



Nature Champions: One Year On - Feedback and Review Report

Andrew Marks – July 2022

Context

One year on from the Nature Champions relaunch in June 2021, Nature Champion LINK host members were invited to come together for an online half-day Forum on June 7th 2022. This online event provided a space to discuss how the initiative is currently working and to consider what we can learn from one another as we enter the second year of Nature Champions. This day also gave host members to voice what additional support LINK can provide to hosts going forward.

The following document is a collation of two feedback-gathering exercises. The first was the 'One Year On – Evaluation' session that took place as part of the Nature Champions Forum, and the second is a post-event survey sent to all Nature Champion host members. The Nature Champions Coordinator, Andrew Marks, has composed a broad Action Plan for the next 6-8 months in response to the suggestions raised within this feedback (see end of document).

One Year On – Evaluation Session

This session asked three separate questions to Nature Champion host members, who discussed these questions in breakout groups before joining the main session to share the thoughts that they had recorded on Google Jamboards. Below are some of the key responses to these questions and the rest can be found in Appendix 1.

1. *What are some of the barriers that you have faced with engaging Nature Champions?*

- "Figuring out which MSP is best to approach for issue/Nature champion representation"
- "Challenging working with different levels of engagement - especially when MSPs are ministers"
- "Skills and training (often more in science)"
- "It can be challenging getting MSP signed up to habitats and the not so 'fluffy' and 'feathery' species"
- "Need for more consistent record-keeping"
- "Availability of MSPs (e.g. for site visits)"
- "Access to sites/species - having to lean on other organisations if you do not own sites where species present or matching to where species/staff are present"
- "Identifying suitable locations (landownership & access)"
- "Capacity within small organisations"
- "Political agenda of MSPs around controversial species ie raptors"

2. *What types of engagement work well for you?*

- "2019 Scottish Parliament reception with MSPs and host organisations was great"
- "LINK writing to less active Nature Champion to check if they are still interested"
- "Species count (e.g. butterfly/bird counts)"

- "In person events - e.g. in Parliament where you can approach MSPs about Nature Champions"
- "Asking MSPs for quotes for project launches and press releases"
- "Site visits"
- "Focussing on Fridays and Mondays (when MSPs are in their constituency)"
- "Picking a weekend - Sunday and MSP came along in own time"
- "Initial Zoom chat with MSP to check what they want out of being a Nature Champion (in the past face-to-face meetings) (usually 20minutes)"

3. *What can LINK do to better support you/your organisation with Nature Champions?*

- "Be involved in meetings with Nature Champions (this works both ways between orgs and LINK)"
- "To organise feedback from MSPs (so organisations can find out what works/what they enjoy) (e.g. do they need technical information, picture in the press, seen to plant a tree...)"
- "Help organise smaller events with host organisations (e.g. Botanic Gardens)"
- "Induction brief from LINK (basic information what LINK can do for organisations etc.)"
- "More Forum events"
- "Space to talk about plans and events. If organising a site visit can tell other hosts "I'm going here, is there anything else I should mention or you want me to mention?"
- "LINK stepping in when MSP Champions don't respond to emails - giving MSPs a nudge"
- "More resources on LINK website (e.g. quick guides on how to engage MSPs, what is a PQ? etc.; recordings of events/presentations)."
- "Central resource/jamboard where organisations can streamline asks and understand the positions of other host orgs."

One Year On - Survey

This survey gathered feedback from event attendees in addition to all Nature Champion host members (11 responses). This survey asked a series of questions regarding the experiences of host members so far and the resources that are currently available or required.

1. *What can LINK do to better support you or your organisation with your Nature Champions and/or the initiative as a whole?*

- "Sending a welcome pack to inform staff of the LINK procedures and services"
- "Providing training and networking events such as today's forum really helps. It would be great to have resources available to dip into as and when needed and some way of keeping up to date with what others in the nature champ initiative are up to."
- "If there was a way to provide help for those new to policy to get us more up to speed. I have felt incredibly supported though but think sessions the one today and specific training for newbies this would make such a huge difference. Maybe ideas on how to keep engagement with MSPs going, so opportunities to share innovative and original ideas - maybe from other countries too?"
- "Briefing packs for host organisation"
- "Although I missed the event, I have welcomed support on how we can get our champion habitat going."
- "Templates for letters etc would be really useful, and more opportunities to learn from other hosts."
- "Digital resources"
- "Would like to consider strategies for attracting MSPs to champion habitats more"
- "Have a shared folder of useful docs (e.g. process of recruiting/managing nature champions)."
- "a bit more guidance on how to pick MSPs to approach for habitats and species"

2. *Please rank the following in order of which would be most valuable to you/your organisation? (ranked by participants as following)*

