

Nature Champions Initiative – Briefing for Members’ Business Debate

February 2026

Key points:

- The Nature Champions initiative provides one way for MSPs to learn about species and habitat conservation and to meet some of the organisations, individuals and communities who are working to protect and restore Scotland’s natural environment.
- The initiative is an engaging, hands-on and often fun way for MSPs to learn more about the threats to our natural environment.
- In this debate, Scottish Environment LINK encourage MSP Nature Champions to raise awareness of the species and habitats that they are championing, memorable experiences MSPs have from site visits and actions that they have taken to champion their species and habitats in Parliament and across their constituencies.

Why are Nature Champions important?

For thirteen years, the [Nature Champions](#) initiative (formerly Species Champions) has supported Members of the Scottish Parliament to champion Scotland’s threatened and iconic species and habitats – from the smallest pond mud snail to the mighty blue whale.

The success of this [award-winning initiative](#) has inspired similar programmes in the Welsh Senedd, the UK Parliament, Scottish local authorities and within communities across Scotland.

The initiative provides an engaging, hands-on and often fun way for MSPs to understand the threats facing Scotland’s natural environment and the importance of protecting species and habitats. It also highlights the need for the benefits of a thriving natural environment to be considered across policy and decision-making.

Scotland has suffered a high historic level of nature loss, losses are ongoing, and we face further risks and pressures in future. Scotland is ranked 212th out of 240 countries and territories for biodiversity intactness¹. Average species abundance continues to decline, with 1 in 9 species at risk of national extinction².

Protecting Scotland’s rich variety of habitats and species is essential if we are to maintain our international reputation for nature and landscape.

The Nature Champions initiative offers MSPs opportunities to learn about species and habitat conservation ‘on the ground’ (or under water!) and to meet the organisations, individuals and communities who are working to protect and restore Scotland’s natural environment. These experiences are frequently brought back into Parliament, where Parliamentary Questions, Motions and Debates are used to promote action and push for positive environmental change.

¹ Natural History Museum and RSPB (2021) Biodiversity Intactness Index. Available at: <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/data/biodiversity-indicators/about-the-biodiversity-intactness-index.html>

² State of Nature (2023) Scotland Report. Available at: <https://stateofnature.org.uk/countries/scotland/>

Nature Champions over the 6th Scottish Parliament

Over the 6th Scottish Parliament, more than 100 MSPs have become Nature Champions, supported by over twenty Scottish Environment LINK member organisations that are leading on the conservation and protection of Scotland's species and habitats.

More than 50 MSPs have visited their species or habitats in person and over half of MSPs have raised awareness of their species or habitats in Parliament or through public awareness-raising activities.

Scottish Environment LINK members have led five different cross-party group site visits for Nature Champions, including to Scotland's rainforest, a lowland peatland, a river restoration project, a marine boat trip to Bass Rock, and a World Bee Day visit to the University of Stirling. These visits aim to ensure that nature loss remains a cross-party concern and encourage MSPs to collaborate when tackling some of the most pressing issues affecting our natural environment.

To celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Nature Champions initiative in 2023, 23 different MSPs provided audio descriptions as part of the public exhibition, 'A Voice for Nature', which took place in front of the Scottish Parliament between August-September. This exhibition highlighted the fantastic work that MSP Nature Champions have undertaken in the Scottish Parliament since the initiative's inception.

Raising awareness of your species and/or habitat

Scottish Environment LINK encourages MSP Nature Champions to use this Members' Business Debate to raise awareness of the species and habitats that they champion. MSPs may wish to refer to their species and habitat factsheets, outlining the key threats that their species and habitats face, and the actions needed to protect them. These factsheets are listed under each species and habitat [on our website](#).

MSPs are also encouraged to reflect on the wider impact of the initiative on their broader relationship to Scotland's natural environment, as well as their specific experiences as champions. MSPs may wish to highlight, for example:

- Memorable experiences they have from site visits
- Specific conservation projects that they have visited in their regions or constituencies
- Local or national campaigns that they have supported that relate to their species or habitats
- Parliamentary Questions, Motions or Debates that they have lodged or participated in on behalf of their species or habitats.

MSPs may wish to consult previous editions of the seasonal [Nature Champions newsletter](#) to review Nature Champions activity over this 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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