



Scottish
Environment
LINK

Nature Champions Guide for LINK members



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Photo: Jamie McDermaid

1. What is the Nature Champions initiative?

Nature Champions is an award-winning initiative developed by Scottish Environment LINK.

Nature Champions encourages Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) to champion Scotland's species and habitats – from the smallest twinflower to the mighty humpback whale.

MSPs are partnered with leading conservation organisations to get to know their species and habitats, along with the key issues affecting them. **By becoming Nature Champions, MSPs can help to raise awareness and promote action to restore Scotland's natural environment.**

First launched in 2013 as 'Species Champions', the Nature Champions initiative has gone from strength to strength since its inception. More than eighty percent of MSPs have become Nature Champions over the past two Parliaments, representing hundreds of Scottish species and habitats.

The initiative has inspired similar programmes in the Welsh Senedd, the UK Parliament, local authorities and within communities across Scotland.



2. How does it work?

Nature Champions is based on a simple idea: each Member of the Scottish Parliament champions a threatened or iconic species or habitat for the duration of the Parliament.

As the Nature Champion for a threatened or iconic species or habitat, MSPs are partnered with the Scottish Environment LINK member organisations that are leading on the protection and recovery of that species or habitat within Scotland.

These host organisations provide Nature Champions with more information about their species or habitats, along with the threats and actions needed to protect them. These organisations also offer site visits for MSPs to learn more about their species or habitat in its natural environment.

Nature Champions become a voice for that species or habitat within the Scottish Parliament. As such, many MSPs raise awareness of their species or habitat in Parliament through debates, motions and questions.

At the end of the Parliamentary session, Nature Champions are encouraged to champion a new species or habitat so that they can learn more about a different part of Scotland's extraordinary natural environment.



3. What does being a Nature Champion offer for MSPs?

The Nature Champions initiative gives MSPs the chance to get out of the office and to deepen their knowledge of Scotland's natural environment.

Nature Champions can meet the species or habitats they represent, take part in conservation activities on the ground (and sometimes underwater!), develop in-depth knowledge of their species or habitat, as well as gaining an awareness of the social, ecological and economic value of their species and habitats for Scotland.

By engaging directly with conservation work, MSPs also build relationships with the individuals, organisations and communities who are dedicated to protecting and restoring Scotland's natural environment. As a result, **many MSPs choose to champion species or habitats found within their constituencies or regions.**

The insight gained through the Nature Champions initiative enables MSPs to advocate more effectively for their chosen species or habitats in Parliament. Nature Champions frequently submit Parliamentary questions, lodge motions and participate in debates to encourage action and promote positive environmental change.





4. What is expected from MSPs and LINK host members?

The Nature Champions initiative has been designed to fit around the commitments and capacities of all MSPs.

At its core, the initiative is a fun and light-hearted means for MSPs to learn more about Scotland's rich natural heritage. However, we nevertheless hope that Nature Champions act as sincere ambassadors for their species or habitats in Parliament, and that they are appropriately engaged with their supporting host organisations.

If they wish to do so, Nature Champions can expect to participate on at least one site visit each year with their host organisation(s).

These organisations will also be available to MSPs for advice and support on Parliamentary matters relating to their species and/or habitats.



5. Selecting Nature Champions species and habitats

Prior to the beginning of each Parliament, Scottish Environment LINK will review the list of species and habitats that are available to champion.

There are several criteria for LINK members to consider when assessing which species and habitats should be included in the initiative:

- What is the geographic distribution of the species or habitat across constituencies or regions?
- Is a species or habitat threatened or affected by a key issue that MSPs can help with or does a species/habitat represent a broader environmental issue?
- Does a LINK member have the capacity to host an MSP champion, and can they continually engage the MSP over the current Parliamentary session?

Whilst most species and habitats should be made available at the beginning of the Parliament, it is possible to add or remove these over the course of the Parliament (N.B. it is only possible to remove a species or habitat from the initiative when it is not championed by an MSP).



6. Species and habitat factsheets

Nature Champions factsheets provide MSPs with an accessible introduction to the species and habitats featured within the Nature Champions initiative. These are featured on the Nature Champions webpage and shared with Nature Champions once they are recruited.

These factsheets are key to indicating the types of activities that LINK host members are hoping Nature Champions will undertake, and therefore they are important in guiding the recruitment of Nature Champions.

Each factsheet covers three main areas: a general overview of the species or habitat, threats facing the species or habitat, and actions required to protect and restore species populations and the quality and extent of the habitat.

