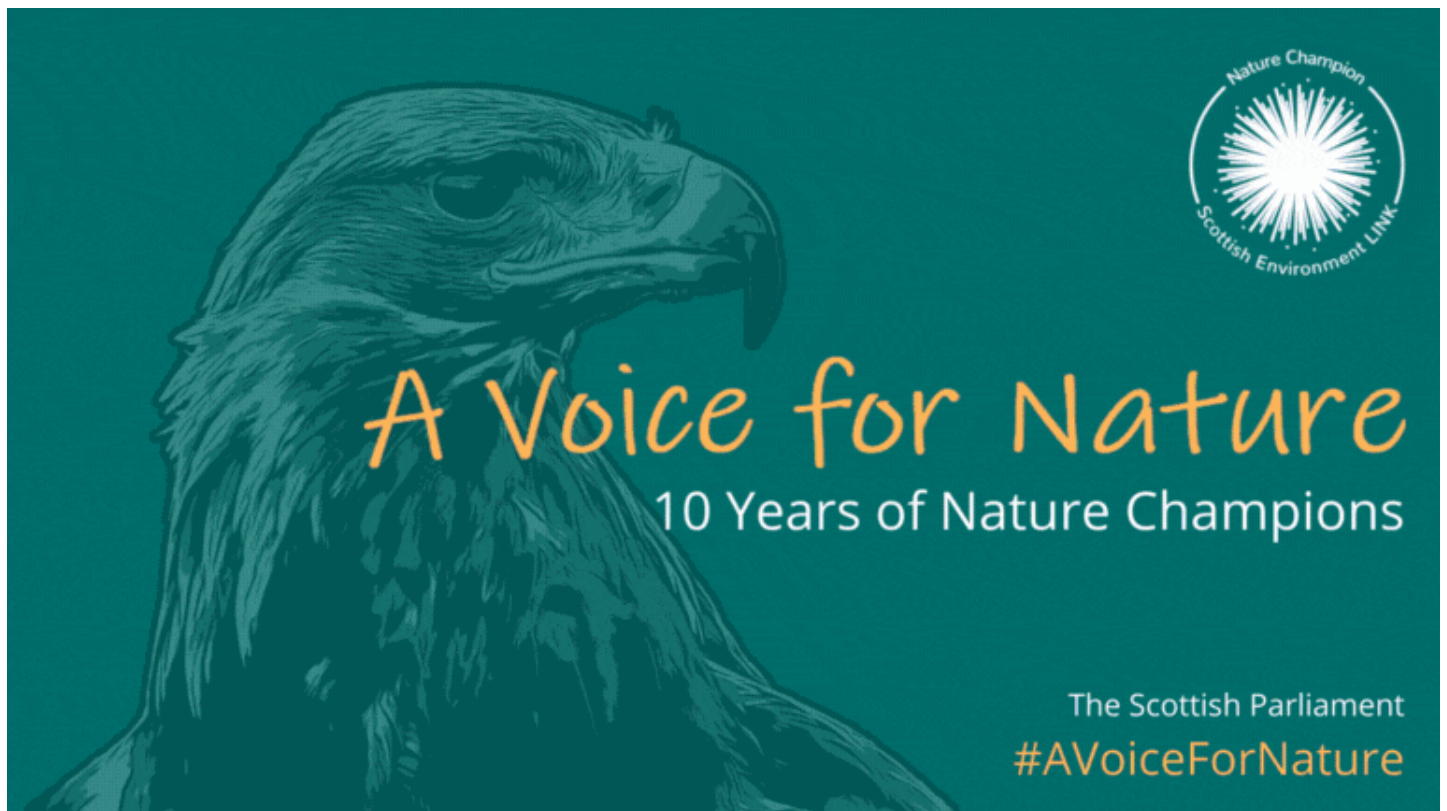


[View this email in your browser](#)



# Nature Champions

## Autumn Newsletter 2023



## A Voice for Nature: 10 Years of Nature Champions

We were delighted to be joined this month by MSP Nature Champions at our 10th anniversary exhibition, *A Voice for Nature*, located outside the Scottish Parliament!

With over 175 different cross-party MSPs supporting the initiative over the past ten years, it was fantastic to share and celebrate some of the inspiring stories of MSPs raising awareness and taking action to protect and restore Scotland's threatened and iconic species and habitats.

