

Media Release

Over 100 MSPs Champion Scottish Biodiversity for 100 Days under the banner of Scottish Environment LINK's Species Champions Initiative

On 5 June, in celebration of World Environment Day, Scottish Environment LINK^[1] members are launching **their Species Champion 100-day challenge**. For 100 days over 100 Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) who have accepted to become a Species Champion will be participating in a series of actions raising awareness about their selected species, encouraging policy changes in support of their species and raising awareness about wider biodiversity concerns in Scotland.

LINK's award-winning initiative "Species Champions^[2]" pairs MSPs with species that are under threat in Scotland. With almost 1 in 10 species in Scotland at risk of extinction, political support for protecting our precious natural environment has never been more critical.

Graeme Dey, MSP for Angus South Constituency and Convener of the Scottish Parliament Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee commented:

"Being Species Champion for the Woolly willow has been, and continues to be, an enjoyable learning experience. I am delighted that there are now 100 MSPs committed to championing species. The 100-day challenge will provide a good focal point for this and I look forward to hearing about the actions taken by MSPs to promote their species."

Craig Macadam, Scottish Environment LINK Vice-Chair and Wildlife Subgroup Convenor added:

"With the support of over 100 MSP Species Champions, representing 78% of the Scottish Parliament and covering every corner of Scotland we hope to put biodiversity at the centre of the Parliament's attention. Our environment has no voice so we need Species Champions to stand up for it.

From planning to agriculture and from tourism to healthcare, the protection and enhancement of our biodiversity must be acknowledged as a key ingredient to our success as a nation – and our policies need to reflect that. If we don't, we will fall short on our 2020 global biodiversity commitments and our ambitions for a sustainable Scotland."

Examples of Species Champion MSPs at work:**Jenny Gilruth, MSP for Mid Fife and Glenrothes and Species Champion for Rowan, plants trees with local schools**

In May, Jenny Gilruth MSP, Species Champion for Rowan joined young constituents from Newcastle Primary School in Glenrothes and Woodland Trust Scotland representatives in a day of tree planting. This was an opportunity for Jenny to hear more about the threats to Rowan and the kind of policies that are needed to redress those, while also engaging with enthusiastic students and promote good environmental practice. Jenny has also previously engaged with her species having planted trees at Lundin Mill Primary School last year.

Graham Simpson, MSP for Central Scotland and Species Champion for Holly Tree and Bilberry Bumblebee, campaigns against Greenbelt development

Since taking on his second species in February, Graham Simpson MSP has been active in local campaigns to safeguard greenbelt areas in the context of the recent Planning Bill. Graham has visited his species, holly, in the Woodhall and Faskine greenbelt to learn about issues, threats and conservation work. He has also lodged a motion on the issue of greenbelt development and led the subsequent debate on 'Save the Greenbelt' in parliament in March.

Alison Johnstone, MSP for Lothian and Species Champion for Brown Hare raises awareness for her species through blogging and social media.

Alison Johnstone MSP, Species Champion for Brown Hare has used her blog to outline her thoughts on the threats and issues facing both Brown and Mountain hare in Scotland. She has also taken to social media to communicate her thoughts on issues such as recent mountain hare culling and lodged related Parliamentary Questions and Motions on the subject. Such action to publicise the threats and issues of her species helps in spreading awareness of the importance and need for conservation work both among the public and the Scottish Parliament.

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Parliamentary office: Dolphin House, Hunter Square, Edinburgh, EH1 1QW, T 0131 225 4345 advocacy@scotlink.org

Alex Cole-Hamilton, MSP for Edinburgh Western and Species Champion for Rusty bog-moss visits his species at Red Moss in Balerno



Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP has recently taken up the title of 'Moss Boss' and Champions Rusty bog-moss, an important species in the context of peat bog development and carbon storage. Alex recently visited Red Moss in Balerno to learn about his species and view first hand conservation efforts to re-flood bog areas. His species and raised bog areas have both a national and international significance in the context of climate change mitigation.

Colin Smyth, MSP for South Scotland and Species Champion for Badger delivers speech at annual Badger week event



In May, Colin Smyth MSP engaged with members of the public, staff and volunteers involved in Badger conservation as part of Scottish Badger Week 2018. Colin actively champions his species in many ways; from publicising issues on social media, viewing his species, visiting experts, volunteers and the public and lodging parliamentary motions. The work Colin does helps to raise awareness and promote action for issues surrounding badger persecution and wildlife crime.

Contact details

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Editors' Notes

(1) Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 35 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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(2) Since 2013, the Species Champion initiative has helped raise awareness and promote action to safeguard Scotland's amazing, diverse and important species. This has been achieved through working partnerships between MSPs, Scottish Environment LINK and voluntary environmental organisations, with MSPs carrying out activities such as site visits, conservation work, community engagement and parliamentary business such as motions, meetings and debates.

More information: www.scotlink.org/work-areas/species-champions

*In celebration of reaching the milestone of 100 species champions, Scottish Environment LINK are launching the **Species Champion 100-day challenge**; inviting and encouraging 100 days of action from all MSP Species Champions in partnership with 16 Species Champion 'host' LINK member organisations, to engage with their species and to further raise awareness of the initiative and wider biodiversity concerns. This is good timing as we are approaching 2020, the target set at the domestic and international level for tackling biodiversity loss^[3]. More information on biodiversity targets: <http://www.scotlink.org/public-documents/scotland-must-step-up-efforts-or-risk-missing-global-biodiversity-targets-say-environmental-charities>*

The Species Champion 100 Day Challenge is an opportunity to celebrate the milestone of 100 MSP Species Champions while providing a platform for MSPs to find out more about their species and take action to make a difference."

The title of 100th Species Champion goes to Tom Arthur MSP, champion for Lions Mane Jellyfish with Marine Conservation Society.

The "Species Champion 100 day Challenge" launches on Tuesday 5th June and runs for 100 days until Wednesday 12th September. Scottish Environment LINK and member organisations are urging all MSP Species Champions to engage with their species over the 100 day period.

This challenge is for every MSP champion; whether they are an active and impassioned campaigner, or if they are a Species Champion, but are yet to get out engage with their species or host organisation.

Engagement and communication is at the heart of the initiative and MSPs can engage with their species in a variety of ways, from keeping up to date on relevant conservation work, to visiting and engaging with their species, standing up for their species in parliament, by spreading awareness of conservation issues on social media or to speak to fellow MSPs about their species and shared issues.

http://www.scotlink.org/wp/files/page/Species_Champion_Newsletter_February.pdf

The Species Champion initiative is an important link between Parliament and environmental organisations in Scotland. It gives MSPs the opportunity to see, learn about and involve themselves in biodiversity and environmental issues both in their constituency or region, and at a national scale.

(3) Information on the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy is available here: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Environment/Wildlife-Habitats/biodiversity/BiodiversityStrategy>. Scotland's Biodiversity Progress to 2020 Aichi Targets Interim Report 2017 is available here: <https://www.snhpresscentre.com/resources/3lfef-0uagk-5qmqg-3b8t0-41k91>

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