**LINK Wildlife Subgroup meeting**

**Wednesday 29 November 2017**

**LINK Edinburgh office**

**Present**: Craig Macadam (Convenor), Lyndsey Croal (RSPB), Stuart Forbes (RSPB), Allan Bantick (Scottish Badgers), Suzanne Burgess (Buglife), Lisa Webb (LINK), Paul Walton (RSPB), Lorna Scott (NTS), Victoria Larcombe (Froglife), Sarah Robinson (RZSS), Gus Jones (BSCG), Calum Langdale (LINK), Daphne Vlastari (LINK), Nonie Coulthard (SWBG, by Skype) and Elisabeth Ferrell (Bat Cons Trust, by Skype)

**Apologies**: Emilie Devenport (LINK), Katy Malone (BBCT), Catherine Gemmell (MCS), Paul Kirkland (Butterfly Cons), Stuart Brooks (NTS)

**Group updates**

Caroline Griffin has left Froglife to become Marine Policy adviser at SNH, thus leaving a vacancy for deputy Convenor of the subgroup. The subgroup agreed that Liz Ferrell of Bat Conservation Trust will become the new deputy Convenor.

We welcomed Calum Langdale to his first subgroup meeting. Calum is based in LINK’s Edinburgh office on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays and will be working on Species Champions through a 6 month internship. Calum can be contacted at specieschampion@scotlink.org

Welcome also to Scottish Wild Beaver Group (represented by Nonie) to their first Wildlife Subgroup meeting.

**Species Champions**

We raised Graeme Dey’s views that it was limiting to have a one species per MSP rule and there followed a conversation about our process on this issue. It was agreed that the rule was useful when we were trying to recruit MSPs following the scheme’s 2016 relaunch and to avoid any one MSP ‘snapping up’ several species. However, now that we have 95 Champions, we can be open to possibility of MSPs taking on a second species. However, we should aim to avoid MSPs adopting a second species if they are doing little to raise awareness about their first species! We won’t actively ask MSPs to take on a second species but if they approach us then this could certainly be considered.

**Action: LINK staff to amend Species Champion protocol to reflect the subgroup’s decision.**

We discussed the beaver, which does not yet have a champion. SWT approached MSPs previously but no-one had agreed to take it on. We discussed this might be challenging where MSPs have a constituency with strong farming contingent. However, perhaps beaver will be more appealing to MSPs once it formally receives protected status.

**Action: Sarah Robinson to check which MSPs were approached and feed back. Then, with LINK, Scottish Wild Beaver Group and SWT, discuss approach going forward for recruiting a beaver species champion.**

A spreadsheet, compiled by Stuart Forbes, was circulated to the subgroup ahead of the meeting. The sheet contains information on upcoming legislation and policy areas, and looks at how these overlap with species currently being championed. The subgroup agreed that this was an extremely useful document, and a good reference to see where there is cut across to other groups eg pollinators and Food & Farming subgp.

**Action: Calum to circulate the link to the Google docs showing activity log, and incorporate Stuart’s spreadsheet into this.**

We discussed the proposal put to us by Sarah Whitebread (who is part of the ‘Rethink Nature’ coalition which runs the Westminster Spp Champions) to consider @SpeciesChampion becoming a joint Twitter handle used by all countries. The subgroup felt that we should avoid this, as it may lead to confusion and there may be political undertones that we’d want to avoid. We agreed that we will consider making our Twitter handle more Scotland specific.

We will ensure that information, newsletters etc are exchanged with the other country Species Champion schemes to keep eachother informed.

**Action: LINK to consider alternative Twitter handles**

**Action: Daphne to feed back to Sarah the decision about Twitter handle**

The RSPB Scotland festive reception on Tuesday 5th December will have an islands theme and could be used to highlight species champions work.

**Action: All to send any photos of Spp Champions site visits to Stuart Forbes asap**

We discussed potential for an event for Species Champions. Perhaps something to coincide with International Day of Biological Diversity on 22 May? We could do an awards ceremony for the MSP Champions, and set up a small group from Wildlife Subgp members which would decide categories, winners etc.

**Action: LINK staff to take forward**

**Biodiversity Funding**

The subgroup discussed funding from SNH, including that provided via framework agreements to some of the larger LINK members. The extent of this funding has been reduced and it is looking like framework grants may be discontinued altogether. Instead, they could be replaced with challenge funds likely to be themed on INNS, data and people engagement (although there may be room for these themes to be changed/ expanded). SNH funding to smaller LINK member orgs is also being cut and there is a requirement for work to be focused in areas of multiple deprivations, which of course is not always where biodiv work needs to be targeted. In addition, it looks as though SNH may look to apply for funding that eNGOs might normally bid for eg HLF. We would have issue with this, particularly if it was for something that they have been tasked to do by ScotGov eg delivery of the Pollinator Strategy. In summary, things are not looking too rosy in terms of SNH funding and this could have serious implications for LINK and its members.