1. MSP Nature Champion Welcome Pack

2. Regular Nature Champion training events
3. Regular Nature Champion networking events
4. An 'introduction to advocacy' guide
5. Site visit organisation support
6. A 'what happens if my MSP isn't engaging' guide
7. An online platform to share upcoming site visits/campaigns
8. A Nature Champions specific meeting with a standing agenda
9. Event organisation support
10. A weekly online 'drop-in' hour for Nature Champion questions

3. *Which of the following resources are you currently aware of? (in order of awareness)*

1. Species/Habitat Factsheets
2. Standing Nature Champions agenda item in Wildlife Group Meeting
3. Nature Champions Twitter
4. Nature Champions Actions & Records shared Google Doc
5. Nature Champions Newsletter
6. 'Making the Most of your Nature Champions Guide'

4. *If Link were to host a series of regular events for Nature Champion hosts, which of the following would you be interested in attending? (Nature Champion Host Networking Sessions; Training Sessions (i.e. Advocacy and Nature Champions, Securing a Member's Business Debate, Content Creation and Nature Champions, etc.); Q&A sessions (with current/past MSP Nature Champions))*

All participants indicated equal support for these events and suggestions were that these events take place online. One participant also suggested a training session on 'refining your ask'.

Review and priorities going forward

The feedback from both the Nature Champions Forum Evaluation and the One Year On survey highlight areas that are working well in successfully engaging MSPs with the Nature Champions initiative and host members' work; however, there are areas in which LINK can better support host members.

The general themes covered within the two feedback-gathering exercises are summarised below:

What types of engagement work well?

Large Parliamentary Receptions

Host members have highlighted how large Parliamentary receptions offer the opportunity to engage with MSPs in a relaxed environment where the issues are already at the forefront of discussions.

Site visits with specific activities for MSPs to undertake

Host members emphasize the use of site visits as central to engagement activities and also suggest the use of specific species/habitat-related activities as part of site visits (i.e. chick ringing, species count, using recording equipment, etc.).

Less intensive support from MSPs (i.e. social media support)

Hosts suggest that low-ask commitments from Nature Champions can help to achieve broader awareness-raising without too much investment from hosts.

What barriers do host members experience?

Lack of guidance on the MSP selection process

Host members have expressed that they are not confident when profiling MSPs as to which would make a good Nature Champion.

Lack of advocacy knowledge and skills

Host members have raised lack of specific policy knowledge and a knowledge of Scottish parliament as a barrier particularly for smaller organisations who do not have specific advocacy teams.

Engaging MSPs with less 'charismatic' species or habitats

The 'non-feathery and fluffy' species tend to be avoided by MSPs (particularly by MSPs not interested in ecology) and habitats are perhaps seen as more contentious than species themselves.

Keeping accurate records of past engagement

With staff turnover and interruptions in engagement due to covid, host members have shared that maintaining accurate records of engagement over time has been difficult and this is challenging for sustainably building relations with Nature Champions.

Limited access to sites or confusion as to availability

This point is particularly relevant to smaller organisations, who have shared that it can be challenging to identify relevant sites for site visits and equally that many sites are not owned by the organisation and rely upon the grace of partners to help facilitate engagement opportunities on these sites, with site managers who may have other political priorities and interests.

What can LINK do better?

Whilst there are many areas where LINK's support for Nature Champions and their host organisations can develop, the key areas highlighted within these exercises are described below.

1. Support hosts with Nature Champion introductions and meetings

Some hosts have mentioned that the initial engagement with Nature Champions, particularly when they have just been secured can be challenging. Additional support with meeting organisation and early relationship stewarding would be helpful.

2. Gather MSP feedback on engagement strategies

Many host members feel that they are unaware as to what works and what is an inconvenience. Some host members feel that it would be beneficial for LINK to gather feedback from Nature Champions themselves to help guide engagement.

3. Create guidance and share resources for Nature Champion hosts

This point has been raised frequently and although there are a number of resources available, these are not always evenly distributed and could be more thorough in some areas.

4. Deliver training for host members

As with point 3, many host members requested different training activities to share knowledge and experience of advocacy and the various aspects of the Nature Champions initiative more broadly. Members have suggested meeting twice a year for a Nature Champions Forum and attending 4-6 training/networking events a year. An initial introductory training for new Nature Champion host members has been suggested to quickly induct new starters into the mechanics of the initiative.

5. *Provide spaces for Nature Champion host members to network.*

Although the Nature Champions initiative is a recurring agenda item on the Wildlife Group meeting, many host members are not a part of the Wildlife Group and can feel out of the loop. Equally, this agenda item does not allow for much creative thinking around the initiative and more online opportunities for discussion have been requested.

Action Plan

In light of this feedback, the Nature Champions Coordinator has suggested the following plan of action to respond to some of these suggestions for development and to overcome some of the identified barriers. The responses to the feedback are grouped by Action Points, which highlight the broad needs of the initiative, and strategies for meeting these needs ('How will this be done'). The timescales indicated are grouped by short-term tasks (before 1st September), medium-term tasks (before 1st December) and long-term tasks (before 1st April). A '|' is used to separate where tasks overlap different timescales and indicate the relevant time scale. This Action Plan follows the structure established for the previous Species Champion initiative feedback response.

