



Nature Champions

Autumn Newsletter 2025



"Presiding Officer, I would like to declare that I am the Nature Champion for the..."

It's autumn and Scotland's species are preparing themselves for the wintery chill - geese are returning to our shores from even colder places, salmon are leaping upstream towards their birthplaces to spawn, and bats are finding safe nooks to hibernate within to see them through to warmer days.

In Holyrood, meanwhile, Scotland's Nature Champions have been busy discussing and debating the **Natural Environment Bill**, which could introduce long-awaited legally-binding nature recovery targets. It was a joy to hear Nature Champions highlight their species and habitats in the Stage 1 debate - and also those they aren't championing!

In this Nature Champions newsletter, we round up the Nature Champions activity from the past few months - those visits, Motions and other efforts to raise awareness of their species and habitats in their constituencies and beyond. We also feature two articles from LINK members and highlight LINK's recent activity as part of the [Scotland Loves Nature](#) campaign.

Whilst political attention may be on biodiversity over the coming weeks, members have been keen to stress how the biodiversity and climate crises go hand in hand, and how climate change remains the single greatest threat to Scotland's natural environment. Here, **Atlantic Salmon Trust** describe the shocking impact that climate change is having on one of our most iconic species and the work they're undertaking to safeguard Atlantic Salmon into the future. Meanwhile, **Froglife** highlight their new project, Coalface to Wildspace: Scotland, which will work alongside communities in areas of rich industrial heritage to transform their local habitats to help mitigate the effects of climate change, along with a whole range of creative activities to get people stuck into their wild spaces.

With just a few months before Parliament is dissolved and the Nature Champions initiative comes to a close for another session, we encourage you to take up any opportunities you can to get out and enjoy the nature around you, to encounter your species and habitats face-to-face, and to meet and the people and places they are integral to.

Thank you, as ever, for being a voice for Scotland's threatened species and habitats in the Scottish Parliament.

Andy Marks
Parliamentary Officer, Scottish Environment LINK
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Phytophthora ramorum

In July, Nature Champion for the White-tailed Eagle and Moss Carder Bee, **Mark Ruskell MSP**, asked the Scottish Government about Scottish Forestry's policy regarding Phytophthora ramorum - a destructive fungus-like organism that kills trees like larch - and how its control can impact breeding raptor populations.

Celebrating the RZSS

Ariane Burgess MSP, Nature Champion for the Eurasian Beaver and the Aspen, lodged a Motion to celebrate the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland's Work to halt biodiversity loss and the charity's leadership in ground-breaking conservation projects.

A Hopeful New Chapter

Christine Grahame MSP, Nature Champion for the Golden Eagle, lodged a Motion to celebrate the successful fledging of the first young golden eagle, 'Princeling', as part of efforts to restore the species in southern Scotland. The South Scotland eagle population has gone from just three breeding pairs to more than 50.

ScotLINK 50-strong!

Sarah Boyack MSP, Nature Champion for the Large Heath Butterfly, lodged a Motion to celebrate Scottish Environment LINK reaching 50 member organisations. ScotLINK's members represent a broad spectrum of environmental interests in Scotland and have a combined membership of over 500,000 people.

Rhododendron Strikes Again!



In September, **Graham Simpson MSP**, Nature Champion for the Bilberry Bumblebee and the Ash, asked the Scottish Government about tackling invasive Rhododendron ponticum - a key threat to Scotland's rainforests - and conversations it is having with the horticultural sector about a potential ban on its sale.

Nature of Scotland Awards

Also in September, Nature Champion for the Fulmar, **Karen Adam MSP**, highlighted her Nature Champion role and her efforts to champion these threatened seabirds at a Parliamentary reception announcing the shortlisted nominees for the Nature of Scotland Awards, hosted by RSPB Scotland & NatureScot.

Whale Strandings

Beatrice Wishart MSP, Nature Champion for the Orca, lodged a Parliamentary Question about increases in marine mammal strandings in Scotland, and what assessment the Scottish Government has made of these results in relation to industrial activity in the seas around Scotland.

Nature Champions in the 7th Session

Nature Champion for the Kestrel, **John Mason MSP**, lodged a Member's Business Motion for Debate noting the success of the Nature Champions initiative over this Parliament, along with the need for new members in the next parliamentary session to take up the role of a Nature Champion to help champion Scotland's natural heritage.

Protecting Scotland's Rivers

Audrey Nicoll MSP, Nature Champion for the Freshwater Pearl Mussel, led a debate on protecting Scotland's rivers and the species that rely on them, such as Freshwater Pearl Mussels. Former and present freshwater champions, **Alexander Burnett MSP** and **Emma Harper MSP**, also took part in the debate.

World Migratory Bird Day



To recognise World Migratory Bird Day, **Gordon MacDonald MSP**, Nature Champion for the Swift, lodged a Motion that noted the steep declines of Swifts, which are now on the Red List, and the value of Swift bricks and boxes in providing nesting sites. Swifts return each May and leave in August, marking the arrival and passing of summer.



