



Scottish
Environment
LINK



Tackling the Nature Crisis

A Guide for MSPs

Scotland's nature is amazing.

Our natural environment is at the heart of who we are as a country. But nature in Scotland is struggling, and our biodiversity continues to decline.

Biodiversity is the extraordinary biological diversity of the world around us – the range of species of plants, animals, fungi and micro-organisms, their own genetic variety, and the habitats that support them.

The more biologically diverse and healthy a landscape or seascape is, the more resilient it is. This resilience is critical, as well-functioning ecosystems provide a huge range of benefits to society.



Cover photos:
Otter by Sandra Graham
Butterfly by Callum Langdale
Rannoch Moor by Mae Mackay
This page photo by Simon Jones

Why is nature important?



Nature for food production:

Our farmers, crofters, and fishers all depend on natural processes, such as pollination, healthy soils, and sustainable fish stocks.



Nature for strong economies:

The Scottish Government says industries reliant on natural capital directly support over £40 billion of total economic output.¹



Nature for health and wellbeing:

Access to green and blue spaces is good for our health, wellbeing, and quality of life. Regular access to nature already saves the NHS £870 million each year.²



Nature for climate resilience:

Not only can our woodlands, peatlands and oceans capture and store carbon, restoring biodiversity can make us more resilient to the impacts of climate change, including from wildfires, droughts and extreme flooding.

¹ Scottish Government, 2024. Natural capital: analysis of importance to the economy, Edinburgh: The Scottish Government. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/importance-natural-capital-scottish-economy/>
² Scottish Government, 2025. Making the Case for Nature: insights from Scotland's Natural Capital analyses, Edinburgh: The Scottish Government. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/making-case-nature-insights-scotlands-natural-capital-analyses/pages/2/>

3 things to know about nature in Scotland



1

Scottish nature is globally important.

Scotland is home to rare and globally important habitats and species. The peatlands of the Flow Country, Scotland's rainforest and Caledonian pinewoods, our cold-water coral reefs and internationally important seabird populations are all part of what makes Scottish nature so special. Preserving and restoring what we have is a gift to future generations.

2

A healthy natural environment is our best defence against climate change.

Restoring and expanding healthy ecosystems helps keep carbon in the soil and the seabed, and helps us to adapt to rising temperatures. Steps such as increasing tree cover to cool our streets and waterways, reestablishing hedgerows to preserve soils, restoring peatlands to protect from drought and flooding, and protecting kelp forests to buffer against storms are common-sense actions.

3

Nature is in long-term decline – but we can change this.

1 in 9 species in Scotland are at risk of national extinction, and the Biodiversity Intactness Index shows that Scotland is one of the most ecologically degraded countries in the world.

Despite this, nature is resilient. We know from the success of projects across Scotland that, with help, nature can recover.



Mountain Hare by Sandra Graham

The causes of nature loss

Globally, the largest direct drivers of nature loss are:

- > Changes in land and sea use
- > Exploitation of natural resources
- > Climate change
- > Pollution
- > Invasive species

In Scotland, we face pressures from pollution, land use intensification, invasive species, climate change, marine exploitation, and the ineffective management of protected areas on land and at sea. We also face several indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, including a societal disconnect with nature and lacking recognition of the value of our natural assets – or 'natural capital' – to our society and economy.

Did you know that an estimated **260,000 jobs** in Scotland are supported by natural capital?³

