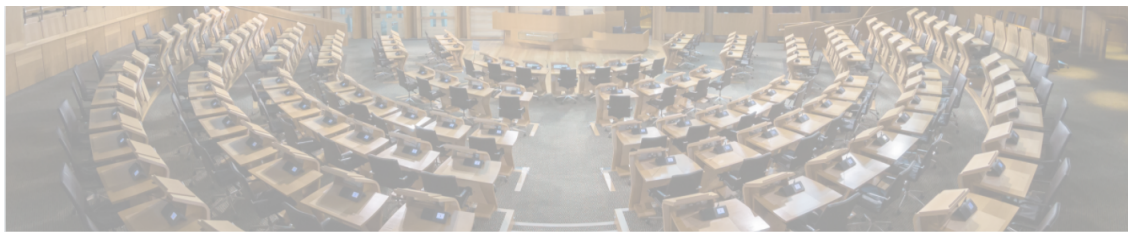
'Come Forth for Wildlife' Project Officer
Froglife



Andrew Marks

Nature Champions Coordinator
Scottish Environment LINK

Nature Champions in Parliament



Protecting Blue Corridors

Kenneth Gibson MSP, Nature Champion for the **Blue Whale**, lodged a motion in February to recognise WWF's 'Protecting Blue Corridors' report. The motion highlighted the threats that whales are encountering within their ocean habitats and advocated for protecting blue corridors as part of the Government's wider ocean recovery efforts.

Sea Eagles on Mull

Mark Ruskell MSP, Nature Champion for the **White-tailed Eagle**, lodged a motion in March welcoming RSPB Scotland's report, 'The Economic Impact of White-tailed Eagles on the Isle of Mull'. This report revealed some of the significant financial benefits (c. £4.9-8 million) that Mull's white-tailed eagles bring to Scotland and Mull.

Planting Native Trees

In May, **Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP**, Nature Champion for the **Caledonian Pine Wood**, lodged a written question in which he asked the Scottish Government "what analysis it has carried out of the ecological and functional benefits that might arise from the planting of tree species native to Scotland, and what action it is taking to ensure that these are realised".

Ancient and Veteran Trees

In June, **Monica Lennon MSP**, Nature Champion for the **Oak**, lodged a written question in which she asked the Scottish Government "what protections exist for ancient and veteran trees, and how ancient and veteran trees are recorded for protection purposes."

Golden Eagles of the South

Christine Grahame MSP, Nature Champion for the **Golden Eagle**, lodged a motion in June which recognised the the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project and its many successful translocations of young eagles, which have contributed to a record c.33 golden eagles in South Scotland. This motion highlighted the Golden Eagle Festival on 16-18 September.

Peatland Hilltracks

In June, **Sarah Boyack MSP**, Nature Champion for the **Large Heath Butterfly**, lodged a written question in which she asked the Scottish Government "what consideration has been given to any environmental impact of hill tracks constructed on peatland under permitted development rights".

Swift Awareness Week

Gordon MacDonald MSP, Nature Champion for Swifts, lodged a motion to recognise the fifth annual Swift Awareness Week, between 2-10th July 2022. This motion also highlighted that swifts were added to the Red List of birds of highest conservation concern, following a reported reduction of 58% in the UK swift population in the last 25 years.



LINK Parliamentary Reception: Scotland and the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration



Restoring Scotland's Nature - Video premiered at the LINK Parliamentary Reception

Scottish Environment LINK was delighted to host a Parliamentary reception at Holyrood on the 18th May, titled 'Scotland in the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration'.

This event was kindly sponsored by Ariane Burgess MSP, who spoke at the event alongside the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, Lorna Slater, and Scottish Environment LINK's Chief Officer, Dr Deborah Long.



This reception brought MSPs from different political parties together to learn more about the work that is being done across Scotland to restore our wildlife and habitats in this, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

The full text of the speech delivered by Deborah Long, in which she outlines the 5 key suggested priorities for the coming year can be found [here](#).

Will you stand up for our living legends?



Ancient and veteran trees are awe inspiring. They are old for their species, and some have endured for many thousands of years like the enigmatic yew that has been sacred to numerous religious groups throughout history, a sign of life, death and re-

birth.

Ancient and veteran trees are valuable assets in our fight against climate change and Scotland's push to conserve and restore nature. They are critical for wildlife, create connectivity across landscape, and provide vital ecosystem services. In fact, research published by the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology in 2019 found oak trees, one of our longest-lived trees, can support 2300 species.

There is also something undoubtedly intriguing about old trees. They are sentinels who have watched the passing of human time. Ancient trees have seen historic moments and have been captured in our artwork and literature like the Birnam Oak, one of the last remaining trees of the Birnam Wood immortalised in Shakespeare's Macbeth "I will not be afraid of death and bane, Till Birnam forest come to Dunsinane."

However, ancient and veteran trees have no automatic legal protection in Scotland, and they face many threats. They have to contend with rural and urban development, poorly managed health and safety concerns, pests and diseases, vandalism, mismanagement and climate change amongst other threats.