© Anthony McCluskey, Apithanny Bourne

Searching for Northern Brown Argus

This summer, Butterfly Conservation Scotland were joined by **Roz McCall MSP**, Nature Champion for the Northern Brown Argus, in search of the Northern Brown Argus in Perthshire.

The Northern Brown Argus is a beautiful butterfly whose UK distribution plummeted 56% from 1990 to 2018, largely due to habitat loss. Exploring swathes of species-rich grassland, Roz and the team managed to spot the adult butterflies, eggs and caterpillars, as well as fragrant orchids and Dark Green Fritillaries. These grasslands take many years to establish and are a valuable carbon store, as well as a haven for wildlife. Action is needed to protect these habitats for the future.

Wild Atlantic Salmon in Hot Water!



Wild Atlantic salmon are in crisis. Once abundant in our rivers, they are now classified as 'Endangered' in Great Britain. Climate change is a major driver of this decline - salmon need cold, clean water. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events and degraded habitats all contribute to the decline of this iconic fish. In the River Dee catchment, spring-run salmon have declined by 80% in recent decades and just a single female adult salmon returned to one tributary – the Girnock Burn – in 2024. Winter floods wash away salmon eggs and hotter, drier summers reduce river flows and oxygen levels, stressing young fish and disrupting their growth.

Despite the crisis, there is hope. At the [Atlantic Salmon Trust](#) we aim to demonstrate and inspire positive action for wild salmon and their habitats. By managing deer grazing and planting trees along riverbanks to provide stability and shade, as well as restoring wetlands and peatland, the habitat for salmon and other species can improve. Our [Save the Spring](#) partnership with the River Dee has this work at its core.

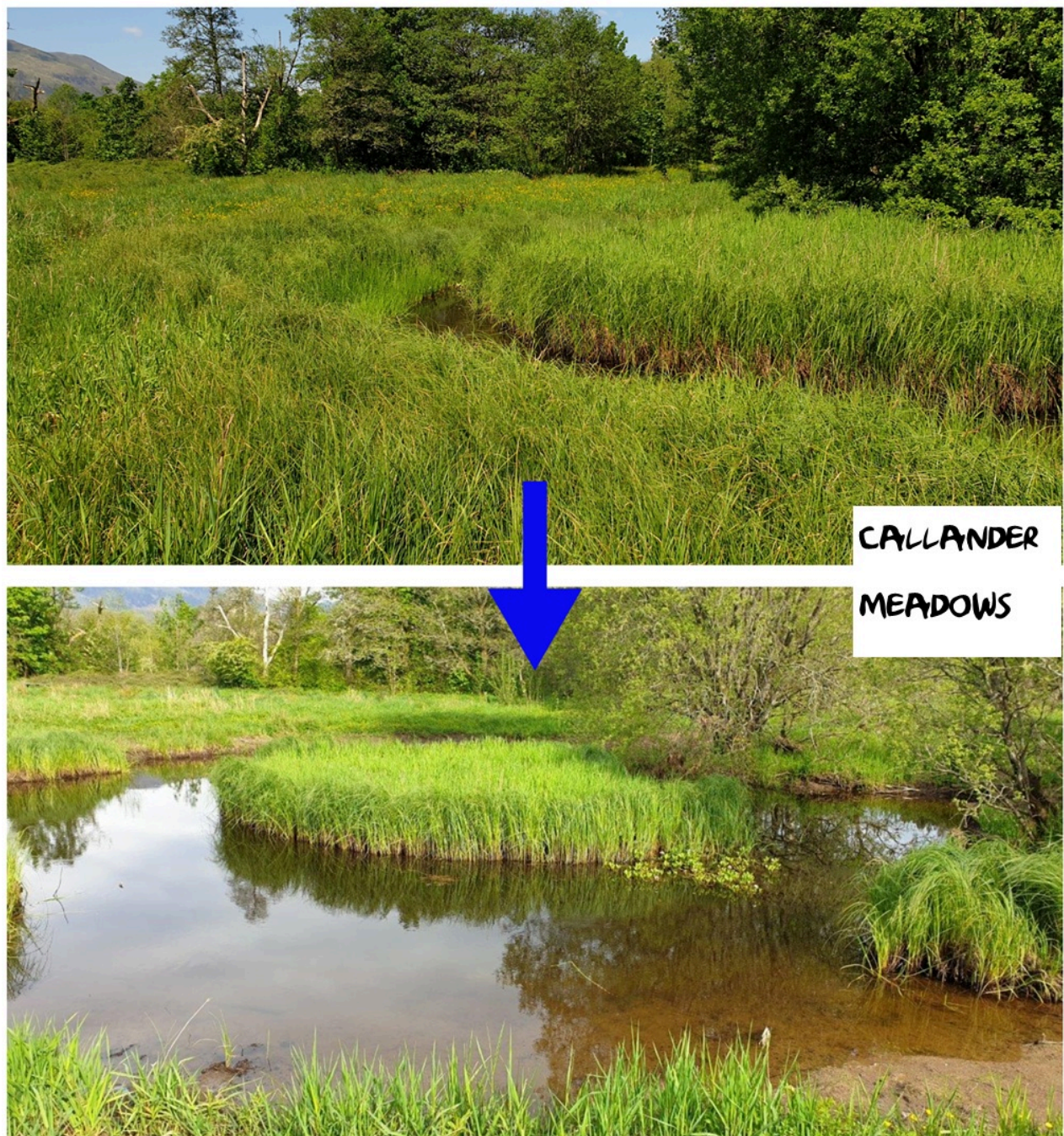
Even in wild salmon strongholds, there is **growing pressure from climate change**. '[Linking the Lochs](#)' is a project based on the Isle of Lewis. With local partners, we're setting out a programme of work across the Laxay watershed to secure wild salmon and wider biodiversity for future generations. Community engagement is essential and we're working closely with crofters to ensure that benefits are just and equitable for both nature and people.

