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Nature Champions

Winter Newsletter 2022-23



Greetings to the 81 Nature Champions of this Parliamentary Session!

And a warm welcome to the newest Nature Champion:

Siobhian Brown MSP (Common Dolphin)

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



Hazel Forrest

Species Advocacy Officer
Scottish Wildlife Trust



Jessica Jones

Living Seas Manager
Scottish Wildlife Trust

Nature Champions News!



Scottish Environment LINK were delighted to jointly award the inaugural 'MSP Nature Champion of the Year' award at our Festive Reception in December. **Jenni Minto MSP**, Nature Champion for **Scotland's Rainforest**, and **Beatrice Wishart MSP**, Nature Champion for **Orca**, jointly received the award for their fantastic support over 2022.

The 'MSP Nature Champion of the Year' award celebrates the notable contributions of MSPs over the year to the protection and recovery of their species or habitat alongside their partnering LINK Member.

You can read more about the award and Jenni and Beatrice's efforts as Nature Champions over 2022, [here](#).

Great Crested Newts

In October, **Fulton MacGregor MSP**, Nature Champion for the **Great Crested Newt**, lodged a motion highlighting the rare and threatened status of the newt in the UK and Europe, and the important role played by Gartcosh Nature Reserve in protecting the largest colony of great crested newts.

Ancient Woodlands

In November, **Graham Simpson MSP**, Nature Champion for the **Ash and Bilberry Bumblebee**, lodged a written question in which he asked the Scottish Government about the production and publishing of a Scottish Ancient Woodlands register.

Beaver Relocations

In December, **Ariane Burgess MSP**, Nature Champion for the **Aspen** and the **Eurasian Beaver**, lodged a motion commending the planned relocation of beavers from Tayside to Loch Lomond NNR, and encouraging public bodies and NGOs to do all they can to make new sites available for beaver relocations.

Peatland Restoration

In January, **Fiona Hyslop MSP**, Nature Champion for **Blanket Bogs**, asked the Minister at the Ministerial Statement on the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, about the relationship between the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and NPF4, specifically in relation to peatland restoration and on-shore wind turbines.

Corncrake Concern

In January, at the Ministerial Statement on the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, **Kaukab Stewart MSP**, Nature Champion for the **Corncrake**, highlighted corncrake conservation and her Nature Champion role when questioning the Scottish Government about the impact of the Nature Restoration Fund.

Blawhorn Moss NNR

Fiona Hyslop MSP, Nature Champion for **Blanket Bogs**, joined CIEEM and Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) at Blawhorn Moss in her constituency in January to discuss the role of peatlands in carbon sequestration, flood management and biodiversity recovery.

A Voice for Nature - 10 Years of Nature Champions



Since 2013, Scottish Environment LINK has encouraged Members of the Scottish Parliament to champion threatened and iconic species and habitats through the Nature Champions initiative (formerly Species Champions).

To mark the **10th anniversary of the Nature Champions** initiative, we want to highlight some of the powerful stories from MSP Nature Champions past and present.

Throughout this year, we will be sharing how MSPs have been working alongside local communities, businesses, and NGOs to be a voice for nature in the Scottish Parliament. We will also be hosting a series of public engagement activities and launching a social media campaign to highlight how Nature Champions continue to promote action to protect and restore Scotland's natural environment.

In preparation for our anniversary launch, we want to hear from you, Scotland's Nature Champions, as to **what it means to you to be a Nature Champion**. *Why are you proud to be a Nature Champion? Have you learnt anything new about your species or habitat through your role? Have you been able to engage with your constituency in new and surprising ways through site visits?*

We want to know!

We'd be very grateful if you could share a sentence or two about what it means to you to be a Nature Champion for your species and/or habitat. We'll share your reflections as part of our 10 year anniversary celebrations.

Share your comments!

The Hunt for the Northern February Red



Every February, Buglife launches its citizen science project '[The Hunt for the Northern February Red](#)'. This project encourages members of the public to locate, photograph, and report any sightings of the adults of this endemic insect as they emerge in the spring*.

The Northern February Red Stonefly (*Brachyptera putata*) is a freshwater species endemic to Britain, found mainly in Scottish rivers and with its global stronghold in the Scottish Highlands. It has only ever been recorded in two rivers outside Scotland – the River Usk in Wales and the River Wye in Hereford, where it is now thought to be extinct.

Scotland's population of Northern February Red Stoneflies is of international significance. Due to its rarity and decline in numbers, this insect is listed as a UK Priority Species.

During periods of winter sunshine through February and March, these insects can often be found basking on fence posts that run alongside large rivers, from where the adults will have emerged to mate and disperse after spending their formative months as larvae growing under rocks in fast flowing water. The female has three dark bands across its wings, as well as dark wing tips, whilst the male is short-winged and unable to fly.

Buglife are **currently looking for a Nature Champion** for the internationally significant [Northern February Red Stonefly](#). A key task for this new MSP species champion would be to support Buglife with raising public awareness of their Hunt for the Northern February Red campaign in the spring.

