Scottish Environment LINK

Nature Champions
Welcome Guide for MSPs

Photo: Scottish Environment LINK

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Nature Champion. Your support is vital in raising awareness and promoting action to restore and safeguard Scotland's environment.

There has never been a greater need for clear political leadership to address both the nature and climate crises. The Nature Champions initiative is one small way of ensuring that the nature and climate crises are considered at the heart of the Scottish Parliament.

This Welcome Guide introduces Scottish Environment LINK's Nature Champions initiative, how it works and what it entails.

If you have any questions or you'd like to find out more, then we'd be delighted to hear from you.

Thank you for being a voice for nature in the Scottish Parliament.

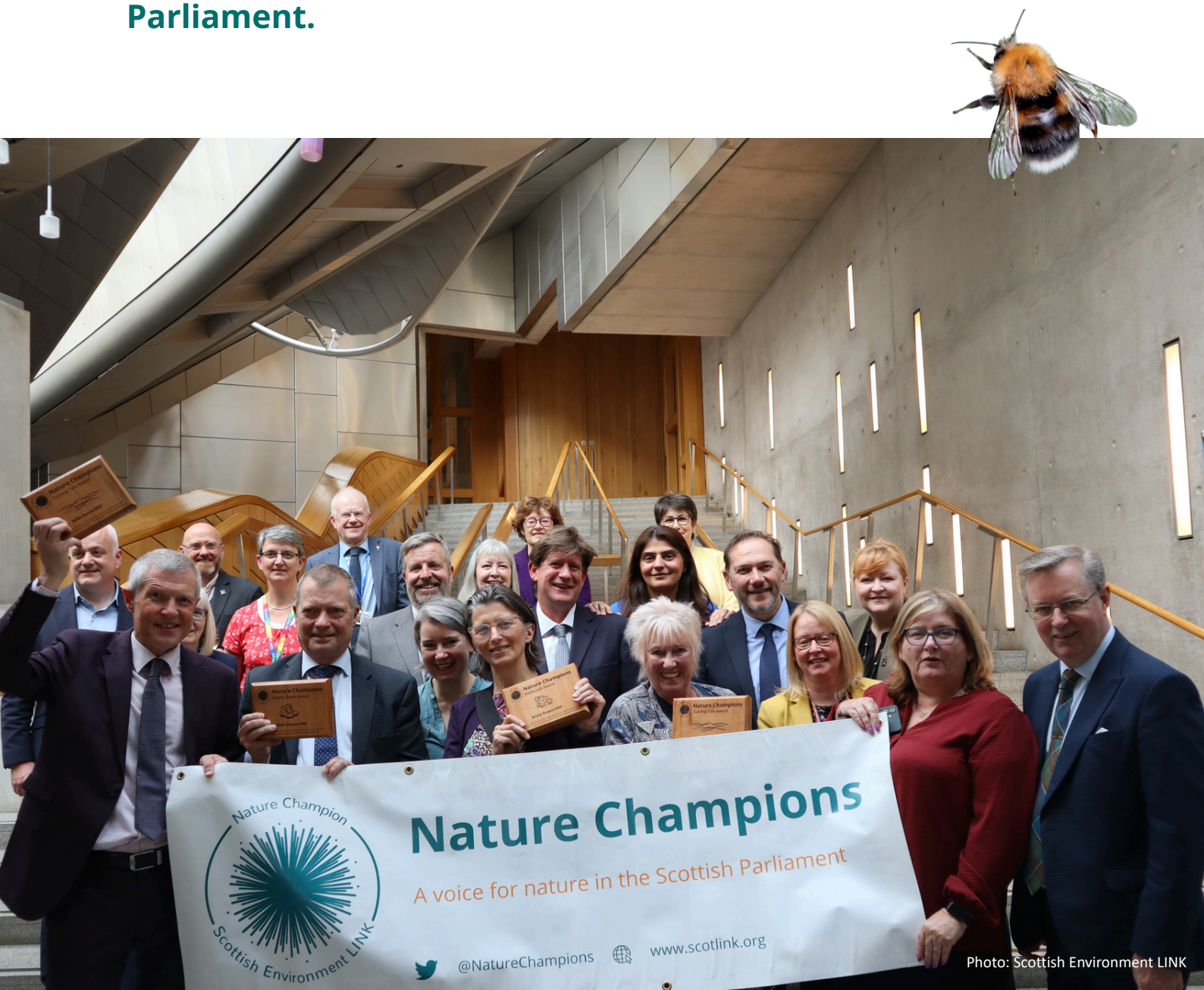

Photo: Scottish Environment LINK

What is Scottish Environment LINK?

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with 50 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

We are a Scottish Charity (SC000296) and a Scottish Company Limited by guarantee (SC250899), core funded by Membership Subscriptions and by grants from NatureScot, Scottish Government and Charitable Trusts.

Photo: Jamie McDermaid

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. 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.

Photo: Craig Macadam / Buglife

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.

Photo: Liam McArthur

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.

Photo: Kelvin Thomson

Photo: RBGE

Photo: Scottish Environment LINK

How does it link to the bigger picture?

While fun and light-hearted, Nature Champions ultimately encourages MSPs to address the threats facing our natural environment.

Nature in Scotland is in trouble.

There has been a 15% decline in average species abundance since 1994 and 1 in 9 species at risk of national extinction. Scotland consistently ranks among the most nature-depleted countries in the world.

Scotland is committed to becoming nature positive by 2030 and to restoring biodiversity by 2045. In 2026, Scotland introduced the Natural Environment Act, which introduces legally binding nature restoration targets in Scotland. These targets will help Scotland to meet our international obligations under the UN Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

The Nature Champions initiative highlights the need for habitats and species to be better protected, and for the benefits of a thriving natural environment to be considered in all aspects of decision-making.

If Scotland is to maintain its international reputation for nature and landscape, we need to step up action to protect and restore our rich variety of habitats and the threatened and iconic species that depend upon them. Nature Champions provides a clear and accessible way for MSPs to do their bit for Scotland's nature and for future generations.

Nature Champions from Scotland, England and Wales attend a UK Curlew Summit at 10 Downing Street in 2019. Photo: Sarah Sanders / RSPB

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.

In the rare event that an MSP's actions or conduct may jeopardise the reputation of the LINK network or Nature Champions, then LINK reserves the right to suspend or remove an MSP from the initiative.

Photo: Scottish Environment LINK

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