



Scottish
Environment
LINK

Nature Champions

Welcome Guide



Beatrice Wishart MSP
Nature Champion for Orca



Thank you for being a voice for nature in the Scottish Parliament.

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Nature Champion. Your support is vital in raising awareness and promoting action to restore and safeguard Scotland's environment for the future.

Within this UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, there has never been greater need for clear political leadership in order to address both the nature and climate crises. The Nature Champions initiative is one small way of ensuring that the nature and climate crises are considered at the heart of Scottish politics and government.

This Welcome Guide provides a background to the Nature Champions initiative, Scottish Environment LINK, and more information around what being a Nature Champion entails. If you have any questions or concerns, then please contact the Nature Champions Coordinator. Thank you again for your support.

What is Scottish Environment LINK?

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. The collective membership of LINK's member organisations represents around 500,000 people across Scotland.

We facilitate change: we build collaboration and support, and enable partnership working to add value for the environment through leadership and engagement. As the voice for Scotland's environment, the LINK network exists to support our members in making change happen on the ground for a healthier environment, healthier societies and a healthier planet.

We are a Scottish Charity (SC000296) and a Scottish Company Limited by guarantee (SC250899), core funded by Membership Subscriptions and by grants from NatureScot, Scottish Government and Charitable Trusts.





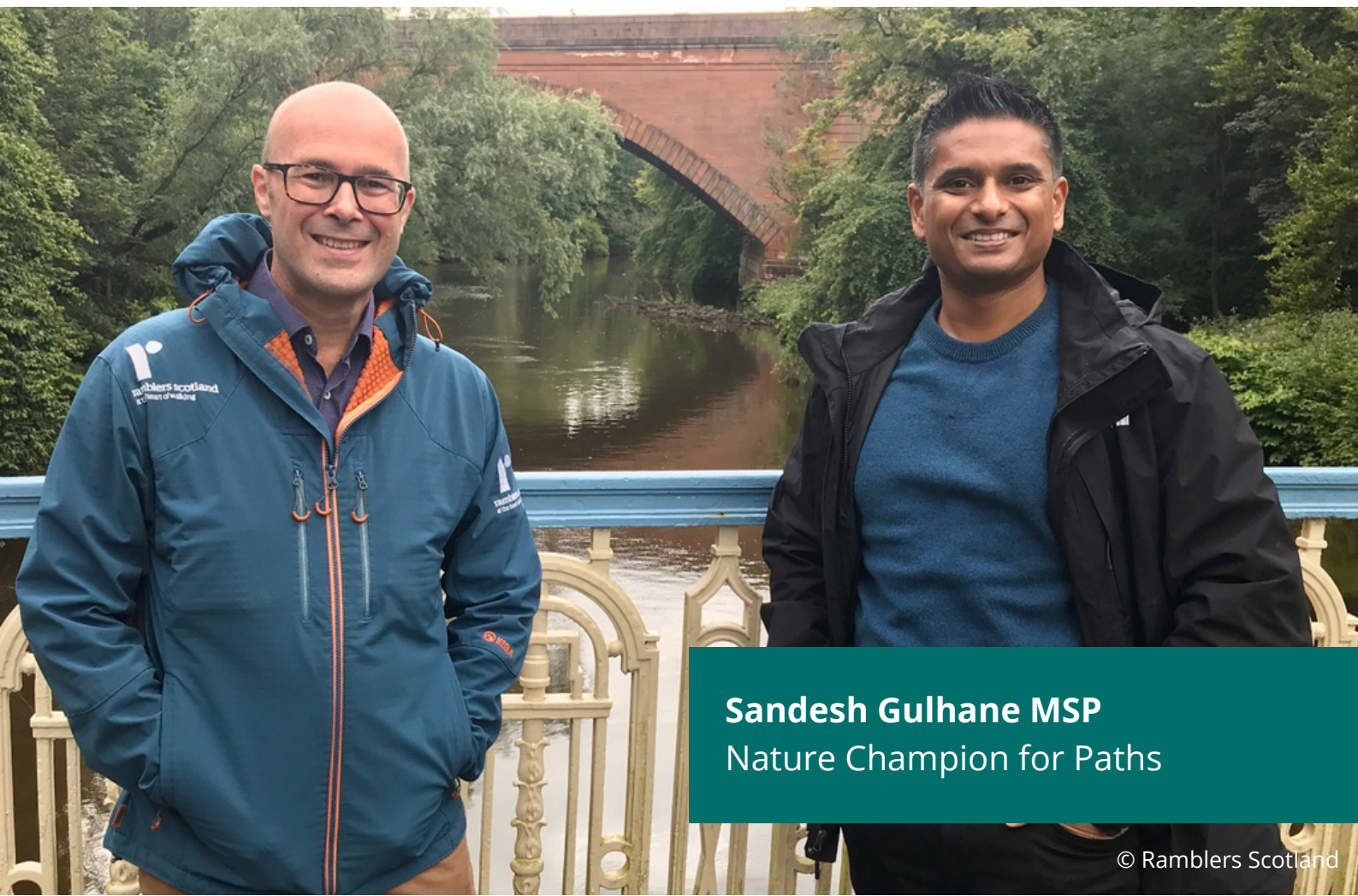
Liam McArthur MSP
Nature Champion for Scottish Primrose