A particular thanks to the 23 cross-party MSPs, including the Presiding Officer, who provided audio narrations to accompany the exhibition to help bring the displays to life and to raise awareness of some of Scotland's extraordinary ecosystems. You can listen to these audio clips on our [website](#).

As we look to the future of Nature Champions, we hope that even more MSPs will take up the opportunity to become Nature Champions. At present, iconic and threatened species and habitats including the Black Grouse, Coastal Sand Dunes and Common Glow-worm, to name a few, remain without representation in the Scottish Parliament. With continued political buy-in, we hope to support Members of the Scottish Parliament to learn more about the extraordinary species and habitats that we live alongside, thereby encouraging the necessary revaluing of our natural environment as a key political priority for our future.

## Nature Champions in Parliament



### Beaver Translocations

In July, **Ariane Burgess MSP**, Nature Champion for the Eurasian Beaver, asked two Parliamentary Questions regarding the lethal control of beavers and whether translocation could be implemented instead, in line with the Scottish Government's commitment to expand Scotland's beaver population.

### World Rivers Day 2023

In September, Parliament marked World Rivers Day 2023, with a debate led by **Jackie Dunbar MSP**, Nature Champion for the Sea Trout. Also speaking were Nature Champions, **Evelyn Tweed MSP**, **Alexander Burnett MSP**, **Mercedes Villalba MSP**, **Mark Ruskell MSP** and **Audrey Nicoll MSP**. The debate commended the organisations, communities and land managers implementing landscape scale initiatives that improve stewardship of Scotland's rivers, and highlighted how nature-based solutions can lead to healthy, dynamic, resilient river systems, that deliver multiple benefits to interconnected species such as sea trout, Atlantic salmon and freshwater pearl mussels, among others. [Watch the full debate above!](#)

### Orca Watch

In June, **Beatrice Wishart MSP**, Nature Champion for the Orca, raised a motion in recognition of Orca Watch 2023 - an annual citizen science event run by the Sea Watch Foundation. The aim of the event is to increase public awareness of how and when orcas utilise Scotland's waters during the summer months and highlight the need for their protection.

### Future of Snaring

In June, **Colin Smyth MSP**, Nature Champion for the Badger, raised a Parliamentary Question in which he asked the Scottish Government when it will consult on the future of snaring.

### Safeguard Cetaceans

In June, **Jeremy Balfour MSP**, Nature Champion for the Minke Whale, asked the Scottish Government when the UK Dolphin and Porpoise Conservation Strategy will be finalised and adopted, and what it is doing to safeguard cetaceans in the meantime.

---

## The State of Nature in Scotland

# One in nine Scottish species are at risk of being lost



**#StateOfNature**

2023

state of  
nature  
PARTNERSHIP

[The State of Nature in Scotland Report 2023](#) is a partnership production involving over 50 organisations, many of which are also members of Scottish Environment LINK, but also including scientific institutes, learned societies and government agencies including NatureScot. The report gathers and collates the most systematic and statistically valid studies and data series on wildlife in Scotland - much of it gathered by volunteer naturalists across the country - and analyses it scientifically to derive the best, most objective and most accurate picture of how nature is faring in Scotland today.

The findings show that Scotland, while still retaining precious and globally important wildlife, is also a highly nature-depleted country, following historic losses of species and habitats over centuries. It also shows that the loss of nature continues today - most of the measures revealed by the State of Nature 2023 report show ongoing declines.

Forthcoming legislation on the natural environment, agriculture and more, and the Scottish Government Biodiversity Framework consultation launched in September 2023, offer an unprecedented and progressive chance to secure that step-change for Scottish nature.

[Read more here](#) about the key opportunities and how we capitalise on them.

---



## How the Wildlife Management and Muirburn Bill can deliver for nature and climate



Earlier this year the Scottish Government introduced the long-awaited Wildlife Management and Muirburn Bill, which is mainly aimed at implementing the recommendations of the independent Grouse Moor Management Group (“Werritty Review”) accepted by Scottish Government. The two main issues covered by the draft Bill are licensing of grouse shooting - specifically designed to combat raptor crime - and licensing of muirburn. RSPB Scotland and other members of Scottish Environment LINK have welcomed this Bill, as we have campaigned for many years for grouse moor licensing to bring an end to the illegal killing of birds of prey mainly associated with intensive management of land for driven grouse shooting, as well as for better protection of peatlands vital in meeting Net Zero climate change targets.

