



Nature Champions

Summer Newsletter 2025



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Welcome to the summer edition of the Nature Champions Newsletter!

A particularly warm welcome to the newest Nature Champion, **Tess White MSP**, Nature Champion for the [Black Grouse](#).

It was fantastic to see so many Nature Champions at the 'Celebrating Nature Champions' Parliamentary Reception at the beginning of June, and many thanks to **Alexander Burnett MSP** (Red Squirrel) for sponsoring the event. The reception was a great opportunity to recognise the fantastic efforts of the 100+ MSPs who are currently signed up as [Nature Champions](#) and celebrate the different ways that they have championed Scotland's iconic and threatened species and habitats over the current Parliament. Congratulations to all of the MSPs who were nominated for the four awards that were presented on the night and of course to the winners. You can read more about the event and the winners [here](#).

In this Nature Champions newsletter we round up the Nature Champions activity from the past few months and feature some articles from LINK members. **RSPB Scotland** explain why we need to learn to better coexist with our sometimes loud and feathery gull neighbours; **Butterfly Conservation** highlight their new project recovering threatened Northern Brown Argus populations alongside farmers; and, last but not least, **Keep Scotland Beautiful** are keeping community green spaces beautiful through their communities network and calling on MSPs to champion their local groups and green spaces.

It's the last summer recess before the next Scottish elections and a perfect opportunity to get out and see your species and habitats, and to engage with the people working to protect them on the ground (or under the water). Do contact your host organisation(s) or please let me know if you'd like to join a site visit in the coming weeks.

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
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Nature Champions in Parliament

Native Woodlands

Graham Simpson MSP, Nature Champion for the Ash and the Bilberry Bumblebee has asked the Scottish Government a number of questions relating to Scotland's native woodlands and rainforests, including new native woodland creation, non-native conifer forestry, and promoting natural woodland regeneration.

Beaver Translocations

Ariane Burgess MSP, Nature Champion for the Eurasian Beaver and the Aspen, asked the Scottish Government questions about irregularities in naturalised beaver ranges defined in policy and the review process regarding translocation licences, including the Glen Affric beaver translocation proposal, live since 2022.

30 Years of COAST

To celebrate 30 years of the Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST), **Kenneth Gibson MSP**, Nature Champion for the Blue Whale, lodged a Motion highlighting their achievements including the establishment of Scotland's first no-take zone in Lamlash Bay and the designation of the South Arran Marine Protected Area.

International Day for Biological Diversity

Mercedes Villalba MSP, Nature Champion for Road Verges, lodged a Motion to recognise International Day for Biological Diversity on 22nd May 2025, as well as the importance of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which was enacted to end and reverse the loss of nature globally by 2050.

World Bee Day 2025



In May, **Mark Ruskell MSP**, Nature Champion for the Moss Carder Bee and the White-tailed Eagle, lodged a Motion to celebrate World Bee Day and the critical roles that bees and other pollinators play in food systems and ecosystems. Mark joined four other Nature Champions for a World Bee Day visit in Stirling.

International Wild Salmon Day

Edward Mountain MSP, Nature Champion for the Atlantic Salmon, lodged a Motion to mark the inaugural International Wild Salmon Day on 1 June 2025. This day aims to raise awareness about the threats that endangered wild salmon face and the solutions that can be used to safeguard these fish and the environment.

SCAMP Success

Also in June, **Finlay Carson MSP**, Nature Champion for Native Oyster Beds, lodged a Motion to congratulate the Solway Coast and Marine Project (SCAMP) on becoming the first recipient of the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Landscape Connections initiative. SCAMP is a nature restoration project along the Solway Firth.

Island Biosecurity

Nature Champion for Cliffs and Maritime Slopes, **Paul McLennan MSP**, asked the Scottish Government whether it will outline its plans for ensuring that island biosecurity continues to be addressed throughout Scotland's island network when the current Biosecurity for Scotland project draws to a close in March 2026.

The Cry of Gulls



The cry of gulls is one of the most evocative sounds of the seaside. Gulls are bold, intelligent birds who have adapted to our encroachment on their natural habitats.

It is this very adaptiveness though that has brought gulls into conflict with humans. Some will have had food nabbed by a hungry gull, or been swooped on by a protective parent gull.

But, despite appearances, **gulls are struggling just as badly as other seabirds in Scotland.**

Herring Gulls are on the Red List of most serious conservation concern, with numbers in Scotland falling by half since the 1980s. Climate change, food shortages, and loss of habitat have all taken their toll. Gulls have adapted to live in our world precisely because they are struggling to find food and shelter in the wild.

Though it is illegal to kill wild birds or destroy their nests, NatureScot can license lethal control in limited cases: if there is a risk to human health and safety, if non-lethal measures have failed, and if it does not harm the overall population. However, it's very likely gulls move between urban and natural areas. So, controlling urban gulls could have serious implications for the entire Scottish population.

At RSPB Scotland, we believe gulls and humans can coexist peacefully - if we take the right action. That starts by urgently addressing root causes: by protecting seabird food supplies, improving island biosecurity and tackling climate change. The upcoming **Scottish Seabird Conservation Action Plan** must reflect this. Meanwhile, we can make changes such as reducing food litter, installing 'gull-proof' bins and avoiding feeding gulls.

Scottish coastal communities are already leading the way, learning to coexist with their sometimes loud, feathery neighbours. In Dundee, the '[For Love of Gulls](#)' project is helping people connect with urban wildlife.

With understanding and action, the cry of gulls can echo on our coasts for many generations to come.