What is the Nature Champions initiative?

The Nature Champions initiative, launched in June 2021, has been developed by Scottish Environment LINK to encourage Members of the Scottish Parliament to champion endangered or iconic species and priority habitats. Through doing so, MSPs are able to raise awareness and promote action to restore and safeguard Scotland's environment. With 1 in 9 species at risk of national extinction, political support for restoring and protecting our natural environment has never been more critical.

We have developed Nature Champions to refresh our award-winning project, Species Champions, and to ideally provide more benefits to members and achieve better policy outcomes for the environment. Since its launch in 2013, the Species Champions initiative went from strength to strength: at the start of the current parliamentary session in 2016, 56 MSPs were signed up to the scheme; at the end of the session in 2021, there were 105 MSP champions, representing 80% of the Chamber. It has inspired similar programmes in Wales, Northern Ireland and England as well as Scottish local authorities.

Nature Champions takes on a similar format to Species Champions. Like the Species Champions initiative, MSPs are supported by a LINK member 'host' organisation to get to know their habitats or species and the key issues affecting them.



Sandesh Gulhane MSP
Nature Champion for Paths

A photograph of four people standing in a lush green woodland. From left to right: a woman in a grey top and dark vest, a man in a white t-shirt with a backpack, a woman in a brown jacket and blue shirt, and a woman in a blue jacket with a red top. The background is filled with tall trees and dense foliage.

Rachael Hamilton MSP

Nature Champion for Riparian Woodland


© Woodland Trust

How does the Nature Champions initiative work?

As the Nature Champion for a threatened species or habitat, you will be partnered with one of Scottish Environment LINK's member organisations. This organisation or organisations (where they are partnering on a particular species or habitat) will be leading on the protection and recovery of your species or habitat within Scotland. They will provide you with more information over the course of your championship around the conservation context, threats and actions needed to protect your species or habitat. These host organisations, where possible, will also offer site visits to see your species or habitat in its natural environment.

Over the course of the Parliamentary session, you will have the opportunity to develop an in-depth knowledge of your species or habitat, as well as gaining an awareness of their social, ecological and economic value for Scotland. Equally, you will be able to meet many of the other organisations, individuals and communities who are passionate about your species or habitat.

As a Nature Champion, you will be the voice of your species or habitat within the Scottish Parliament. As such, many Nature Champions raise awareness of their species or habitat in Parliament through debates, motions and questions. At the end of the Parliamentary session, Nature Champions are encouraged to champion a new species or habitat, but they are welcome to continue championing their existing species or habitat if they are keen to do so!