RSPB Scotland supports the introduction of licensing of all muirburn, but we would like to see the legislation go further, including a ban on burning on peat over 30cm (with some exceptions, for example to prevent wildfire, approved by NatureScot) and a change to the end date of the muirburn season to 15th March rather than the 15th of April. Peatlands are vital to tackling the nature and climate crisis and reaching Scotland’s legally binding Net Zero target. These unique habitats, which are a final refuge for some of Scotland’s most important wildlife, also store huge amounts of carbon when in good condition. However, with only 20% of Scotland’s peatbogs in good condition, and with the

other 80% degraded by decades of burning, overgrazing by livestock and wild deer, and track building, many sites are net-carbon emitters. Finally, many of our moorland birds, including red listed species like curlew and lapwing - as well as golden eagle and red grouse - are starting to nest by the 15th of March and we need to take all steps to help these species.

The Scottish Government has already recognised the importance of peatland conservation through its Peatland Restoration Fund, and we believe that a ban on burning on deep peat is needed to support the recovery of our peatlands to full health. Whilst the 40cm definition of peatland in the Bill is an improvement over the current 50cm definition, we argue that Scotland should introduce a 30cm definition, which has a stronger scientific basis, and more support according to UK and international peatland expert criteria and advice.

Many Nature Champions for birds of prey through the years have helped to highlight our message about the need for grouse moor licensing, and we are grateful to all of them for their past and current action on behalf of their species.

*Duncan Orr-Ewing*

*Head of Species and Land Management, RSPB Scotland*

---

**Continuing to Save Scotland's Red Squirrels**



[Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels](#) (SSRS), established in 2009, is a nationally co-ordinated partnership project, led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, to save Scotland's iconic native red squirrels. Red squirrels could yet become extinct in Scotland due to habitat loss and, more pressingly, threats from invasive non-native grey squirrels, which outcompete reds for food and living space and carry squirrel pox, a virus lethal to our native species.

Through SSRS, the Scottish Wildlife Trust is leading the delivery of the national strategy for red squirrel conservation. With the help of hundreds of dedicated volunteers, landowners, and members of the public, the project continues to undertake strategic control of invasive grey squirrels across Scotland, reducing densities of grey squirrels where they threaten key remaining red squirrel populations and halting their incursion into Scotland's core northern red squirrel population. Much of these efforts, along with the development and support of community-led volunteer networks across South Scotland and the establishment a national Community Hub that serves as a central data repository and resource, were made possible through SSRS's recent five-year Developing Community Action Phase.

Now a year and a half into a two-year SSRS Transition Phase, the Scottish Wildlife Trust is focused on establishing more permanent and sustainable means to guarantee the continued delivery of these critically important efforts. Working with project partners, local authorities, LINK members, Nature Champion Alexander Burnett MSP, and others, the Scottish Wildlife Trust is aiming to advance Scottish Government's awareness and commitment to these important issues of red squirrel conservation and



invasive non-native species management. Through proper resourcing and continued co-ordinated delivery of these efforts across the landscape through diversified mechanisms, red squirrels can continue to thrive in Scotland long into the future.

*Nicole Still*

*Programme Manager, Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels*

## Nature Champions Site Visits!



### Red Kites and Raptor Persecution

**Meghan Gallacher MSP**, Nature Champion for the Red Kite, joined volunteers from the Scottish Raptor Study Group on a visit to two active nests this summer. The group enjoyed views of a large chick in the nest through the telescope. On the visit, Meghan and SRSRG were able to discuss bird of prey conservation, monitoring and some of the problems they still face - including being shot, trapped and poisoned.



### Kingfishers at Chatelherault

In June, Nature Champion for the Kingfisher, **Christina McKelvie MSP**, stopped by RSPB Scotland's stand at Chatelherault country park to discuss RSPB Scotland's work and the birdlife local to Chatelherault, including kingfishers! Kingfishers are vulnerable to hard winters and habitat degradation through pollution or unsympathetic management of watercourses.