Caitlin Paul
Marine Policy Officer, RSPB Scotland

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Farmers, Landowners, Northern Brown Argus and Species-rich Grassland



Work to protect the threatened **Northern Brown Argus** butterfly (Nature Championed by **Roz McCall MSP**) is off to a flying start, with the launch of Butterfly Conservation's new project in the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway. This exciting six-year pilot is funded by the Borderlands Initiative Growth Deal and will allow us to work collaboratively with farmers to restore species-rich grasslands and explore green finance opportunities. As a butterfly of flower-rich and lightly grazed swards, the Northern Brown Argus is the perfect flagship species for High Nature Value (HNV) farming.

The Scottish Borders is a significant stronghold for Northern Brown Argus and volunteer surveys have highlighted that **50% of populations are now impacted by factors such as gorse and bracken encroachment, under-grazing and in particular, financially rewarding afforestation schemes**. Over the next six years, our project will work to tackle these issues by trialling different costed management techniques to restore and manage species-rich grassland. This will include working with contractors, tractor mounted mechanical flails, NoFence collar technology, drone surveys and even remote controlled Robocutters. We will also investigate ways to incentivise farmers to continue managing grasslands through appropriate grazing regimes – such as securing green funding through Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and exploring the need for a Grassland Carbon Credit Code.

This project will also offer a variety of new volunteering activities in the south of Scotland – with identification training workshops and walks to be advertised in the coming weeks, and practical conservation tasks such as gorse removal and rock-rose plug planting taking place during the autumn and winter months. We are particularly keen to inspire individuals and communities to champion their local species-rich grasslands and will provide volunteers with the necessary skills to monitor and maintain key sites.

We are looking forward to starting work on the ground to secure a thriving future for Northern Brown Argus, biodiverse grasslands and local farmers. To keep up to date with these volunteering opportunities, please join the Borderlands volunteer mailing list by contacting abourne@butterfly-conservation.org.

Keeping Community Green Spaces Beautiful



Green spaces across Scotland give communities and individuals of all ages the opportunity to enjoy the environment, connect with nature and outdoors, often without having to travel far from home. There are a number of threats to our community green spaces including declining cleanliness standards alongside the impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss and disconnection from both nature and our land.

Environmental charity Keep Scotland Beautiful has been working alongside **Joe FitzPatrick MSP** for more than a year through the Nature Champions initiative to protect community green spaces, and have been delighted to introduce him to some of the community groups striving to make Dundee a greener, more resilient place.

Indeed, communities all over Scotland are working together to improve the places we care about. Keep Scotland Beautiful's [Climate and Nature Friendly Communities Network](#) recognises and celebrates the achievements and efforts of those taking positive action across Scotland to protect and enhance our natural and built heritage.

Members of the charity were joined by Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, **Jim Fairlie MSP**, at a recent visit to Kinnesswood to learn more about building a climate and nature friendly community. Mr Fairlie met with volunteers from Kinnesswood in Bloom, who have been cleaning and greening their village for two decades as part of Keep Scotland Beautiful's Beautiful Scotland competition, as well as pupils from Portmoak Primary School, an exemplar international Eco-School.

The Minister said the visit “really highlighted to me how much can be achieved when a local community comes together”.

In 2024, Keep Scotland Beautiful supported 233 community groups through our Climate and Nature Friendly Communities Network, and just this month awarded 88 Scottish parks with a Green Flag - a symbol of excellent management of our precious and much loved green spaces.

We know how crucial it is that our green spaces, the areas in which so much biodiversity in Scotland thrives, continue to be protected and cared for. With support of members of the Climate and Nature Friendly Communities Network and many park managers, Keep Scotland Beautiful is determined to build community capacity and capability to ensure green spaces thrive – but vital funding is needed if we are to continue to support the groups and volunteers across Scotland who are working every day to protect our environment. **We need MSPs to continue to recognise the excellent work being done and to champion their local groups and green spaces;** celebrating their importance and the nature found within them.

You can find out more about the [Climate and Nature Friendly Communities Network](#), [Green Flag Award for Parks](#) and the [impact of Keep Scotland Beautiful](#) on our website.

Katie O'Donnell
Communities Manager, Keep Scotland Beautiful

Image © Keep Scotland Beautiful

Nature Champions Activity!



To celebrate World Bee Day in May, Scottish Environment LINK, Buglife and Bumblebee Conservation Trust partnered with the University of Stirling for a joint visit for Nature Champions. We were delighted to be joined by **Evelyn Tweed MSP** (Azure Hawker), **Graham Simpson MSP** (Ash and Bilberry Bumblebee), **Mark Ruskell MSP** (Moss Carder Bee and White-tailed Eagle), **Patrick Harvie MSP** (Red Mason Bee), and **Roz McCall MSP** (Northern Brown Argus). The visit included a fascinating talk from Dr Gema Martin-Ordas on bee cognition and culminated in a wild bee safari! You can read more about the visit [here](#).



In June, Nature Champion for the Scottish Primrose, **Liam McArthur MSP**, joined the team from Species on the Edge to see his species at Hill of White Hamars Scottish Wildlife Trust reserve on island of South Walls. The Scottish Primrose is an endemic species to Scotland, meaning it can be found in Scotland and nowhere else in the world!



Jenni Minto MSP, Nature Champion for Scotland's Rainforest, joined the Plantlife Scotland team in July for a visit to Argyll Countryside Trust (ACT) Rainforest Hub. Scotland's rainforest is found only on the west coast, where the combination of high rainfall and relatively mild year-round temperatures means woodlands are consistently very humid.



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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