Overview

The 'overview' section of each factsheet provides an accessible, yet factual, introduction to each species or habitat.

This overview could include information about:

- The physical characteristics of a species or habitat
- Its range, distribution or extent in Scotland
- Its conservation status (i.e. is it on a Red List? Is it a Priority Marine Feature or does it feature in the Scottish Biodiversity List?)
- Recent or historical declines, including causes
- Its cultural or economic importance
- Key conservation efforts/projects, including those that are located within a particular geographical area

Threats

The 'threats' section should briefly introduce the key factors that negatively affect this species or habitat in Scotland. As with the overview section, this should be written in plain English, with technical language only used where necessary.

Action needed

The third and final section is perhaps the most important in shaping MSP recruitment and advocacy. This is where hosts list the types of activities that are essential to tackling the threats faced by the species or habitat. It is also where hosts can indicate the types of activities that they would like a Nature Champion to undertake.

These actions can either be high level or very specific, depending on what hosts consider to be more appropriate to the political context of these activities. For example, if hosts are calling for specific changes to a piece of legislation, then understand that this may put off MSPs with opposing party positions. In this case, hosts may instead wish to reduce the specificity of actions towards 'supporting' or 'considering' actions that may tackle the root causes of threats, and then build on this movement towards policy change further into the relationship with a Nature Champion.

Actions needed could include (but are not limited to):

- Supporting a specific strategy or implementation plan
- Support the introduction of a piece of legislation
- Raising awareness among a stakeholder group
- Pressing for a specific policy change
- Facilitating the bringing together of stakeholder groups
- Encouraging greater funding for conservation efforts, research or other initiatives
- Increasing public awareness through media
- Supporting a specific campaign



7. Co-hosting species and habitats

Some species and habitats are co-hosted by two or more LINK members. **Co-hosting can help to maximise capacity and engage MSPs with a range of LINK members.**

It is essential that LINK members should keep each other in the loop with all engagements with their co-hosted Nature Champions.

See the **good practice checklist for co-hosting Nature Champions:**

Theme	Focus	Good Practice	Why It Matters
Organisation	<i>Joint Planning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work together when recruiting the Nature Champions to ensure that the MSPs is (ideally!) the right fit for all organisations. • Draft an engagement plan together (key dates, goals, events) that aligns with your agreed advocacy actions, each organisation's strengths, and each organisation's (often seasonal) capacity. • Share policy updates, case studies, and engagement ideas with one another. • Ensure each partner can meaningfully contribute to engagement activities. • Communication and activities can be delivered independently but always loop in partners <u>before</u> engagement. • Ensure that talking points and asks are agreed <u>before</u> engagement. 	Keeps everyone focused and aligned. Demonstrates a united front and respect for co-hosts.
	<i>Clarity of Roles</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree clear roles within each engagement activity, e.g. communications, policy briefings, and visit coordination. (N.B. this doesn't mean that one party leads on all types of one activity!) • Consider the balance of stewardship, e.g. 80/20. • Agree level of input and collectively manage expectations with MSPs. 	Prevents duplication and minimises conflict.
	<i>Adaptability</i>	Keep one another informed of issues, e.g. with capacity or MSP non-commitment, and agree where roles and expectations can change depending on the circumstances.	Keeps everyone focused and aligned. Demonstrates respect for co-hosts and builds trust.
Communication	<i>Shared Visibility & Recognition</i>	Celebrate successes jointly (e.g. shared social posts).	Demonstrates a united front!
	<i>Regular Communication</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise repeated short check-ins between co-hosts (e.g. monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly). • Set up agreed repeated points of contact with MSPs. 	Builds trust, accountability and keeps things moving.
	<i>Honesty & Conflict</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be honest about any areas of conflict – policy or otherwise. If you have an issue, then share and accommodate it in the spirit of partnership. • Try to welcome conflict and critique as an opportunity for personal, professional or organisational growth. 	Builds trust and a collaborative culture.
Learning	<i>Peer Learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take part in one another's training, events and site visits. • Share research and campaigns. 	Builds knowledge and fosters collaboration.
	<i>Continuous Improvement</i>	After each major engagement, do a quick 'what worked/what didn't' review together.	Helps refine the relationship and engagement over time.

8. Recruiting a Nature Champion

Recruiting Nature Champions is a joint effort carried out by the Nature Champions Coordinator and the LINK host organisation(s).