Photo: Species on the Edge

## Bumblebee Safari!

**Alasdair Allan MSP**, Nature Champion for the Great Yellow Bumblebee, took part in the second annual Outer Hebrides Wildlife Festival, co-ordinated by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust as part of Species on the Edge. As part of the festival, Bumblebee Conservation Trust conducted bumblebee safaris, in which Alasdair came face to face with the rare great yellow bumblebee on Northton machair!



Photo: ScotLINK

## Exploring Scotland's Rainforest

In August, Nature Champions, **Monica Lennon MSP**, **Mark Ruskell MSP** and **Graham Simpson MSP**, joined staff from RSPB Scotland, Plantlife Scotland, ScotLINK and the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park at RSPB Inversnaid, part of Scotland's temperate rainforest. On the visit, they discussed invasive species, herbivore damage, rare lichens and took the time to hug an ancient ash tree together!



Photo: ARC

## Biodiversity and Traditional Orchards

In August, **Pam Gosal MSP**, Nature Champion for Traditional Orchards, joined the National Trust for Scotland and Amphibian and Reptile Conservation at Geilston Gardens, Cardross, for a tour of the traditional orchards on site. Pam learned more about the skills and the work required to maintain these sites firsthand from staff and volunteers, as well as their value for wildlife.



Photo: Jeremy Balfour

## A Whale of a Time!

Nature Champion for the Minke Whale, **Jeremy Balfour MSP**, joined staff from Whale and Dolphin Conservation in August at the Scottish Dolphin Centre in Spey Bay, Moray Firth. Minke whales are the most common of the baleen whales in Scotland, and the whale species people are most likely to see from headlands and ferries.



Photo: Buglife Scotland

## Searching for Peatland Spiders

Buglife Scotland had a wonderful morning out with Bog Sun-jumper Spider Nature Champion, **Michelle Thomson MSP**, in August. The group were successful in their search for this small charismatic rare spider on its specialist habitat, lowland raised bog. This jumping spider is known to reside in just a handful of sites in central Scotland, fragments of what was once an extensive bog network.



Photo: WDC

## The Scottish Dolphin Centre

**Douglas Ross MP MSP**, Nature Champion for the Bottlenose Dolphin, joined Whale and Dolphin Conservation staff at the Scottish Dolphin Centre at Spey Bay, Moray Firth, to learn more about the lives of these charismatic dolphins. Bottlenose dolphins are regularly spotted at the mouth of the river Spey and close to the shoreline, along with ospreys, seals, a huge variety of bird life and the occasional otter!



Photo: Gillian Mackay

## Wildlife at the Ythan Estuary

Nature Champion for the Harbour Seal, **Gillian Mackay MSP**, visited the Scottish SPCA Wildlife Centre and met a young seal pup called Sprout! One of two UK seal species, Harbour Seals give birth in the middle of the summer and moult in August. They feed on a variety of species including Sandeels, Herring, Octopus and Squid, up to 50km from their haul-out sites.



Photo: Audrey Nicoll

## Rare Mussels on the River Dee

**Audrey Nicoll MSP**, Nature Champion for the Freshwater Pearl Mussel, joined staff from The James Hutton Institute and Buglife Scotland on the River Dee to see these amazing mussels in person. Freshwater pearl mussels are one of the most critically endangered molluscs in the world. Over the last 100 years it has been lost from a third of the rivers that used to contain it.





Photo: Scottish Badgers

## Brocktober!

Scottish Badgers staff, local members and trustees met up with **Colin Smyth MSP**, Nature Champion for the Badger, at RSPB Wood of Cree to present him with a Nature Champions badge in celebration of his six years in the role. The Galloway event also saw the launch of the charity's 'Brocktober' programme – an annual, month-long festival in celebration of badgers.



Photo: Graham Simpson

## Threatened Bilberry Bumblebees

**Graham Simpson MSP**, Nature Champion for the Ash and the Bilberry Bumblebee, joined the Bumblebee Conservation Trust in a successful search for bilberry bumblebees! Bilberry bumblebees thrive in colder upland areas and are dependent on species-diverse moorlands, in particular where there is bilberry and heather. It is therefore very vulnerable to climate warming and loss of suitable habitat.

**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.**

**Want to change how you receive these emails?  
You can [unsubscribe from this list](#).**