"The Basking Shark and our aquaculture as a whole have a part to play in introducing new and more people to our marine offering and to our coastline. The Basking Shark is a fabulous creature and indeed it's the friendly shark. More people seeing it can have a positive effect on our marine tourism sector."

Stuart McMillan MSP, Nature Champion for Basking Shark

How does it link to the bigger picture?

While fun and light-hearted, the initiative ultimately looks to address failing environmental policies and increasing threats on our natural environment by highlighting the need for habitats and species to be better protected, for the benefits of a thriving natural environment to be considered in all aspects of decision-making.

2021 marked the beginning of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), and the UN will decide on a new 10-year framework for biodiversity under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at its 15th Conference of Parties (COP15) in 2022. A new international deal for nature must be matched by domestic ambition to bend the curve of biodiversity loss and deliver commitments made under the CBD. If Scotland is to maintain its international reputation for nature and landscape, we need to step up action to protect and maintain our rich variety of habitats and the iconic and endangered species that depend upon them. This initiative provides a clear and accessible way for MSPs to do their bit for Scotland's nature and future generations.

At a time when environmental issues are increasingly brought to the fore, the need to have informed, passionate and supportive MSPs in parliament ensuring our wildlife and environment has a voice has never been more critical. An increasingly knowledgeable, interested, and pro-environment group of MSPs will have a demonstrable impact on issues right across the environmental agenda.

What opportunities does the Nature Champions initiative offer for MSPs?

The Nature Champions initiative offers MSPs the opportunity to get out of the office and experience Scotland's nature in person. Nature Champions can visit their habitats or meet their species, and participate in conservation work, research and engagement activities in locations across Scotland. Through doing so, MSPs are able to gain an in-depth understanding of what conservation entails 'on the ground' and how different policies impact Scotland's species and habitats.

By engaging with LINK member organisations and their community-level conservation efforts, Nature Champions are able to develop relationships with those in the community who are working hard to protect threatened species and habitats. It is for this reason that many MSPs choose to champion species or habitats that are present within their constituencies.

The knowledge and direct experience of conservation that is fostered through the Nature Champions initiative allows MSPs to more proactively support their species and habitats. The first-hand experiences of MSPs are frequently brought back into Parliament, where Parliamentary questions, motions and debates are used to promote action and push for positive environmental change.

Scottish Environment LINK and its members are always keen to raise awareness of MSPs engagement with their species or habitat through social media and the press!



© Kelvin Thomson/SRSG

Meghan Gallacher MSP
Nature Champion for Red Kite



© Buglife Scotland

Colin Beattie MSP
Nature Champion for Rivers

What is expected from MSPs and LINK host members?

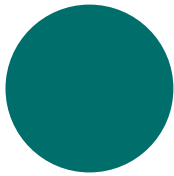
The Nature Champions initiative has been designed to fit around the commitments and capacities of all MSPs. At its core, the initiative is a light-hearted means for MSPs to learn more about Scotland's rich natural heritage and meet those people who are engaged in its conservation 'on the ground'. As such, we hope that Nature Champions are able to act as sincere ambassadors for their species or habitats in Parliament and to be appropriately engaged with their partnering host members.

If they wish to do so, Nature Champions can expect to participate on one or more site visits each year with LINK host members. LINK host members will also be available to MSPs for advice and support on matters relating to their species and/or habitats.

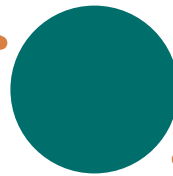


Jenni Minto MSP
Nature Champion for Scotland's Rainforest

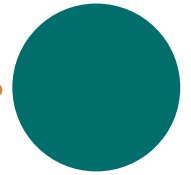
**MSP becomes a Nature
Champion and receives a
species/habitat Fact Sheet**



**Nature Champion
meets with their
LINK member host
organisation**



**Nature Champion visits
their habitat or species
with LINK member host
organisation**



**Nature Champion raises
awareness of their species
or habitat and promotes
action in Parliament**



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