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Nature Champions

Summer Newsletter 2024



Image © Colin Hattersley / Scottish Environment LINK

Welcome to the bumper summer edition of the Nature Champions Newsletter!

A particularly warm welcome to the newest MSP Nature Champions, **Lorna Slater MSP** (Northern Damsel), **Douglas Lumsden MSP** (Golden Plover), **Tim Eagle MSP** (Merlin) and **Joe FitzPatrick MSP** (Community Greenspace)!

In this Nature Champions Newsletter, you can catch up on all of the Nature Champions activity from the past few months - from Motions to site visits - as well as hear a bit more from Scottish Environment LINK members. In this issue, we highlight **Scotland Loves Nature** - a new joint campaign from Scottish Environment LINK members that is calling for legal targets to restore nature. We also feature articles from two LINK members, Bat Conservation Trust and the National Trust for Scotland. Bat Conservation Trust make the case for their new '**Manifesto for Bats**', whilst National Trust for Scotland highlight the powerful coastal testimonies that make up the **Our Seas photographic exhibition** - coming to a venue near you! We also celebrate Nature Champions being awarded the NGO Impact Award at the 2024 CIEEM Awards in London, and the impact that MSPs

have had in raising awareness of Scotland's threatened species and habitats through the initiative over the past 11 years.

These sunny (or, perhaps more accurately, less wet) days of the summer recess offer some of the best opportunities to encounter the bustling summer activity of many of Scotland's species. From the breathtakingly beautiful blooming machair of Na h-Eileanan Siar, to the arrival of darting swifts who have travelled all the way from sub-Saharan Africa, we highly recommend taking a break from the office to enjoy the spectacle of these warm(er) days. If you'd like to go on a visit to see your species or habitat before Parliament resumes in September, then I'm sure your Scottish Environment LINK host member(s) would be delighted to organise this for you.

Thank you, as always, for your support and for being the voice for Scotland's threatened species and habitats in the Scottish Parliament.

Andrew Marks
Nature Champions Coordinator

Scotland Loves Nature

**Three quarters of Scots
back legal targets for
nature recovery - let's
make it a reality.**

**SCOTLAND
LOVES
NATURE** 



Scottish Environment LINK has this month launched a new campaign calling on the Scottish Government to bring forward legislation to protect nature. The campaign, **Scotland Loves Nature**, is backed by 43 organisations, including RSPB Scotland, the Scottish Wildlife Trust, and WWF Scotland.

The campaign is calling on the Scottish Government to introduce a **Natural Environment Bill** to bring in legal targets to restore nature. These targets would commit the Scottish Government to preventing the extinction of wildlife and halting the decline of nature by 2030, and to make significant progress in restoring Scotland's natural environment by 2045.

The health of Scotland's natural environment has been in long-term decline, and today **1 in 9 species are threatened with extinction**.

Ministers had previously committed to the proposed Bill, which has since been delayed. The campaign groups are calling on the Scottish Government to include the Natural Environment Bill in the upcoming **Programme for Government**, expected this September.

The campaign launch comes as a new opinion poll shows three quarters of Scots back legal nature targets. The poll, conducted by Diffley Partnership, found that **74% of people in Scotland support legal targets to improve the natural environment**, with only 11% opposed.

The Scotland Loves Nature campaign calls on the Scottish Government to:

- Urgently introduce a Natural Environment Bill with legally binding nature recovery targets
- Put funding in place to restore nature
- Help communities to protect and restore their local environment

[Find out more!](#)

Nature Champions in Parliament



A Bee Bonanza! Not one, not two, but three of the Nature Champion **#BeeTeam** asked questions regarding the welfare of wild bees as part of Portfolio Question Time in May. Click the image above to hear from Nature Champions **Graham Simpson MSP** (Bilberry Bumblebee and the Ash), **Alasdair Allan MSP** (Great Yellow Bumblebee) and **Mark Ruskell MSP** (Moss Carder Bee).

Standing up for Bats!

In April, **Keith Brown MSP**, Nature Champion for the Nathusius' Pipistrelle, asked the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support bat conservation. Nathusius' pipistrelles are one of the smallest bats in the UK, and roost in crevices such as tree hollows, rock fissures and under soffit boards.