The Nature Champion Coordinator will liaise with the host organisation(s) to ascertain the type of champion that would suit a given species or habitat. Discussions will usually be directed by the following questions:

- Can the species or habitat be found within the MSP's electoral constituency or region?
- Does the species or habitat fit in with the portfolio or personal interests of an MSP?
- Does the level of political commitment required for a species or habitat match the anticipated interest of an MSP?
- Does the MSP have an appropriate background to be able to sincerely champion this species or habitat?

Once an appropriate MSP has been identified, the Nature Champions Coordinator will approach the MSP, formally inviting them to become a Nature Champion.

Information on MSP recruitment, including a list of available MSPs, can be found on the shared Nature Champions Record & Actions 2026-31 Spreadsheet.



9. What happens once an MSP agrees to be a Nature Champion?

Once an MSP accepts the invitation, the Nature Champions Coordinator will share an introductory email with the MSP, putting them in touch with the host organisation(s), and at that point the stewardship of the relationship becomes the responsibility of the host organisation(s).

In the introductory email, the Nature Champions Coordinator will share a factsheet about the MSP's species or habitat, along with the Nature Champions Welcome Guide. Hard copies of the Nature Champions Welcome Guide and Nature Champions badges are also available to LINK hosts to present to their Nature Champions.

Scottish Environment LINK will share an announcement of an MSP becoming a Nature Champion via social media channels. The Nature Champions webpage will also be updated with the new MSP's profile.

The next step is for the host organisation(s) to set up an initial meeting with an MSP champion (see [Getting Started with your Nature Champion](#)) and to introduce them to their given species or habitat.

We strongly advise that you draft an engagement plan for your Nature Champions and LINK staff are available to support this.

As the relationship develops, engagement should be logged on the Nature Champions Record & Actions 2026-31 Spreadsheet (see 'Reporting Nature Champions engagement').





10. Reporting Nature Champions engagement

Please remember to notify the Nature Champions Coordinator if your Nature Champions take part in the following activities so that we can record these for reporting purposes:

- Meeting about the species/habitat
- Parliamentary Motion
- Parliamentary Question
- Parliamentary Debate
- Mentioned in Parliament (e.g. at a reception, committee meeting, CPG)
- Learning (e.g. species ID course)
- Visit with organisation
- News article
- Constituency activity (e.g. participating in a relevant local event)
- Other (e.g. speaking at a LINK member conference)

You can record this engagement either by emailing the Nature Champions Coordinator or by directly updating the Nature Champions Record & Actions shared document.

You may also be required by law to record your activities on the Lobbying Register. For more information, please see the LINK guidance on the Lobbying Register or contact the Nature Champions Coordinator.



11. Getting started with your Nature Champion

You've recruited a Nature Champion - what happens next?

Whilst every relationship is individual, we recommend referring to the following steps to help get your relationship with Nature Champions off to the best start.

1. Send a welcome email from your organisation(s)
2. Share the news about the new Nature Champion
3. Arrange, plan and attend a first meeting
4. Plan your first engagement activity
5. Make an engagement plan for your champion
6. Keep in touch with your Nature Champion
7. Make use of your Nature Champion in Parliament!

1. Send a welcome email from your organisation(s)

This email should explain that you are the lead contact at their host organisation, give a little background to the species, and ask if you can meet up with the MSP to discuss their involvement further. Make sure the email is short as MSPs are busy and will probably be reading the email on the go.

Be prepared to wait a couple of weeks as MSPs inboxes get full, but don't be afraid to send a reminder. If you still haven't heard anything, then try calling their office to let them know that you're eager to meet.

When requesting an in-person meeting, it's important to be mindful of their location and when Parliament is in recess. If you intend to meet the MSP in Parliament, then you will likely meet on a Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday as these are the days that Parliament sits. If you are hoping to meet on a site, then MSPs are usually available in their constituencies on Mondays and Fridays.

2. Share the news about the new Nature Champion

Scottish Environment LINIK will share the news via social media channels, but you may consider doing so from your organisation's accounts.

You may wish to share that you are looking forward to working with the MSP, outline their species or habitat, and include a photo/video of their species or habitat.