We discussed again the issue whereby SNH didn’t set out a need for more funding when it was in front of the ECCLR Committee. Not sure where else we can go with this as the Committee don’t feel they can take any specific action on this.

We discussed whether there might be scope to commission a report on the SNH reduced biodiv funding, or get a media article on this.

The Subgroup had also previously discussed developing our own research on changes in SNH funding but felt the situation is evolving too quickly for that to be relevant. It was instead suggested that a study could be undertaken in the context of SG commitment for a strategic review of environmental legislation. We considered a piece of research that collates data on biodiversity declines (including historical declines) and looks at implementation of legislation and how this has and has not delivered. This would then form the basis to make a clear case to SG that biodiversity should be at the core of the strategic review. The State of Nature report includes a lot of valuable information and we’d want to understand/ highlight the factors leading to limited delivery on the ground eg inadequate legislation, poor implementation due to knowledge gaps, lack of funding? Commissioned research might help to throw some light on this.

**Action: Daphne to write a proposal for a piece of work on biodiv duty and its funding and circulate. Could potentially be used as a bid to LINK Discretionary Project Funding.**

LINK will discuss the budget at the next meeting with Roseanna Cunningham and we could consider writing to Derek Mackay on issue of funding for envt.

**Action: Daphne to draft letter to Derek Mackay**

**Biodiversity Duty**

Daphne and Lloyd Austin have an informal meeting with the Post-leg Scrutiny Committee on 7 December. Calum L. has collated information on the Biodiv Duty which shows how poorly it is being adhered to (in 2015, only 44% of public bodies reported). Next reporting due in January 2018.

What we really need is a test case on this. The subgp was reminded that Maggie at SWT did a report on biodiv duty with LAs (Single Outcome Agreements?) Could we use example of Cairngorms NP and An Camas Mor….there the Nature Cons Act was raised but the argument didn’t hold? We can also keep an eye on how SNH goes and if it continues move away from biodiversity towards people engagement, we could potentially mount a legal challenge on them for failing in its delivery of biodiv duty!

**Action: all to consider whether there are examples where stat duties have a penalty if not met eg any examples from Built Heritage? Also, could we get a requirement on Ministers to have to report on Biodiv duty as per climate change duty? And Parli scrutiny of reports? Would be good if net outcomes of all public bodies could be assessed (although acknowledge this is difficult to measure).**

**New Environment Group**

A new group is to be set up which will replace the Scottish Biodiversity Committee. It will be called the ‘Economy and Environment Leaders Group’ and will be chaired by Roseanna Cunningham and Fergus Ewing. Members include FCS, SNH, ScotGov, Nat Parks – basically all stat agencies and no NGOs present.

**Action: Paul to circulate more information once he receives it. If that info isn’t forthcoming then consider a series of PQs.**

**Action: Daphne to raise at the LINK meeting with Fergus on 5 December.**

**National Ecological Network**

There was a workshop on NEN in early October which was attended by Paul Walton, Davie Black, SWT et al. SNH produced a NEN document which aligns well with the LINK vision in terms of concepts. However, the SNH Action Plan which was a one-pager and contained specific actions doesn’t meet our expectations for scale and ambition of NEN.

Conclusion from the workshop is that the NEN is a key way in which to deliver the Scottish Biodiv Strategy. Drawback is that we need good regional biodiversity advisors and that is lacking currently.

Debbie Bassett is the new SNH lead on NEN

**Action: Daphne to feedback to James Hutton about where we are with NEN. NTS to share vision when talking to SLE and RSPB to do same in next discussion with NFUS.**

We discussed the fact that marine isn’t well incorporated into the NEN vision and that some marine colleagues are concerned that it could detract from their current work around MPAs.

**Action: Craig to discuss this further with Calum Duncan, to raise at Strategic Planning on 7 December and Paul W to attend next Marine Gp meeting on 11 December.**

It was mentioned that LINK Board discussed the importance of ensuring and being able to measure that LINK asks are taken up in the SG programme for government. With this in mind, the subgroup agreed that we would aim for a commitment on NEN to be in the next one. This would be an important KPI for us and our advocacy strategy.

**AOB**

*Beavers*

Nonie raised that SWBG will look for help from LINK members to support positive media stories about beavers.

*Next meeting*

**Action: Craig to Doodle for next meeting date**

*Lisa Webb*

*1 December 2017*