Wild Atlantic salmon are a keystone and indicator species - an early warning system for problems in the wider ecosystem. By taking action to restore them, we protect the wider ecosystem from the impacts of climate change too. Through continued efforts we are determined to turn the tide for wild Atlantic salmon.

Wendy Kenyon
Environmental Lead, Atlantic Salmon Trust

Image © Richard Davies

Coalface to Wildspace: Scotland



Froglife is dedicated to conserving the UK’s native reptile and amphibian populations and the habitats vital to their survival. A practical, hands-on charity, we create and restore freshwater habitats across the UK to support these species.

Ponds are essential for amphibians and reptiles, providing breeding grounds, refuge, and feeding opportunities. However, **climate change is putting these habitats under strain**. Rising temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns cause ponds to dry out or flood unpredictably, disrupting breeding and reducing egg and larval survival. Amphibians, reliant on moist environments, face habitat loss and disease during droughts and heatwaves, while reptiles face challenges such as skewed sex ratios in temperature-dependent species and loss of riparian habitats. Together, these impacts threaten biodiversity and ecosystem resilience.

To help mitigate these effects in Scotland, Froglife is developing [Coalface to Wildspace: Scotland](#), supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project will run across Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, and the Lothians, building on the success of previous Scottish initiatives—Scottish Living Waters, Scottish Dragon Finder, and Come Forth for Wildlife, which engaged over 206,000 people, enhanced 31 sites, created 74 ponds, restored 18, and improved 138 terrestrial habitats.

Coalface to Wildspace aims to go further: creating and restoring 87 ponds, enhancing 24 terrestrial habitats, and establishing nine wildlife corridors featuring 36 smaller ponds and 72 targeted interventions.

Public engagement is central to the project, with activities ranging from a digital film exploring local geology and species evolution to creative and educational experiences such as art workshops, “Speaking Sculptures,” Mapestry, wildlife gardening, performance art in schools, Nature Guardian training, and community events.

Ultimately, the project seeks to tackle biodiversity and climate crises while ensuring inclusive access to Scotland’s natural heritage, improving wellbeing, skills, and employment through conservation.

Kathy Wormald
CEO, Froglife

Images © Froglife

A Wilcat, a Red Squirrel, a Puffin, a Bumblebee, oh my!



On the morning of the 30th October, MSPs and passers-by were greeted by a puffin, a bumblebee, a wildcat and a red squirrel demonstrating outside the Scottish Parliament. This unorthodox menagerie held signs reading ‘Protect our home’, ‘Restore nature’ and ‘Nature targets now’, representing the interests of wildlife across Scotland in advance of the Stage 1 Debate of the Natural Environment Bill.

The Natural Environment Bill presents a vital opportunity to set strong and meaningful targets for nature recovery in Scotland. As the [State of Nature 2023](#) report has found, **one in nine species in Scotland is at risk of extinction**, with almost half of species decreasing in number since the 1970s. Scotland also ranks in the [lowest 15% of countries globally](#) for the overall health of its biodiversity.

Puffins, for example, are a ‘Red List’ species, meaning they are one of our most threatened birds. They are at risk of extinction in Scotland and worldwide. The Great Yellow bumblebee, now extinct from the rest of Britain, is hanging on in the very North of Scotland, the Orkneys and the Outer Hebrides. Wildcats are on the brink of extinction in Scotland, although the [Saving Wildcats](#) partnership is providing a lifeline by breeding cats for release into the wild. Scotland is home to 80% of the UK’s red squirrels, but this iconic species is under threat from the invasive, non-native grey squirrel.

The Scotland Loves Nature campaign is calling on the Scottish Government to **set legally binding targets for nature recovery**, as well as putting more funding in place to restore nature and helping communities to protect and restore their natural environment.

The campaign was launched by Scottish Environment LINK to demand urgent action to restore Scotland’s nature. It is backed by more than 40 organisations including the Scottish Wildlife Trust, the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, WWF Scotland and RSPB Scotland.

To find out more about Scotland Loves Nature and to read messages of support from citizens across Scotland, visit: www.scotlandlovesnature.scot.

Image © Scottish Environment LINK



Scottish Environment LINK would like to thank Nature Champions 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 50 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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