3. Arrange, plan and attend a first meeting

The first meeting with a Nature Champion is an important opportunity to build a solid foundation for your ongoing relationship. Below are some tips that can help you get off to a great start:

- (Re)introduce the Nature Champions initiative and Scottish Environment LINK – there is no guarantee that the MSP will remember either!
- Consider bringing a small physical gift (e.g. a badge, poster or soft toy) as a friendly gesture and potential social-media prompt.
- Introduce the Nature Champion to their species or habitat in an accessible, light-hearted way.
- Consider using the factsheet structure as a guide (overview, threats, action needed).
- Use plain language and avoiding assumptions about prior knowledge.
- Give a simple overview of biodiversity, why it matters, and how the MSP's species fits into the wider picture; don't assume familiarity with the nature or climate issues.
- Describe your organisation's conservation work, including any relevant projects the MSP should know about.
- Explore how the MSP is willing to support future work (e.g., motions, Parliamentary questions, social-media posts, briefings).
- Agree on preferred contact frequency and outline next steps, ideally offering a light, easy first action the MSP can take.
- Follow up within a week with a short summary of the meeting and agreed actions to help build an ongoing relationship.

A member of the LINK advocacy team would be happy to also attend this meeting if you would benefit from support. Contact the Nature Champions Coordinator for more information.

4. Plan your first engagement activity

The best way to engage with your Nature Champion is to get them out on site to see their species or habitat. Ideally, you will already have a site in mind within their constituency/region where they can see their species/habitat.

Get in touch with the MSP and try and organise a visit with their office staff as early as possible. Remember that it'll need to fit in around Parliamentary business, so potentially Mondays or Fridays may be better if Parliament is in session. The Parliament is closed during recess, so members are more likely to be active in their constituencies. The more notice you give MSPs when offering a site visit, the more likely they will be available!

See the section on 'Planning a site visit' for more information.

5. Make an engagement plan for your Nature Champion

Once you've established the beginnings of a relationship with a Nature Champions, the best thing to do now is set out a plan for the stewardship of your relationship. This doesn't need to be definitive, but it gives you something to refer to and build upon (an also a handover in case of staff changeover).

Here are some tips on creating an engagement plan:

- Develop a simple programme of activities or objectives over one or two years.
- Identify the key issues you wish to communicate to your MSP and include LINK-wide priorities where appropriate (LINK advocacy staff can assist with this).
- Assess how much time you and your organisation can commit to engaging with your MSP alongside the MSP's own availability.
- Identify any projects or initiatives where the MSP could be meaningfully involved.
- Plan opportunities for engagement through social media, including digital campaigns.
- Consider how Parliamentary mechanisms – such as motions, questions, or committee work – could align with your existing advocacy plans, including those undertaken through LINK groups.
- Be sure to plan in fun engagements, with plenty of opportunities for thanking and rewarding MSPs for their support.
- Return to your engagement plan and adjust it as your relationship develops.

Engagement will involve both proactive and reactive elements, and MSPs are far more effective in reactive situations when they have already been engaged proactively. At the same time, be mindful of their boundaries and competing responsibilities – it is important not to overwhelm your Nature Champion!

6. Plan your first engagement activity

Remember to keep your Champion informed of any new information about their species or habitat!

Have we found out something new about a Nature Champions species or habitat? Has it been found somewhere new? Have there been new impacts on the species from development, climatic events, etc.?

If your organisation is issuing a press release on an issue that your Nature Champion might be interested in, remember to let them know in advance and perhaps give them the opportunity to contribute a quote in the story.

7. Make use of your Nature Champion in Parliament

The Nature Champions initiative is all about giving nature a voice in the Scottish Parliament, so do try to encourage your MSP to influence policy to benefit your species/habitat.

Keep track of what is coming up in Parliament to see what opportunities are coming up that may be relevant to a Nature Champion's species or habitat. If you spot something, then ask if the MSP would be interested in a briefing on this.

A Nature Champion can also raise issues relating to their species or habitat in Parliament via:

- Parliamentary Questions (written)
- First Minister's Questions
- Portfolio Questions
- Topical and Urgent Questions
- Motions
- Members' Debates
- Committees
- Amendments to legislation
- Petitions
- Cross-Party Groups

The LINK advocacy team can help with advocacy planning and Nature Champions can also be considered in advocacy work at a LINK Group level.



12. Planning a site visit

Site visits are one of the most important ways of engaging MSPs with species and habitat conservation. When done well, they can be among the highlights of an MSP's time in Parliament.

Here are some important aspects to consider when planning a site visit with your Nature Champion:

Why a site visit?

