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Nature Champions

Spring Newsletter 2024



Image © Morag Wells / Scottish Environment LINK

Welcome to the spring edition of the Nature Champions Newsletter!

A particularly warm welcome to the newest MSP Nature Champion, **Alexander Stewart MSP**, who is championing the Twinflower with Plantlife and National Trust for Scotland. **Mark Ruskell MSP** has also become the Nature Champion for the Moss Carder Bee with Bumblebee Conservation Trust, adding to his existing role as the White-tailed Eagle champion.

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 from Scottish Environment LINK members. In this issue, we highlight **Save Scottish Seas' campaign** to develop effective Marine Protected Area (MPAs) management measures and we also feature an article from Scottish Environment LINK member, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, discussing their evidence-based position on **managing the impacts of honey bees** on wild species.

As the weather begins to warm and many species are returning to our shores or becoming more active in the longer days, it's the perfect time to get outdoors and spend some time in nature's company. If you'd like to go on a visit to see your species or habitat this summer, then I'm sure your Scottish Environment LINK host member(s) would be delighted to organise this for you.

Thank you, as always, for your support and for being the voice for Scotland's threatened species and habitats in the Scottish Parliament.

Andrew Marks
Nature Champions Coordinator

Nature Champions in Parliament



Click the image above to hear Graham Simpson MSP, Nature Champion for the Bilberry Bumblebee and the Ash, ask a question regarding the protection of wild native bee species.

Competing Bees?

In February, **Graham Simpson MSP**, Nature Champion for the Bilberry Bumblebee and Ash, asked a question at Portfolio Questions about the need to regulate the use of managed bees, including the placing of hives on protected areas, to avoid them competing or negatively impacting our threatened wild bee species.

Important Marine Mammal Area

Nature Champion for the Orca, **Beatrice Wishart MSP**, lodged a Motion congratulating Shetland and Fair Isle on being recognised as an Important Marine Mammal Area (IMMA). Shetland and Fair Isle now join areas around the world with IMMA status, including Antarctica, Madagascar, Baja California and Patagonia!

Atlantic Salmon

John Swinney MSP, the new Nature Champion for the Atlantic Salmon, asked the Scottish Government three separate questions regarding the conservation of wild Atlantic Salmon, including topics covering stocking measures, the impacts of recent flooding events and the progress of the Scottish Wild Salmon Strategy.

Protect Scotland's Marine Protected Areas



Scotland's seas boast an extraordinarily diverse array of marine life. Our seas are at the heart of many communities and underpin important industries like fishing and tourism. Our seas are also crucial in the fight against climate change, as marine ecosystems can store even more carbon than those on land. Yet, evidence shows **a steep decline of marine ecosystems**, with seabed habitats and seabird species particularly affected. To address this, the [Save Scottish Seas](#) campaign highlights the urgent need for transformative action.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are vital tools for conservation, but their effectiveness relies on proper management. Scotland has designated over two hundred MPAs, but ten years after their creation most sites are [largely unprotected from the most widespread pressures](#). Continuous delays to implement management measures put marine ecosystems at risk, hindering Scotland's ambition to [halt biodiversity loss by 2030](#).

In its latest campaign, Save Scottish Seas urges the Scottish government to implement tailored fisheries restrictions across MPAs by the end of 2025. So far, more than 2,000 people have added their voices to [our call](#).

Delivering an effective network of MPAs is the bare minimum if Scotland wants to halt and reverse the decline of our marine biodiversity. **Without these tailored management measures, MPAs cannot reach their conservation objectives.** This action is further supported by [independent research on the effectiveness of Scotland's MPA network](#), which has concluded that Scotland's MPA network is underperforming, partly as a result of how the legislation underpinning MPAs has been interpreted into policy.

If we are to help our seas recover, implementing MPA management measures is only the first step. **MPAs must be part of a broader ecosystem-based approach to tackle the ocean emergency.** Urgent action across policy areas is needed to facilitate species and habitat recovery, and ensure that marine ecosystems can function. This means implementing a more holistic approach to the management of fisheries, establishing a new national marine plan centred on ocean recovery, and addressing cumulative impacts on the marine environment.

