



Nature Champions

Autumn Newsletter 2022

Scotland's Nature Champions - Autumn 2022



Greetings to the 80 Nature Champions of this Parliamentary Session!

A particularly warm welcome to our five newest Nature Champions:

Keith Brown MSP (Nathusius Pipistrelle)

Fiona Hyslop MSP (Blanket Bogs)

Fulton MacGregor MSP (Great Crested Newt)

Audrey Nicoll MSP (Freshwater Pearl Mussel)

Kaukab Stewart MSP (Corncrake)

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 habitats in the Scottish Parliament.

LINK Members - New Faces



Emmy Cooper-Young

Shellfish Restoration Officer
**Marine Conservation
Society**



Katie Dyke

Policy Officer
**WDC, Whale and Dolphin
Conservation**



Thomas Widrow

Parliamentary Officer
John Muir Trust

Nature Champions in Parliament



In September, **Fiona Hyslop MSP**, Nature Champion for **Blanket Bogs**, declared her Nature Champion role within Portfolio Question Time and pressed for the systematic restoration of Scotland's peatlands to help Scotland to reach its climate targets. Watch the full question and response [here](#).

White-tailed Eagles

In July, **Mark Ruskell MSP**, Nature Champion for the **White-tailed Eagle**, lodged a written question in which he asked the Scottish Government "what its response is to reported calls for white-tailed eagles to be culled".

Native Woodland Targets

In August, **Monica Lennon MSP**, Nature Champion for the **Oak**, lodged a written question in which she asked the Scottish Government "whether it will set clear and robust targets to protect, restore and expand native woodland habitats".

Wildlife Tunnels

In August, **Martin Whifield MSP**, Nature Champion for the **Adder**, asked the Scottish Government "what steps it plans to take to increase the number and size of wildlife tunnels and bridges in order to reduce the reported high level of wildlife casualties on Scotland's roads.".

Farm for Scotland's Future



Members of Scottish Environment LINK have launched a new campaign to call for a farm funding system that works for nature, climate and people.

The **Farm for Scotland's Future** campaign is backed by more than thirty environment, food and farming organisations. It calls on the Scottish government to replace the decades-old system of farm funding with a new system that helps farmers and crofters manage their land in ways that protect and restore nature, tackle climate change, and revitalise rural areas.

As well as producing food, farmers and crofters manage three quarters of Scotland's land. Yet many current farming practices cause pollution and severely deplete our wildlife. Farming is also one of the top three sources of climate emissions in Scotland.

The Scottish Government spends more than half a billion pounds a year on farm funding. It plans to introduce a new agriculture bill in 2023 to update its funding system. We believe that the government must transform farm funding to make Scottish farming sustainable.

We need a new farm funding system that helps farmers and crofters reduce chemical and pesticide use, adopt low carbon farming methods, make space for nature by creating woodlands, hedgerows and wildflower rich grasslands - and much more.

The campaign asks that the upcoming Agriculture Bill:

- Ensures at least three quarters of public spending on farming supports methods that restore nature and tackle climate change.
- Supports all farmers and crofters in the transition to sustainable farming.

As part of the campaign, Farm for Scotland's Future have created a **farming policy video game** - can you sort out Scotland's farming policy to help farmers and crofters restore nature and tackle climate change?

Find out more about the campaign [on their website](#).

[Play the Farming Policy Video Game!](#)

People's Plan For Nature



Eighty-three percent of adults in Scotland believe nature is under threat and more urgently needs to be done to protect and restore it, according to polling from the RSPB Scotland and WWF Scotland.

The majority have seen a decline in nature and wildlife in their local areas; with close to half (47%) expressing a willingness to take action themselves to avert a nature crisis. However 39% don't feel empowered to do so.

These results come as the RSPB, WWF and the National Trust - three of the UK's biggest conservation charities - join forces with celebrity champions Maisie Williams and Cel Spellman to launch the People's Plan for Nature, inviting the nation to have its say on how the UK solves the ongoing nature crisis.

Through both a UK-wide conversation and the first ever citizens' assembly for nature, the charities are inviting the public to share their ideas and together develop a set of public demands to tackle the nature crisis - calling on the leaders of all four nations to take action before it's too late.

The charities feel the time is ripe for co-creating a proposal for nature's recovery as the polling shows that the people in Scotland already would like to see improvements in their local areas, including:

- **more action for cleaner rivers, waterways and seas (49%),**
- **more protection for nature in the planning and housebuilding system (33%)**
- **strengthened legal protection for nature, wildlife, and habitats (36%).**

People from Scotland and the rest of the UK can submit their thoughts on the future of nature in the UK on peoplesplanfornature.org by the 30th October. The charities have also partnered with Future Art Centres (a network of independent cultural centres across the UK) to help facilitate the nationwide conversation. The public will be invited to add their ideas to specially-designed tree installations at 30 Art Centres around the country. The trees can be found at venues including Eden Court in Inverness, Lyth Arts Centre in Caithness, Lairg Learning Centre, Pearce Institute in Glasgow, and Glasgow Science Centre.

A representative group of 100 people from across the UK will come together as a citizens' assembly to develop a set of recommendations to help and restore nature in the UK, starting in November this year.

Find out more about the People's Plan for Nature [on their website](#).

Image: (c) People's Plan for Nature

Searching for rare dragonflies at Flanders Moss



The weather was sunny for our visit to Dragonfly Hotspot Flanders Moss National Nature Reserve with new Azure Hawker Nature Champion **Evelyn Tweed MSP**.