Why have you chosen to meet up with your Nature Champion? MSPs are very busy and their time is precious. If you suggest a site visit, you should have a sound understanding why this would be more beneficial than a meeting at Parliament.

It may be helpful in your initial meeting with your Nature Champion to explore what they would be most interested and excited to see as part of a site visit, e.g. to meet their constituents, to do something locally or to join other MSPs who may be interested.

Where?

This question follows the previous question and depends on what it is that you want to achieve. If, for instance, you want to raise awareness of a widely distributed species or habitat, is there somewhere closer to Holyrood that would work, like a walk around Holyrood Park? Would the Nature Champion instead prefer to visit the species or habitat (if applicable) within their constituency, where they can form a more local attachment to the species or habitat and possibly meet constituents?

It's important to consider the visitor experience in its entirety: does the site have a cafe where you can get a cuppa? Does the site have quiet spaces for discussion? Are there toilets? Are you familiar with the site? If you do not see their species, are there other discussion points to make it worthwhile? Are there any risks that need to be considered about different sites?

When?

When is the best time to visit your Nature Champion's species or habitat? What can you see at different times of the year and how does this relate to your asks or discussion points that you may have? How does this fit with your Nature Champion's calendar?

If Parliament is in session, then your visit will need to fit in around Parliamentary business, so Mondays or Fridays will usually be better. Parliament is closed during recess, so members are more likely to be active in their constituencies and flexible with dates.

Invitations and communication

Once a date has been agreed, it will be important to consider what the MSP needs to know in advance of the visit, including how to get there (will you be providing transport?), what are the parking details, what to wear, where to meet on the day, to gather any dietary considerations or if any staffers are attending, and to provide contact numbers for the day.

It is good practice to send a formal invitation with all the information gathered in one email with at least a week's notice.

What is the dress code?

MSPs may not be familiar with what is appropriate to wear in different sites and it's helpful to not assume that they will know. Suggest what you think they will need to wear/bring in the invitation and feel free to send an updated suggestion if the weather forecast looks sunny/rainy the day before.

Who is attending from your organisation?

How many people need to be at the site visit? This will depend on the types of topics that will be discussed although it is certain that the site manager will need to attend and at least one representative from the host organisation - preferably the lead contact for the relationship.

If there is just one MSP, then you don't want too many people to attend and to be competing for discussion time. On the other hand, you want those experts present who can explain the issues at hand to the MSP.

The more notice you give MSPs when offering a site visit the more likely they will be available!

Is your Nature Champion attending with their staff?

It is important to build a good relationship with a Nature Champion's staff members. They arrange the MSP's schedule and are critical in ensuring an MSP is kept on top of different issues. If the space allows for it, then ensure the Nature Champion is aware that their team is also invited.

What is the itinerary?

What is going to happen when they get to the site? Who will greet the MSP? Where will you go first? Individual site visits (depending on where they are taking place) tend to take around 1.5-2 hours and you'll want to ensure that there is a good opportunity for conversation depending on what you're hoping to discuss. Where possible, have a contingency plan in case of bad weather!

What will you discuss?

Whilst it's impossible to plan every moment of your discussion, it's good to have a rough list of topics that you want to bring up in the site visit. Whether it's a broad discussion of the species/habitat and their threats, specific issues with funding, issues with a particular bill/policy or a request for a related motion, having an agenda ensure that issues are discussed promptly and whilst you have the opportunity.

Due to their busy schedules, you may not get another opportunity to raise topics in person within weeks/months and so take advantage of the time you have available.

Do you need a risk assessment or permissions?

This will depend on your organisation's policies and/or the site you are visiting, but it is important to prepare a risk assessment in advance of a site visit and to make this available to an MSP's staff or other attendees before the day. Within this, it may be helpful to consider any additional safety or security concerns that an MSP may have. Will there be a first-aider present at the visit?

Some sites will require different permissions than others. For example, if you are planning on an engagement event in Holyrood Park, then you will likely need permission from Edinburgh Council and Historic Environment Scotland to do so. It is important that you investigate this and seek the relevant permissions before the invitations are shared, to ensure that there are no unforeseen conflicts.

N.B. Scottish Environment LINK does not accept any liability from LINK member-led site visits and each organisation must follow its own relevant policies.

Press and social media

Depending on the site visit, there may be an opportunity to share images and footage of the visit on social media. Always check that you have permissions for any images that you use.

Be sure to tag MSPs on any relevant social media platforms to share information about your visit. However, only post details of a site visit after the event has taken place for security reasons.