Raptor Nests

Mark Ruskell MSP, the Nature Champion for both the White-tailed Eagle and the Moss Carder Bee, asked the Scottish Government what plans Forestry and Land Scotland had for encouraging owl and raptor conservation and monitoring, including through the use of artificial nest platforms in Scotland's national forests.

World Environment Day

To mark World Environment Day on the 5th June, **Sarah Boyack MSP**, Nature Champion for the Large Heath Butterfly, lodged a Motion recognising the day and its theme: 'Generation Restoration'. The Motion highlighted the need for greater action on land restoration in Scotland, particularly for peatlands.

UN Day for Biodiversity

Nature Champion for the Orca, **Beatrice Wishart MSP**, lodged a Motion to mark International Day for Biological Diversity on 22nd May. The theme was "from agreement to action: build back biodiversity"; stressing that all measures of the Global Biodiversity Framework should be implemented by 2030.

Tree Planting

Monica Lennon MSP, Nature Champion for the Oak, asked the Scottish Government questions in May and July regarding tree-planting targets in Scotland, enquiring how many hectares of new trees have been planted in Scotland's national forest estate. Oaks are possibly the best known and most readily identified Scottish tree.

INNS in Scotland

In May, **Audrey Nicoll MSP**, Nature Champion for the Freshwater Pearl Mussel lodged a Member's Business Motion regarding invasive non-native species (INNS) in Scotland. The Motion also highlighted the publication of the Scottish Environment LINK report, 'Invasive Non-native Species in Scotland: A Plan for Effective Action'.



Red Squirrel Kits

Alexander Burnett MSP, the Nature Champion for the Red Squirrel, asked the Scottish Government what actions are being taken to reduce the number of red squirrel kits that are killed through forestry felling and harvesting operations, building upon a previous question regarding kit deaths submitted by **Colin Smyth MSP** in 2023.

Ancient Woodlands

In June, **Graham Simpson MSP**, Nature Champion for the Bilberry Bumblebee and Ash, asked the Scottish Government on its commitment to produce a National Register of Ancient Woodland. An ancient woodland takes hundreds of years to establish and is defined as irreplaceable habitat.

Bird Dissuading Mesh

Nature Champion for the House Sparrow, **Paul Sweeney MSP**, asked a series of Parliamentary Questions regarding the safe use of bird-dissuading mesh so that it doesn't trap or threaten the safety of birds, enquiring as to the standards set, incentives to maintain mesh, and the number of mortalities as a result of mesh.

Cetacean Entanglements

Nature Champion for the Blue Whale, **Kenneth Gibson MSP**, asked what discussions the Scottish Government has had with the Scottish Association for Marine Science regarding its research into reducing cetacean deaths from fishing entanglements. Entanglement is the largest cause of death for minke and humpback whales in Scottish waters.

The next step (or flap!) for bats in Scotland



Bat Conservation Trust 

#ManifestoForBats

Our five asks for every political party:

- Keep legal protection for all bat species and improve its implementation
- Make all new development species friendly
- Deploy climate change mitigation in harmony with nature
- Support long-term nature-friendly farming through agricultural schemes
- Improve wildlife crime recording, investigation and prosecution

© Highmark

From Harris to Haymarket and beyond, at least nine bat species make their home in Scotland, happily munching billions of midges (and other insects) every year. We have strong networks of people working to protect bats, including our six fantastic Nature Champions who advocate for our bat species in the Scottish Parliament. Thousands of volunteers and bat groups help to monitor bats, raise awareness and carry out vital research in their local areas to help bat conservation.

However, our bats have experienced historic declines that they are yet to recover from and threats like climate change risk future declines. Lots of our environmental targets are not ambitious enough and even those we have are in significant danger of not being met.

In response, the Bat Conservation Trust published **A Bat Conservation Manifesto** in June to call for action from all political parties to stop and reverse the declines of our bat and other wildlife populations. Our five asks are:

- Keep legal protection for all bat species and improve its implementation
- Make all new development species-friendly
- Deploy climate change mitigation in harmony with nature
- Support long-term nature-friendly farming through agricultural schemes
- Improve wildlife crime recording, investigation and prosecution

You can read our manifesto in full [here](#), along with a toolkit of resources and information to help you to confidently engage on these issues.