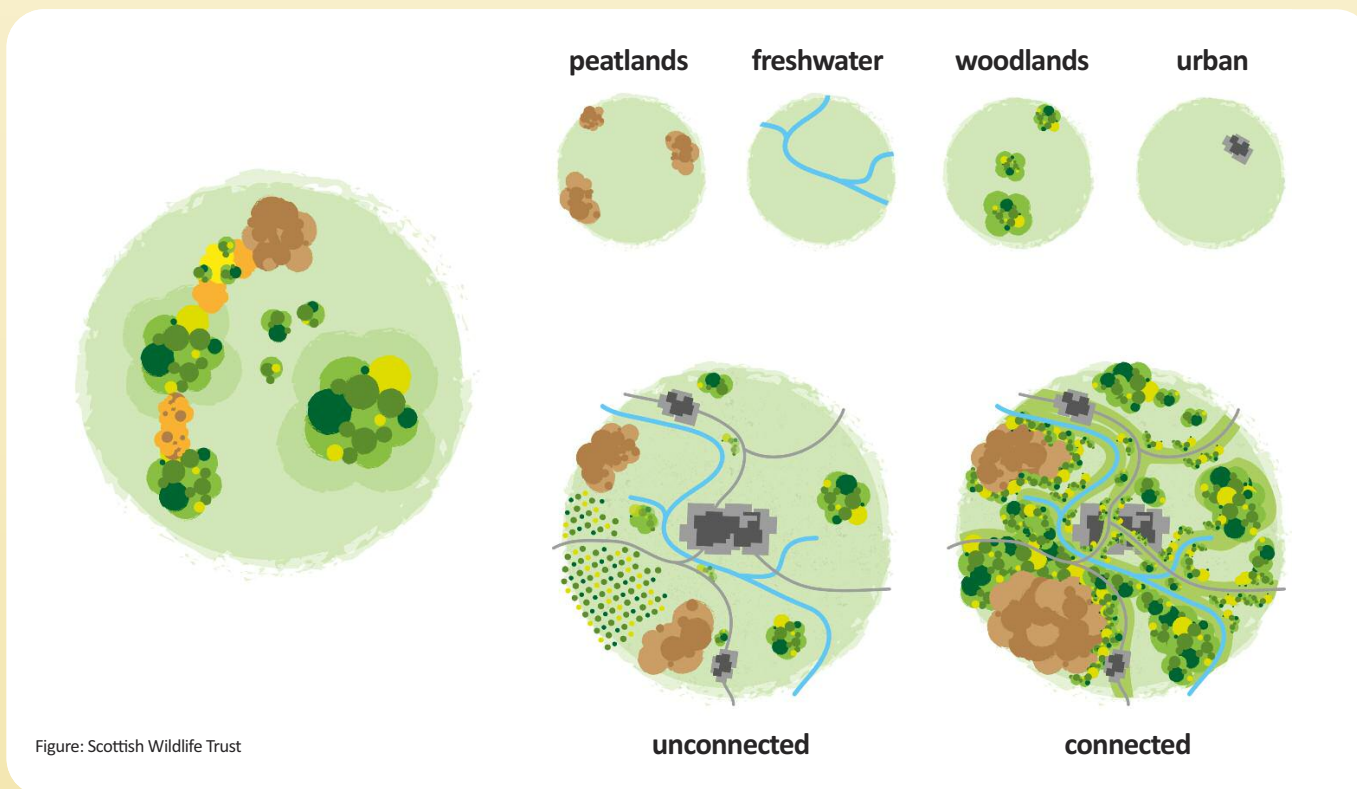
³ Scottish Government, 2026. Natural capital: marine and terrestrial economic reliance analysis, Edinburgh: The Scottish Government. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/importance-natural-capital-scottish-economy-marine-terrestrial/>

Red squirrel by Sandra Graham

The solutions to nature loss

Restoring nature often just means allowing natural processes to take place. If we remove the pressure on a site – for example, by removing invasive species or preventing damaging activity – then habitats can recover and species numbers naturally increase. Other times, we might need to intervene directly – like by planting trees where there is no seed source.

Nature is most resilient when it is connected. Every local authority is in the process of developing a nature network to improve ecological connectivity. This should be a series of corridors and stepping stones that connect fragmented habitats and allow wildlife to travel along the landscape. In practice, this might involve interventions like planting trees alongside rivers (riparian woodlands) and should bring nature directly into communities across the country.



Our most important sites for biodiversity are our **protected areas**, which cover around 18% of our land and 37% of our seas.

Protected areas include different designations for important habitats and species. The Scottish Government has committed to the global **30 by 30 target** to protect 30% of our land and sea by 2030.