Therefore, the Woodland Trust has launched its [Living Legends Campaign](#). The Trust hopes this campaign will showcase the importance and vulnerability of our oldest and most important trees.

The campaign calls on the Scottish and governments from across the UK to:

1. Protect ancient trees - give the UK's very oldest and most important trees legal protection - like endangered wildlife, castles and old buildings already have.
2. Stop the loss of old trees to development - strengthen policy protection so that trees everywhere can grow old safe from harm. That's whether they're in new developments, urban areas or the countryside.
3. Increase support for tree care - make it easier for people who own and manage our oldest trees to access support to look after them.

We'd love to tell you more about it and how you, in your role as a Nature Champion, can help support the campaign. So far, Monica Lennon MSP, our Nature Champion for the oak tree, one of our longest-lived trees, has lodged parliamentary questions on protections for these trees. There are opportunities coming up in the fourth National Planning Framework, the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, and the Natural Environment Bill to embed the asks above so we need all the support we can get!

Suzie Saunders, Policy Advocate at Woodland Trust

Searching for rare bumblebees in the Outer Hebrides



Alasdair Allan, MSP for the Western Isles, had his first encounter with a special bumblebee species this month. It wasn't the rare Great Yellow bumblebee he represents as Nature Champion, which proved too illusive on this occasion. Instead, it was the Moss carder bee, another beautiful bumblebee species, which, coincidentally, is in the market for an MSP Nature Champion as it has sadly declined dramatically over the last century.

Alasdair and his team joined Katy Malone, Conservation Officer at Bumblebee Conservation Trust, as she delivered a training event on the Eoropie Machair, on the Isle of Lewis. Machair grasslands are wonderfully vibrant, flower-rich coastal habitats, cultivated by crofters using low-intensity agricultural methods and provide Scotland's rarest bumblebee populations with key food resources. Their conservation and management are critical to the fate of species like the Great Yellow. Despite not managing to find a Great Yellow on the day, Alasdair was upbeat about standing up for nature in Scotland:

"As the proud Nature Champion for the Great Yellow Bumblebee, I was delighted to get the opportunity recently to participate in an event at Eoropie, on the Isle of Lewis, which promoted the understanding of the natural environment in the islands. Some species, like the Great Yellow Bumblebee, have some of their main remaining habitats here in the islands, and so it was great to get the chance to hear about the work being done to preserve this type of habitat, as well as promoting knowledge about rare

species like this.”

Bumblebee Conservation Trust are looking forward to working more with Alasdair to make sure rare gems like the Great Yellow and the Moss carder bumblebees are able to thrive again. They have been busy developing a new project aimed at delivering critical conservation work across the Western Isles and engaging with the local community about how they can help.

Should any MSP like to stand up to champion the beautiful Moss carder bumblebee or the wonderfully rich Machair grassland habitat, please get in touch with Scottish Environment Link.

Darryl Cox, Senior Science and Policy Officer at Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Image: (c) Dave Goulson

Swift Awareness Week with RSPB



We have just marked the fifth annual Swift Awareness Week (2nd – 10th July). As part of this week, we were delighted to have worked with our swift Nature Champion, Gordon MacDonald MSP, to raise awareness of these iconic birds and this important week.

Swifts are one of the classic signs of summer. They return to the same nesting sites in Scotland from Africa each year from early May and they leave again from early August after their chicks have fledged.

Sadly, swifts were recently added to the Red List of birds of “highest conservation concern” in the 2021 Birds of Conservation Concern 5 report. It is true that many migratory species appear to be suffering from declines, but swifts have been particularly hit hard. Shockingly, we have lost 58% of swifts from the UK in the past 25 years.

The loss of nest sites in the roofs of buildings has particularly contributed to their decline; however, we can help by installing swift nest boxes and making sure we do not block old nests when we are insulating and renovating our homes. Equally, insects are part of swifts’ staple diet and so by growing more wildflowers (which insects feed on) in parks and gardens and by reducing our pesticide use, we can help insects and, in turn, swifts to thrive.

To aid our conservation efforts, together with our partners Action for Swifts, Natural Apptitude, Swift Conservation and the Swifts Local Network, the RSPB have developed Swift Mapper; a web-based mapping system and mobile app.

By telling us where you see nesting swifts you’ll help to build a picture of where swift nest sites need to be protected and where it would be best to provide new nest sites. The best time to look for nesting swifts is from late May to late July, around dusk on a warm, still evening or early in the morning. If you see a swift, please let us know us through [Swift Mapper](#).

Rhiannon Lee, Policy and Advocacy Volunteer with RSPB Scotland

ARC - Newtyle amphibian project



Amphibian and Reptile Conservation's 'Saving Scotland's Amphibians and Reptiles' (SSAAR) project was delighted to partner with Friends of Angus Herpetofauna and local residents in Newtyle, on a mission to save amphibians from gully pots (also known as storm/roadside drains).

Newtyle is a lovely village in the west of Angus, with a large common toad population. About two years ago, two local residents started to rescue amphibians (and the occasional small mammal) from drains on their street.

