



# Nature Champions

## Spring Newsletter 2025



Image © Calum McLennan

Welcome to the spring edition of the Nature Champions Newsletter!

A particularly warm welcome to the newest Nature Champion, **Clare Haughey MSP**, Nature Champion for the [Common Toad with Froglife](#).

Nature is springing into action after its wintery slumber and Nature Champions and Scottish Environment LINK are similarly a hive of activity as we move towards the summer!

LINK members are busy working to support a strong **Natural Environment Bill** that could help to protect and recover many of the iconic and threatened species that feature as part of the Nature Champions initiative. The Bill presents a game-changing moment for biodiversity in allowing the Scottish Government to set legally binding targets to halt and reverse nature's decline. Much of the current Bill is very encouraging; however, with 1 in 9 species at risk of extinction in Scotland, it's crucial that the Parliament prioritises nature and biodiversity outcomes as the Bill progresses.

In this issue, we spotlight some of the work from Scottish Environment LINK members and how the Natural Environment Bill can help to improve biodiversity and regenerate Scotland's natural environment. Head of Plantlife Scotland and Convener of LINK's Wildlife Group, Alistair Whyte, outlines how the Bill can **change the fortunes of some of our most loved species**, Buglife Scotland highlight their new **'Don't neglect the night'** campaign and how the Bill can protect those species that depend on natural darkness for survival. Meanwhile, RSPB Scotland share their call for entries to the **Nature of Scotland Awards**, which will take place towards the end of the year.

With just one year left of this Parliament, we hope that you are able to make the most of being a Nature Champion and get to experience the conservation of Scotland's threatened and iconic species and habitats on the ground with your LINK host members.

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

Andy Marks  
Parliamentary Officer, Scottish Environment LINK

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**Nature Champions in Parliament**



Restoring the Solway Firth

In February, **Finlay Carson MSP**, Nature Champion for Native Oyster Beds, asked the Scottish Government about the progress of the Solway Coast and Marine Project (SCAMP) bid. SCAMP is a coastal and marine nature restoration project that seeks to restore the coastal and shallow sea habitats of the Solway, including oyster beds.

World Wildlife Day 2025

Nature Champion for the Kestrel, **John Mason MSP**, lodged a Motion to mark World Wildlife Day - designated by the United Nations to celebrate and raise awareness of the world's wild animals and plants. This year's theme was 'Connecting People and Planet: Exploring Digital Innovation in Wildlife Conservation'.

Grassland Action Plans

**Graham Simpson MSP**, Nature Champion for both the Ash and the Bilberry Bumblebee, asked the Scottish Government whether it will produce a dedicated grassland action plan, similar to those for woodlands and peatlands. There is evidence that some grasslands can store even more carbon in soil than woodlands.

Annual BeeWalk Report

In March, **Mark Ruskell MSP**, Nature Champion for the Moss Carder Bee and the White-tailed Eagle, lodged a Motion to note the BeeWalk Annual Report 2025 from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. Bumblebee numbers declined by 22.5% in 2024, meaning that it was the worst year since records began.



Happy 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Ramblers!

**Dr Sandesh Gulhane MSP**, Nature Champion for Paths, lodged a Motion to congratulate Ramblers Scotland on its 60th anniversary. The Motion also noted that walking is one of the most easily accessible ways for people to improve physical and mental health, and that Ramblers led over 2,300 walks in 2024 alone!

Ecosystem engineers

In April, **Ariane Burgess MSP**, Nature Champion for the Aspen and the Eurasian Beaver, asked the Scottish Government about the progress of an application to translocate beavers to Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin in Glen Affric. April 7<sup>th</sup> also marks World Beaver Day, a reminder of the crucial role beavers play as ecosystem engineers.

Disease-resistant Ash Trees

In recognition of another of his championed species, **Graham Simpson MSP** asked the Scottish Government how it is supporting the breeding of disease-resistant ash trees. Ash die-back is expected to kill between 50-75% of ash trees in Scotland over the next 10-20 years, according to Forestry and Land Scotland.

Free trees!

**Rachael Hamilton MSP**, Nature Champion for Riparian Woodlands, lodged a Motion to welcome the news that Woodland Trust Scotland has distributed almost 50,000 trees in 274 tree packs across Scotland under its Free Trees for Schools and Communities Scheme this spring. Applications for November tree packs are still open.

Targets for threatened species



**We probably all have our ‘favourite’ species.** Maybe for you it’s the majestic Golden Eagle soaring across the mountains. Or the Atlantic Salmon, running our great rivers as they have done for thousands of years. For me, is perhaps the Twinflower, a plant which is intrinsically linked with ancient Caledonian pinewoods, and which symbolises so much about how special Scotland’s wildlife is.

Species are important. They are the fundamental building blocks of ecosystems, and we know that ecosystems are more resilient and robust when they are more diverse. This is because all species have a role to play in ecosystems, and a diverse range of individual species means that those crucial roles will always be filled. Species complexity and diversity leads to ecosystem resilience.

This can best be understood by looking at the flip side – what happens to an ecosystem when species are removed. These impoverished ecosystems become very unstable, and even a small change in environmental conditions can have drastic consequences.

Unfortunately, here in Scotland, species are not faring well. The [State of Nature partnership](#) publishes regular reports which highlight species trends, and the numbers don't look good. **One in nine Scottish species are threatened with extinction**, which is a sobering statistic for a country which prides itself on its natural environment. We've seen a 49% decrease in average abundance of Scottish seabirds since 1986. 47% of flowering plants, 62% of mosses, and 57% of lichens, have decreased since 1970. And upland birds have decreased by 21%.