Daniele from the British Dragonfly Society, Dragonfly recorder for the site David McCulloch and Nature Scot site manager Ameer Hood were keen to show Evelyn the wonderful dragonflies and damselflies that make Flanders Moss their home.

BDS Scottish Conservation Officer Daniele Muir said "It was a beautiful day for spotting dragonflies and introducing Evelyn to these wonderful insects. Although Evelyn's species the Azure Hawker isn't found at Flanders Moss, we managed to see Black Darters and Large Red Damselflies flying around, and even a pair of Common Hawkers mating! When we carried out some guddling, we also found some larvae of Four-spotted Chasers and Common Hawkers."

"Many species of rare dragonfly rely on peatlands for their home - such as the Azure Hawker, White-faced Darter and Northern Emerald - and are threatened by climate change and the extraction of peat for compost and I look forward to working with Evelyn to secure a better future for these rare peatland dragonflies."

Evelyn's constituency is the Stirling area, with Azure Hawker being found in Glen Lochay. She said 'The Azure Hawker is a very elusive and rare Scottish species with some in my Stirling constituency. Their habitat is being eroded by climate change so I'm happy to take on this role.'

Daniele Muir, Scottish Conservation Officer at British Dragonfly Society

Image: (c) Daniele Muir

Get Sett Scotland



Scottish Environment LINK member, Scottish Badgers, has commenced a 3-year project entitled 'Get Sett Scotland'. The project, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, will incorporate a re-run of the Scottish Badger Distribution Survey undertaken the by charity back in 2006-2009. The aim of this new citizen science project is to estimate change in the density and distribution of badger main setts

across a range of habitats in Scotland.

Over the course of 2022-2025, 500 trained volunteers will survey 1000 pre-selected 1-km squares across Scotland for badger setts, field signs and signs of human disturbance to setts. Surveyors will also record information on habitats found within each survey site.

Biomathematics and Statistics Scotland (BioSS), formally part of the James Hutton Institute and the team involved in the 2006-2009 survey, will undertake the analysis and design the re-survey methodology to estimate recorder error rates. BioSS specialises in the development and application of the quantitative methods needed to enhance scientific knowledge and impact. Changes in habitat and the effect of human disturbance will be analysed to determine their effect on badger sett distribution and density.

Volunteer surveyors will receive high quality classroom and field-based training to replicate the training from the original survey. Training will include badger biology, ecology, survey methodology, health & safety, Scottish Outdoor Access Code, map reading and how to identify wildlife crime.

Surveyors will be supported by a staff team led by Programme Manager Elaine Rainey who has over 15 years' experience in the field and who coordinated the original survey. Community Engagement Officer Morag Boyd will bring her extensive experience in environmental education and volunteer management to recruit, train and support the volunteer surveyors. Species Protection/ Information Officer Joe Connelly will bring his expertise in wildlife crime to the project.

The Get Sett Scotland project has an overarching aim to create a national of Badger Champions by providing volunteers with flexible development pathways including training in public speaking, fundraising and the use of digital media.

Elaine Rainey, Programme Manager at Scottish Badgers

Image: (c) Andy Marks

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: RSPB Scotland

Bird Flu and Scotland's seabirds

Karen Adam MSP, Nature Champion for the **Fulmar**, joined local councillors and RSPB Scotland at the Troup Head Nature Reserve in Aberdeenshire. It was a sobering visit due to the outbreak of bird flu in seabirds, but it was an important opportunity to discuss the outbreak and other issues impacting Scotland's seabird communities.



Photo: Daniele Muir/BDS

Dragonflies and damselflies galore!

In August, **Evelyn Tweed MSP**, Nature Champion for the **Azure Hawker**, joined the British Dragonfly Society at Flanders Moss National Nature Reserve. Daniele from the British Dragonfly Society, Dragonfly recorder for the site David McCulloch and Nature Scot site manager Ameer Hood were keen to show Evelyn the wonderful dragonflies and damselflies that make Flanders their home.



Photo: Andy Marks/ScotLINK

On your marks, Get Sett Scotland

Colin Smyth MSP, Nature Champion for the **Badger**, met with Scottish Badgers' staff and local volunteers at WWT Caerlaverock and viewed some local badger setts. Scottish Badgers has recently commenced a three-year project entitled 'Get Sett Scotland', which will estimate change in the density and distribution of badger main setts across a range of habitats in Scotland.



Photo: Andy Marks/ScotLINK

Bats on your doorstep

Miles Briggs MSP, Nature Champion for the **Noctule Bat**, joined Bat Conservation Trust's Scottish Bat Officer, Claudia Gebhardt, on an evening walk around St Margaret's Loch in Holyrood Park. Sadly, no Noctule bats were spotted, but there were plenty of Daubenton's bats and Soprano and Common Pipistrelles - all on the doorstep of the Scottish Parliament!



Photo: Gillian Martin MSP

Wildlife at the Ythan Estuary

Gillian Martin MSP, Nature Champion for the **Grey Seal**, joined Hywel, Nora and Karen from RSPB Scotland to talk about the status of the eider, Arctic tern, and many other inhabitants of the Ythan Estuary, including local grey seals!



Photo: Foysoil Choudhury MSP

Holyrood Bat Night

Foysoil Choudhury MSP, Nature Champion for the **Soprano Pipistrelle**, and his team joined Bat Conservation Trust's Scottish Bat Officer, Claudia Gebhardt, for a Soprano Pipistrelle search in Holyrood Park. Together, they discussed city bats, Soprano Pipistrelles, wildlife education and the effects of climate change on Scotland's bat species.

Scottish Environment LINK would like to thank each Nature Champion for your support and for being the voice for Scotland's threatened species and habitats in the Scottish Parliament.



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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