There may also be an opportunity to share a press release regarding a visit. Consider the 'hook' of the piece and create a press release accordingly, before sharing it with the MSP's team to check they're happy with it.

If you don't think the site visit is press-worthy, then consider writing a blog post about your visit and share this instead.



13. Engaging your Nature Champions in creative ways

Struggling for inspiration? Here are some of the many ways that you can engage your Nature Champions!

Highlight an awareness-raising initiative

Monica Lennon, Nature Champion for the Oak, nominated the Cadzow Oak as part of the Woodland Trust Scotland's annual Scottish Tree of the Year competition.

Launch a public event

Lorna Slater, Nature Champion for the Golden Eagle at that time, joined SRSG, JMT and RSPB at the UK's first ever Golden Eagle Festival in Moffat. Lorna unveiled a bench specifically made for the town in honour of its new 'Eagle Town' status and awarded trophies to the winners of the events 'Eagle Hill Fen Run'.

Take your Nature Champions on a group site visit

Annie Wells, Finlay Carson and Fulton MacGregor joined Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) for a late evening group Bat Walk around Holyrood Park. By hosting the event right next to the Scottish Parliament when it was in session, BCT were able to gather three Nature Champions for a memorable evening of awareness-raising and encourage cross-party support for bats. Consider locations which don't require significant planning to accommodate different schedules!

Support your Nature Champion to complete a training programme

Whale and Dolphin Conservation supported Nature Champion for the Orca, Beatrice Wishart, to complete a Shorewatch training programme and become a citizen science volunteer trained to carry out regular ten-minute whale and dolphin surveys and log her sightings on the Shorewatch database.

Engage your Nature Champion with a local community project

Scottish Wildlife Trust and WWF Scotland invited David Torrance, Nature Champion for Seagrass, to get stuck in with some seagrass planting as part of the Restoration Forth project. A year later, David joined the team again to take part in a guided snorkelling session to explore the seagrass meadows and kelp beds.

Ask your Nature Champion to chair a meeting

Where organisations have opposing views, Nature Champions can help to chair meetings between constituents. Previous examples have included the Nature Champion for the Badger chairing meetings between National Farmers Union, Scotland, with Scottish Badgers.

Speak at a conference

Buglife invited Nature Champion for the Freshwater Mussel, Audrey Nicoll, to give the opening address at the 112th meeting of the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology's Scottish Freshwater Group.

Go to a research centre

As part of a group site visit for World Bee Day, Buglife and Bumblebee Conservation Trust took MSPs to a laboratory at the University of Stirling to learn about advancements in bee psychological research and how agricultural intensification is changing bee behaviour.



14. Species on the Edge

Species on the Edge is an exciting partnership between NatureScot and seven nature conservation charities, all of whom are members of Scottish Environment LINK.

Species on the Edge and the Nature Champions initiative overlap in their aim to raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity to Scotland. As such, there will be opportunities to engage Nature Champions in support of work undertaken as part of Species on the Edge.

The relationship between Nature Champions and Species on the Edge will be straightforward for LINK members who are both hosting MSP Nature Champions and working with those threatened and vulnerable species included within Species on the Edge. All activities undertaken by an MSP Nature Champion in relation to their championed species, whether in relation to Species on the Edge or otherwise, should continue to be recorded in the Nature Champions Records & Actions 'Action Record' spreadsheet.

Where a LINK member is working with species as part of Species on the Edge, but the Nature Champion for that species is instead hosted by a different LINK member organisation, the non-hosting member is welcome to contact and invite support from that Nature Champion, so long as they keep the host organisation(s) involved in any contact they make with that Nature Champion. This collaboration will hopefully only strengthen the collaboration and impact that organisations are able to achieve together in support of the species. Where appropriate, the organisations may wish to consider co-hosting the species for the purposes of simplifying the management of relationships with MSP Nature Champions, but this is at the discretion of the original Nature Champion host organisation.

Whilst Species on the Edge offers an exciting opportunity for greater awareness-raising and partnership working, it is important to acknowledge that the Nature Champions initiative is for the benefit of MSPs and LINK members, and clear relationship ownership should be held by LINK members only. NatureScot, as a lead coordinator for Species on the Edge, should be invited along to relevant Nature Champions engagement activities where they overlap with work undertaken through Species on the Edge; however, NatureScot should not take on a leading role within the broader hosting of Nature Champions as this role should solely be held by LINK members themselves.