Amphibians often cross roads on their way to and from their breeding ponds and may also spend time on the road surface trying to catch prey or intercept mates. Consequently, road traffic kills many amphibians but large numbers also become trapped and eventually die inside roadside drains from drowning, starvation or exposure to pollution. Kerbs make the problem worse, by making it difficult for amphibians to leave the road and by channelling animals toward gully pots. In the absence of other mitigation measures, amphibian ladders can be installed to help amphibians (and mammals) to climb back out of drains.



Together with Friends of Angus Herpetofauna and Angus Council, we organised an event on Monday 18th July and were delighted to have 22 people attend. The evening session started with a presentation on amphibian ID, an introduction to gully pots and the challenges, followed by some examples of amphibian friendly drainage systems, mitigation measures for existing gully pot systems and a demonstration on how to construct an amphibian ladder. The group then proceeded to work in teams to construct their ladders and armed with our 14 ladders, we headed out to install them. We also handed out amphibian rescue kits to anyone who was keen to sign up to help in surveying other gully pots in Newtyle and beyond!

With limited data on the potential impact of gully pots on amphibian populations in Scotland (and the rest of the UK), we are aiming to recruit and train volunteer surveyors to carry out surveys to inform evidence-based conservation.

Rachael Cooper-Bohannon, Saving Scotland's Amphibians and Reptiles (SSAAR) Project Officer at Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC)

Nature Champions Updates

We are always thrilled to see Nature Champions learning about, engaging with and visiting their species and habitats. With 1 in 9 species facing extinction in Scotland, we need urgent action for nature like never before!



Photo: Deborah Long/ScotLINK

Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest

Jenni Minto MSP, Nature Champion for Scotland's Rainforest, joined Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest partner organisations, funders and supporters to celebrate Scotland's Rainforest at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh in April. Jenni spoke about the communities that depend on these landscapes and her passion for these rare habitats.



Photo: Andrew Marks/ScotLINK

Searching for Adders at Cashel

In May, Martin Whitfield MSP, Nature Champion for the Adder, joined Froglife CEO, Kathy Wormald, at Cashel Forest and Native Forest Centre, next to Loch Lomond. Although the weather wasn't ideal for adder-spotting, Kathy and Martin spoke about the importance of habitat protection in supporting the species' recovery.



Photo: Kelvin Thomson/SRSG

Hen Harrier Watch

Elena Whitham MSP, Nature Champion for the **Hen Harrier**, joined the Scottish Raptor Study Group (SRSG) for a day of hen harrier watching in Tarras Valley Nature Reserve. Elena was lucky to see both a male and female at close quarters!



Photo: Alice Walters/WDC

Orca Week Shorewatch

Beatrice Wishart MSP, Nature Champion for **Orca**, joined **Emma Steel**, Whale and Dolphin Conservation's (WDC) Shorewatch Coordinator for the Northern isles, for a spot of shorewatching at Mousa Sound on Shetland during Orca Week, which this year took place from 28th May - 5th June.



Photo: Alistair Whyte/Plantlife

Thriving Road Verges

Mercedes Villalba MSP, Nature Champion for **Road Verges**, joined Head of Plantlife Scotland, **Alistair Whyte**, to see Dundee City Council's thriving road verges. Dundee City Council have been working with **Eden Project International** to encourage these rich roadside habitats. Mercedes and Alistair were also able to discuss Plantlife's Road Verge Management Guidelines.



Photo: Buglife Scotland

River Walk along the Esk

Colin Beattie MSP, Nature Champion for **Rivers**, took a walk with Buglife's Conservation Director, **Craig Macadam**, along the River Esk. Colin and Craig enjoyed vibrant discussions around the important steps that we can take towards conserving and restoring Scotland's vital river ecosystems.



Photo: Kelvin Thomson/SRSG

Red Kites in Argaty

Meghan Gallacher MSP, Nature Champion for **Red Kites**, joined the Scottish Raptor Study Group (SRSG) at Argaty Red Kite's feeding station in June to learn firsthand about conservation monitoring techniques undertaken by SRSG and Argaty Red Kites.



Photo: Kelvin Thomson/SRSG

ID Tagging Kestrel Chicks

John Mason MSP, Nature Champion for **Kestrels**, got stuck in with the Scottish Raptor Study Group (SRSG) at Argaty Red Kites. They spent a sunny day ID tagging, or 'ringing', five kestrel chicks and learning about the conservation monitoring of kestrels undertaken by SRSG across Scotland.



Photo: Nora Casey/RSPB

Swift Week in Balerno

Gordon MacDonald MSP, Nature Champion for **Swifts**, joined RSPB Scotland in Balerno to look at some of the swift boxes donated to local residents in Balerno through the Swift Cities project, including some of the swift boxes made by Harmeny School students!



Photo: @EvelynTweedSNP

Azure Hawkers and Climate Change

Evelyn Tweed MSP, Nature Champion for **Azure Hawker** dragonflies, met with British Dragon Society's Scotland Officer, **Daniele Muir**, to discuss this illusive and rare species, and the negative impacts of climate change on their habitats.

Scottish Environment LINK would like to wish all Nature Champions an enjoyable summer recess.



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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