The **Convention on Biological Diversity** defines a protected area as “a geographically defined area which is designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives.”⁴

Designation does not mean effective protection

Many protected areas are currently in poor condition and require improved management. On land, we particularly need to deal with invasive species, overgrazing, and poor water management. At sea, a significant portion of Scotland’s marine protected areas (MPAs) lack effective protection from the most damaging impacts, including commercial bottom-towed fishing activities.

Protected areas are just one important tool for improving biodiversity in Scotland. To restore our land and seas, we need a combined approach that includes protected areas, species and habitat conservation efforts and wider measures such as effective marine and land-use planning and the transition to a circular economy.

⁴ HM Government (2026). Global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security: A national security assessment. London: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nature-security-assessment-on-global-biodiversity-loss-ecosystem-collapse-and-national-security>

Scotland's national and international responsibilities

The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy's first delivery plan, which runs to 2030, sets out the current Scottish Government's plans to meet its ambitions: to halt biodiversity loss by 2030; to **protect 30% of land and sea by 2030**; and to **restore and regenerate biodiversity by 2045**.

These commitments complement the global targets agreed as part of the UN's Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). This international agreement to recover nature was made in 2022 by 196 signatory countries – including the United Kingdom.

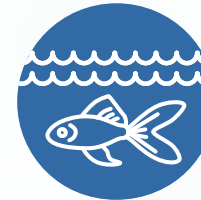


Photo: Mark Hamblin/2020VISION

Key policy issues in this parliament



Nature targets: The last Scottish Parliament legislated to require Ministers to set legal targets to restore nature. It is vital that ambitious, achievable targets are set without unnecessary delay.



Protecting our seas: Marine policy must support our coastal communities by delivering effective conservation alongside a sustainable fishing industry. Fisheries restrictions in inshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) – those within 12 nautical miles of the shore – were delayed for the fourth time in 2025 and they are now a decade overdue.



Agriculture: Around three quarters of our land is under agricultural management. Farmers and crofters can deliver a wide range of environmental benefits, but they must be supported to do so. The current farm funding system does too little to support nature-friendly farming and environmental funding for farmers has fallen over time. This leaves the industry increasingly exposed to the impacts of climate change and nature loss, which make producing food much harder.



Funding: None of our environmental goals will be met without investment. Despite nature's fundamental importance to all of us we spend a very small proportion of the Scottish budget directly supporting the protection and recovery of nature. Existing public funding should be made to work harder to deliver environmental outcomes, and direct investment in nature recovery should increase to meet Scotland's legally binding targets.



Cross-cutting policy: We can no longer think of nature as an isolated area of policymaking. The protection and restoration of biodiversity, like our climate goals, must be interwoven with the way we think about all aspects of policy – from education to health. As we are increasingly understanding, global biodiversity loss threatens our national security and prosperity.⁵ In order to reach our ambitions for climate and nature, policy cannot work in silos.

⁵ HM Government (2026). Global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security: A national security assessment. London: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nature-security-assessment-on-global-biodiversity-loss-ecosystem-collapse-and-national-security>

What you can do for nature as an MSP

- Become a Nature Champion and learn more about your species or habitat, the threats they're facing and the actions needed to protect them.
- Scrutinise the Scottish Government on their progress on the highlighted key policy issues.
- Assess legislation brought before the parliament for its potential to damage nature.
- Work with your local authority on the development of a Nature Network in your constituency.
- Visit **scottishnaturedata.net** to learn more about the state of nature in your constituency.

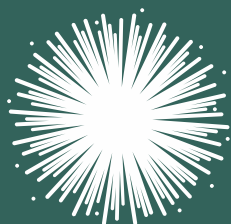


Photo: Mark Hamblin/2020VISION



Photo by Calum McLennan

Cover photos:
Bat by Sandra Graham
Red squirrel by Mark Hamblin/2020VISION
Corn Bunting by Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)
Rannoch Moor by Mae Mackay



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October 2026

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