15. What to do if a Nature Champion isn't responding?

MSPs are very busy people, however, it's important that your Nature Champion still engages from time to time.

If your Nature Champion has not responded to your emails/calls within 6 months of attempted communication, then follow the escalation pathway below:

1. If you are unable to make contact via telephone or email, then contact the Nature Champions Coordinator.
2. The Nature Champions Coordinator will send an email enquiring if the MSP would still like to remain a Nature Champion for that species or habitat or if another would be appropriate.
3. If there is still no contact after 1-2 weeks, the Nature Champions Coordinator will speak with a regular contact of the MSP (e.g. staff member, Whip) to enquire if the MSP is ok.
4. If there is no reason for the MSP's disengagement or no response, the Nature Champions Coordinator will send an email explaining that we will be removing them from our website and recruiting a new Nature Champion for this species or habitat. Where appropriate, the MSP will be welcome to return as a Nature Champion in future for a different species or habitat.



16. Removing MSPs from Nature Champions

Nature Champions have the potential to become valuable ambassadors for species or habitats in Parliament; however, on occasion, MSPs may fall short of what is expected. The guidance below can offer direction to LINK host members in circumstances where they feel that a relationship with a Nature Champion may have run its course.

In some cases, for example, where an MSP's engagement is at risk of bringing LINK or a LINK member into disrepute, suspending or removing an MSP from the initiative will be a simple decision; however, other cases may require a more nuanced response.

The inclusivity of Nature Champions has been fundamental to its success, therefore decisions to remove MSPs from the Nature Champions initiative should not be taken lightly. It is important to understand in this context that both LINK members and MSPs have a joint responsibility to ensure that species and habitats are meaningfully represented in Parliament. For example, most MSPs will not be equipped to effectively champion their species and habitat in the early stages of their engagement, and they must be supported by LINK hosts to develop their knowledge and enthusiasm.

Your relationship with a Nature Champion can be a good opportunity to influence party policy and it is in the interest of the aims of LINK members to seek to influence positions whenever possible and to not shy away from difficult discussions. You may wish to consult previous training on 'Building Relationships with Nature Champions' and 'Creating an Engagement Plan' to help shape your engagement with MSPs over a Parliamentary session.

If you feel that a Nature Champion should be removed from the initiative, then it is important that you speak with LINK as soon as possible so that we may provide advice. Whilst each decision will be made on a case-by-case basis, the following questions will help inform these decisions.

Where a LINK host member feels that an MSP or a member of their staff has behaved in a way that involves bullying, harassment, or any other inappropriate behaviour, we strongly encourage you to raise this with a LINK member of staff or with your own line manager, and to raise through any other pathways you consider appropriate. The MSP in question will be immediately suspended from the initiative.

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Guidance Questions

Has the MSP behaved in a way that may bring LINK or a LINK member significant reputational risk if an association is maintained?

Where an MSP has behaved in a way that may bring LINK or a LINK member significant reputational risk, the MSP should be suspended from the initiative and removed from the LINK website.

Has the MSP failed to engage with the initiative?

If your Nature Champion has not responded to your emails/calls within 6 months of attempted communication, then follow the escalation pathway outlined in the previous section.

Has the MSP acted against the interests of their species or habitat?

Conflicts of interest between an MSP and their species or habitat should ideally be avoided with adequate consideration prior to an MSP's recruitment.

Where an MSP acts against the interest of their species or their habitat, it may be helpful to err on the side of generosity and raise the issue with the Nature Champion in an inclusive, open-handed way. For example, MSPs may have or be 'whipped' into taking positions that may oppose those of your organisation. Your relationship with a Nature Champion can be a good opportunity to influence party policy and it is in the interest of the aims of LINK members to seek to influence positions whenever possible and to not shy away from difficult discussions.