If you know an MSP who would like support this species, then please contact [Andrew Marks](#), Nature Champions Coordinator.

*Photographs of stoneflies can be submitted to Buglife as part of the campaign either by emailing them to Scotland@buglife.org.uk or by tweeting them to [@BuglifeScotland](https://twitter.com/BuglifeScotland). It is important that messages include in the email subject STONEFLY, and the email includes your name, the date of the photograph, the name of the river and a specific location (a grid reference if possible).

Natalie Stevenson

Scotland & Northern Ireland Manager, Buglife

Image (c) Craig Macadam

Collaboration is key to reducing whale entanglements in Scotland



Entanglement is a global welfare and conservation problem for whales, dolphins, porpoises, turtles, and sharks, and is the single **largest cause of death for minke and humpback whales in Scottish waters**. The issue was not previously well understood, but a ground-breaking study run by the [Scottish Entanglement Alliance \(SEA\)](#) brought together government, academia, NGOs and the fishing industry to show the scale of whale entanglements in creel fishing gear around Scotland and has identified potential solutions to reduce entanglements in the future.

Commercial creelers (pot fishers) from around the Scottish coast were interviewed and **worked in partnership with researchers** to better understand the nature and extent of entanglements in Scotland's waters.

This information was analysed alongside whale sightings from the long-term data collection programs run by Scottish Environment LINK members Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT) and Whale and Dolphin Conservation's (WDC) Shorewatch project. Sightings and strandings data collected by the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme, British Divers Marine Life Rescue, Sea Watch Foundation, and Cetacean Research and Rescue Unit were also included. The analysis was undertaken by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW).

The study showed an estimated six humpback whales and 30 minke whales become entangled in creel fishing ropes in Scottish waters every year. The densities of humpback whales in the waters off western Scotland were low, but the data suggest numbers are increasing. The estimated number of annual humpback whale entanglements also shows an increasing trend.

A high proportion of entangled whales had become caught in the groundline, the rope that links creels together on the seabed. The groundline is usually made from rope which floats, and can form arches in the water between creels which basking sharks or whales can get caught round their mouths, flippers or tails.

If the groundline sinks rather than floats, it will lie on the seabed, reducing the entanglement risk. WDC are working with the Scottish creel fishing industry to conduct trials of sinking groundline to understand if this is feasible for fishers and could reduce entanglements in Scotland.

Scotland's fishers are leading the way for understanding and mitigating marine animal entanglements, and **this collaborative approach** will continue to improve our understanding of the threat of entanglement, and how to reduce the risks to marine life in Scottish seas.

The findings have been published in the journal [Endangered Species Research](#).

If you know of an MSP who would be interested in becoming the **Nature Champion for Humpback Whales** and working with LINK hosts members Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust and Whale and Dolphin Conservation to support work on this species, then please get in touch with [Andrew Marks](#), Nature Champions Coordinator.

Dr Lauren Hartny-Mills

Science and Conservation Manager, Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust

Fife Living Waters



The new Scottish Biodiversity Strategy offers a significant opportunity to restore Scotland's ecosystems and reverse species declines. Our natural environment is in crisis, and we urgently need an ambitious new strategy with clear targets. Freshwater ecosystems are essential for biodiversity, providing habitat for a wide array of aquatic species while also helping to reduce the impacts of major threats including climate change, flooding, chemical pollution, and noise pollution. The number of good quality **freshwater habitats in the UK are dwindling**, with many ponds being filled in to make room for development, being polluted by chemical run-off, or being lost due to poor management.

Froglife has been tackling this issue through the **Fife Living Waters** project. This one-year project worked on Cowdenbeath Wetland and Swan Pond Nature Reserve both located in Cowdenbeath.

Cowdenbeath Wetland, despite its name, was no longer functioning as a wetland due to late succession. Swans Pond had one large open water body, but it lacks biodiversity. To restore Cowdenbeath to a functioning wetland, and to improve the biodiversity value of Swans Ponds, we created 111 new ponds, restored 10 ponds, and enhanced 12 terrestrial habitats across both sites.

Creating open water bodies accommodates breeding amphibians, particularly newts, as the males require open water to perform courtship display. However, the water bodies are also valuable habitat for many other wildlife species, including invertebrates, plants, birds, and small mammals. The terrestrial habitat was created to facilitate amphibian migrations as well as providing habitats for reptiles.

The project additionally delivered a number of public engagement activities, reaching a staggering **c.21% of the population of Cowdenbeath!** Activities included: 100 Volunteer Training sessions (1,030 attendees); 6 Community Engagement sessions (154 attendees); 6 Wildlife Gardening Workshops; 10 School Group Sessions (180 participants); 4 Business Team Building Days (29 attendees); 4 public events (1,174 attendees).

Kathy Wormald
Chief Executive Officer, Froglife
Images (c) Froglife

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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