	Action Point	How will this be done?	Timescale	Progress
1	Update aims and objectives of initiative	Collate previously existing aims/objectives and align with current priorities. This and metrics will go together in the same document so there is a metric for every aim.	Short-term (before 1 st September)	
2	Update the project metrics which can be used to measure success of project		Short-term (before 1 st September)	
3	Ensure host organisations are aware of the main objectives of the initiative and equipped to deliver these.	Redesign existing materials for Nature Champion hosts, including background, protocol, case studies, etc. and collate these into a visually appealing 'Nature Champions Guide for Hosts'. Include guidance on record-keeping for relationship management. Share resources regularly and place these on the shared LINK member Google folder Lead a training session for new host members twice a year (depending on demand) on the core ideas of the initiative and relationship management (including relationship tracking and record keeping).	Short-term (Before 1 st September) Medium-term (before 1 st December)	
4	Ensure new MSPs are only given species/habitats that are relevant in	Run training on host MSPs are selected and integrate guidance	Short-term (before 1 st October)	

	personal/portfolio or constituency setting to ensure there is a 'hook' for engagement.	into the 'Nature Champions Guide for Hosts'.		
5	Ensure MSPs are aware of the main objectives of the initiative, that they have an awareness of biodiversity issues and an understanding of the roles of LINK and their host organisation(s).	Create a 'Nature Champions Welcome Pack' for MSPs. Promote regular contact with MSPs. Support LINK members with site visits and planning where necessary. Run a site visit training session for hosts. Be available to support host members with initial meetings and early engagement.	Short-term (before 1 st October)	
6	Ensure a collaborative approach across Nature Champion host members	Add a statement about collaboration into the Nature Champions Guide for Hosts. Organise a regular (every 3 month) series of networking opportunities for host members. Encourage host members to regularly update the Actions & Records shared spreadsheet. Create a working document listing available LINK member sites that hosts can use for site visits. Run a twice-yearly 'Nature Champions Forum' to encourage collaboration and P2P learning.	Short-term (before 1 st October) Medium-term (before 1 st April)	
7	Offer regular meetings with Nature Champion host members.	Allocate an 'open door' weekly Microsoft Teams meeting time. Meet for an annual catch up with each host organisation.	Short-term (before 1 st September 2022) Long-term (before 1 st April)	
8	Ensure all host members have a basic knowledge of Parliamentary processes and how to advocate for change using the Nature Champions initiative	Share regular LINK advocacy training opportunities and recordings of these trainings with Nature Champion hosts. Include a basic overview of advocacy in the Nature Champions Guide for Hosts.	Short-term (before 1 st October)	
9	Encourage members who have never met with their champion or haven't for some time to reconnect.	Through regular contact with host organisations and identifying gaps in engagement. Produce process guidance of how to re-engage MSPs with the initiative.	Short-term (before 1 st October)	
10	Gather MSP feedback on engagement strategies	Gather feedback from MSPs through conversation and share amongst members through meetings. Organise MSP Q&A events where possible for host members to discuss engagement strategies.	Medium-term (before 1 st December)	
11	Produce and share a list of case studies which demonstrate success of initiative.	Contact engaged host members and Nature Champions for their accounts of the initiative and share on social media and in the newsletter. Integrate into the Welcome Pack for Nature Champions and Nature Champions Guide for Hosts.	Medium-term (before 1 st December)	
12	Strive to broaden opportunities for the Nature Champions initiative to be used among other LINK priorities, making members aware that the initiative is there to be considered in all aspects of LINK work.	Nature Champions Coordinator to join different Working Group meetings twice a year to remind of the use of Nature Champions.	Ongoing	

13	Engaging MSPs with less 'charismatic' species or habitats	Nature Champion Coordinator to highlight the exciting and interesting aspects and value of different species and habitats through the Nature Champions Twitter account and through the Nature Champions Newsletter.	Ongoing	
14	Continue to offer Nature Champions Coordinator support to members and change approach to suit – for example some members appreciate 'hand off' approach and others appreciate more direct involvement.		Ongoing	
15	Ensure those involved in Nature Champions are on the appropriate contact lists.		Ongoing	
16	Make clear to members the points of contact and sources of information for Nature Champions developments, (for example LINK news bulletin, newsletter and wildlife subgroup meeting notes).	Include in 'Nature Champions Guide for Hosts' and update in Wildlife Group meetings, trainings and where necessary, emails.	Ongoing	
17	Send newsletter 4 times per year as opposed to 2 times per year.	Send seasonally	Ongoing	

Additional Feedback

If you have any additional feedback on the Nature Champions initiative or on the above action plan then please email andrew@scotlink.org .