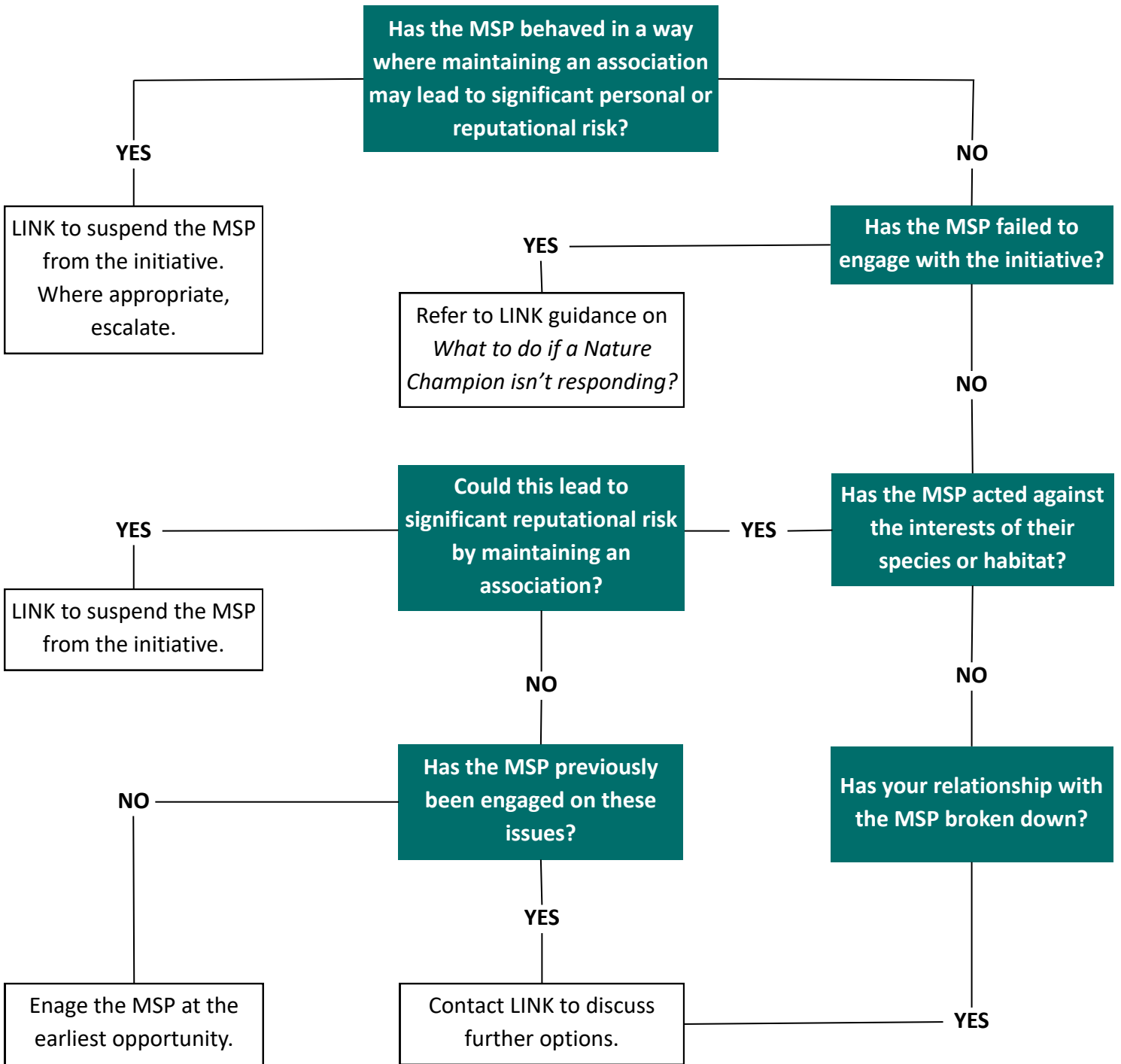
With that said, where an MSP knowingly acts directly against the interests of their species or habitats, then there clearly is an issue. LINK will contact the MSP to suggest that they champion another species or habitat that better aligns with their interests. In more serious cases, where an MSP has behaved in a way that may bring significant reputational risk for LINK or a LINK member, the MSP will be suspended and removed from the initiative.

Has the relationship between an MSP and their host organisation broken down?

The Nature Champions initiative is a valuable opportunity for MSPs to get to know LINK members and to find out more about their work. Where an MSP and an organisation are struggling to find common ground and there are challenges in maintaining a relationship, then we strongly advise that you speak with LINK at the earliest opportunity for advice on how this can be remedied. You may wish to consult previous training on 'Building Relationships with Nature Champions' and 'Creating an Engagement Plan' to help shape your engagement with MSPs over a Parliamentary session.

If a relationship has broken down, LINK will contact the MSP to suggest that they either champion another species or habitat, or that they are hosted by a different organisation.

Flow chart





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Instagram **[scottishenvironmentlink](https://www.instagram.com/scottishenvironmentlink)**

Facebook **[@scotenvlink](https://www.facebook.com/scotenvlink)**

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