For more information, check out [our latest blog](#).

Fanny Royanez

Marine Policy and Engagement Officer, Scottish Environment LINK

Balancing the interests of wild bees



In February's [Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Island's Portfolio Question Time](#), **Pauline McNeill MSP**, Nature Champion for the Flapper Skate, asked the Scottish Government what action it is taking to protect the welfare of bees in Scotland.

Bilberry Bumblebee Nature Champion, **Graham Simpson MSP**, asked a key follow up question:

"There remains a lack of knowledge among many people on exactly which bees need help. It is wild bees, such as the species that I champion—the Bilberry bumblebee—that are in trouble, not honeybees. In fact, there are some situations in which honeybees can be a risk to wild bees as they compete for flowers and pass on diseases. Does the cabinet secretary agree that we need to do more to regulate use of managed bees by, for example, taking precautions to avoid hives being placed in protected areas that are important to rare species?"

It is not widely appreciated that we no longer have wild honeybee colonies in this country, all honeybees in the UK are domesticated and are more akin to livestock than wildlife. This doesn't mean

they aren't important ecologically, economically, and culturally. But **there is an important distinction to be made between wild pollinators in need of conservation and managed pollinators.**

The response from the Cabinet Secretary was encouraging. The Scottish Government recognises the risks managed bees can pose, however, the Cabinet Secretary said they lack sufficient scientific evidence to fully understand this issue and take mitigating steps, which also requires better education and dialogue with key stakeholders.

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust have an [evidence-based position paper which could help](#). It sets out the **impacts managed honeybees can have on bumblebees** and offers key recommendations, including taking a precautionary approach to hive placement, ensuring hygienic beekeeping practices to prevent diseases, and diversifying planting schemes so they include a variety of flowers that cater for a wide range of bee species.

Darryl Cox

Senior Science and Policy Officer, Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Nature Champions Site Visits!



Photo: Jessica Jones / SWT

Seeding Seagrass

David Torrance MSP, Nature Champion for Seagrass, joined Scottish Wildlife Trust, WWF Scotland and other Restoration Forth partners at Burntisland to take part in some Seagrass planting and to learn more about the project. The Restoration Forth project is working to re-establish the Forth's native oyster reefs and seagrass meadows.



Photo: John Swinney / Twitter

Loch of the Lowes

In February, **John Swinney MSP**, Nature Champion for the Atlantic Salmon, joined Scottish Wildlife Trust staff at Loch of the Lowes Wildlife Reserve near Dunkeld to learn more about the species and his Nature Champion role. Atlantic Salmon appear in surrounding water systems from around February to October, as they migrate to spawn over the summer months in the same waters in which they were born.



Photo: Liam Templeton / SotE

Natterjacks at Night

In April, **Emma Harper MSP**, Nature Champion for the Natterjack Toad, braved the elements in a dusk visit to RSPB Mersehead with the Species on the Edge team and Froglife in search of the iconic Natterjack Toad. Many Natterjacks were spotted and they were in full chorus for the visit. Natterjacks are one of the rarest amphibian species in the UK, limited to a small number of dune, heathland and salt marsh sites.



Photo: Morag Wells / Scotlink

Peatlands for People & Planet

Sue Webber MSP and **Elena Whitham MSP**, Nature Champions for Lowland Raised Bogs and the Hen Harrier, joined staff from Scottish Environment LINK, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Buglife and Butterfly Conservation at Red Moss of Balerno to learn more about the value of Scotland's peatlands for people, nature and climate, as well as some of the threats they are facing and the action needed to protect them.



Photo: Kelvin Thomson

Nature Can't Wait!

In March, Nature Champions **Sarah Boyack MSP**, **Rhoda Grant MSP**, **Colin Smyth MSP**, **Christine Grahame MSP** and **John Mason MSP** joined Scotlink members outside Parliament in support for the Wildlife Management and Muirburn Bill.

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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