We now have an opportunity to change this, and to offer our cherished species a different future. The recently introduced Natural Environment Bill sets out a framework for introducing legally binding targets for species recovery. These targets should be clear, measurable, and locked into transparent timescales for delivery. They will focus attention and resource on taking substantial action to bring about real change on the ground. We must see a specific target or targets related to the status of threatened species.

Species offer us so much, and Scotland's wildlife is a huge part of our collective identity and a source of great national pride. **We cannot afford to keep squandering this.** Let's grasp this opportunity to do the right thing for our wildlife, and commit to taking real, meaningful action to save it.

*Alistair Whyte*  
*Head of Plantlife Scotland, Convener of LINK Wildlife Group*

*Image © Keilidh Ewan*

## Scotland's forgotten night



A new environmental campaign will shed light on darkness, or rather, the alarming lack of it across the legislative landscape. **'Don't Neglect the Night'**, spearheaded by Buglife, will launch in early May to address the growing crisis of light pollution affecting nocturnal wildlife.

While most people sleep, around two-thirds of global species are active at night. This includes **51% of threatened species that depend on natural darkness for survival**. Yet this crucial ecological dimension, representing half of all time, receives virtually no protection under current nature policy.

What makes this environmental challenge particularly urgent is its rapid acceleration. Globally, light pollution is increasing by an alarming 10% annually, disrupting the natural day-night rhythms to which wildlife has evolved over millennia. Artificial illuminations are not merely aesthetic concerns but are actively damaging habitats and contributing to population declines across numerous species.

The upcoming Natural Environment Bill presents a timely opportunity to close this critical gap in Scotland's environmental framework. Despite Scotland's leadership in many conservation initiatives, it currently lags behind several nations that have already implemented light pollution reduction policies. **Targets to reduce light pollution and its impact on the nocturnal environment would be game-changing.**

The Don't Neglect the Night campaign aims to gather support from Members of Scottish Parliament, and organisations ahead of its official launch, with detailed impacts and policy solutions outlined in briefing documents prepared by Buglife. With Parliamentary backing, Scotland could position itself as a pioneer in comprehensive environmental protection, one that acknowledges both day and night as essential components of our natural world.

*David Smith*  
*Advocacy and Social Change Manager, Buglife*

*Image © Buglife*



## The search is on for Scotland's nature champions...



### The RSPB Nature of Scotland Awards 2025 are now open for entries!

The Nature of Scotland Awards shine a light on the outstanding work being done across the country to support Scotland's species and habitats. With headline sponsor **NatureScot**, we are recognising the people and initiatives protecting - from pioneering businesses to collaborative partnerships, we want to celebrate those achieving for nature. We are open to all and it's free to enter.

There are 10 categories to choose from and full details are on our website [www.rspb.org.uk/natureofscotland](http://www.rspb.org.uk/natureofscotland). Awards celebrate individuals, groups, businesses and partnerships - make sure you alert your contacts that they should apply and inspire even more people to help nature. Applicants can also choose to nominate other people's good work so we can recognise all that they have achieved.

Over the last 14 years we have showcased the outstanding achievements of individuals like Dave Anderson who for 40 years has worked at the forefront of birds of prey conservation in Scotland, pioneering new methods to study these much-loved species. Last year, The Flow Country Partnership won the Nature and Climate Action Award for their pioneering innovative and deeply collaborative approaches to the re-evaluation and restoration of blanket bog peatlands across Caithness and Sutherland. We also celebrated outstanding cross-community delivery for nature in West Fife where CLP Nature Action are delivering nature conservation and restoration initiatives, while offering inclusive volunteering and engagement opportunities for communities to take action for nature conservation and build a sustainable future for people through positive collaboration.

**The shortlist will be revealed at a Parliamentary Reception on 10 September hosted by Karen Adam MSP, Nature Champion for the Fulmar, and the Awards Ceremony will take place on 20 November at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre.**

*Image © RSPB Scotland*

## Nature Champions Activity!



In February, seabird and marine MSP Nature Champions joined RSPB Scotland outside the Scottish Parliament to raise awareness of RSPB Scotland's seabird campaign. Champions included **Claire Baker MSP** (Puffin), **Karen Adam MSP** (Fulmar), **Brian Whittle MSP** (Leatherback Turtle), **Willie Rennie MSP** (Sandeel) and **Beatrice Wishart MSP** (Orca). Watch [the video](#) to learn more about the plight of Scotland's seabirds and to see some footage from the day.

In March, Nature Champion for Riparian Woodlands, **Rachael Hamilton MSP**, and her Borders MP counterpart, John Lamont MP, joined Woodland Trust Scotland for a visit to Jacob's Well in Coldstream to discuss the benefits of trees along rivers, burns and





lochs. Jacob's Well is predominantly comprised of sycamore and ash, and it provides a secluded haven just a short walk from the Town Centre.

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**Colin Smyth MSP**, Nature Champion for the Badger, joined representatives from Scottish Badgers in Dumfries to discuss badger road death hot spots in the town. As part of the visit, the team were delighted to present Colin with his **MSP Nature Champion of the Year 2024** award, following being named the winner at Scottish Environment LINK's Festive Reception in Edinburgh in December.



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Earlier in the spring, **Dr Sandesh Gulhane MSP**, Nature Champion for Paths, enjoyed a walk and talk with Ramblers Scotland along the Kelvin. On the walk, they discussed the health benefits from walking in nature, which can include improved physical health and wellbeing, improved sleep, greater brain stimulation and even improved creativity! Find out more about the health benefits of walking [here](#).



Scottish Environment LINK was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Christina McKelvie. Beyond her duties as an MSP and Minister, Christina was also the Nature Champion for the Kingfisher with RSPB Scotland. We thank her for all her tireless work and send our sympathies to all her family, friends and colleagues.

*Image © Simon Jones*



**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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