We are encouraging any elected representatives, not just bat Nature Champions, to share these aims for bats and other wildlife in the Scottish Parliament and elsewhere. If you would like to help but don't know where to start, please get in touch with Lil McDermaid (BCT's Species Advocacy and Policy Officer) at LMcDermaid@bats.org.uk.

Lil McDermaid
Species Advocacy and Policy Officer, Bat Conservation Trust

Coastal Testimonies



The [Our Seas coalition](#) is an alliance of over 140+ organisations campaigning for the instatement of a modern inshore limit* to secure the environmental recovery of Scotland's seas and the revival of

sustainable inshore fisheries.

The Our Seas coalition recently commissioned and curated the [Coastal Testimonies Project](#), which is a collection of video and portrait testimonies from the people who work, use and live by Scotland's seas.

In 2023 photographer Katerina Barvirova visited people from all eleven Scottish marine regions, including coastal businesses, commercial fishermen, sea anglers, politicians, scientists and community groups, to record their experiences, concerns, ideas and hopes for our marine and coastal spaces.

The testimonies Katerina captured will be exhibited at events across Scotland. Each event will provide space for open, collaborative dialogue and the project aims to bring together everyone with a stake in Scotland's seas.

The project launched in mid-July with an event in Eyemouth. The weekend-long event offered visitors the opportunity to learn about Scotland's seas and coasts, and to share the hope for environmental recovery via talks, nature walks, seaweed workshops, marine crafts and the photography exhibition. Highlights included a workshop for teenagers and an evening reception to officially launch the project.

The exhibition will now tour Scotland with future dates and locations TBA - keep an eye on your inbox for an invite to the exhibition when it comes to your constituency.

* The Our Seas Coalition is advocating for a modern inshore limit, which would protect sensitive inshore waters from environmental damage and safeguard low impact fishing. A modern limit would be flexible to account for local seabed conditions and fisheries.

Rebecca Millar

Policy Officer, National Trust for Scotland

Image © Rebecca Millar

Nature Champions Site Visits!



Photo: Ian Fulton

Greenland White-fronted Geese

In April, Dame **Jackie Baillie MSP**, Nature Champion for the Greenland White-fronted Goose, joined RSPB Scotland at RSPB Loch Lomond to discuss local geese populations, community engagement, and peatland restoration. During the visit, Jackie spotted some of the local deer, saw first-hand how their populations can affect tree saplings, and got hands-on experience keeping the reserve free of invasive plant species.



Photo: Heather Wolfe

A Carpet of Bluebells

Jenni Minto MSP, Nature Champion for Scotland's Rainforest, joined RSPB Scotland and Plantlife Scotland staff at RSPB Inversnaid. Inversnaid is on the east shore of Loch Lomond, where Atlantic Oak woodland rises steeply from the loch and gives way to open moorland with spectacular views. It is an internationally important example of Scotland's Rainforest and it is carpeted with bluebells in the spring.



Photo: Bethia Pearson

Mountain Adventures

Graeme Dey MSP, Nature Champion for both the Alpine Blue Sow Thistle and the Woolly Willow, joined National Trust for Scotland and NatureScot staff at Corrie Fee National Nature Reserve in May to learn more about their conservation efforts. Corrie Fee is home to many rare plants that grow on its cliffs and in gullies and it also has the most extensive natural stand of montane willow scrub in Scotland.



Photo: Kelvin Thomson

Return to Tarras Valley

In June, **Elena Whitham MSP**, Nature Champion for the Hen Harrier, returned to the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve with members of the Scottish Raptor Study Group. The group were lucky to have good views of a male and a female who were keeping an active nest well provisioned! Elena had previously visited Tarras Valley in 2022, and on this occasion the group also spotted the UK's smallest bird of prey, the Merlin.



Photo: Mel Ruskell

Sea Eagles on Mull

Mark Ruskell MSP, Nature Champion for both the White-tailed Eagle and the Moss Carder Bee, joined RSPB Scotland on the Isle of Mull. Mark witnessed an example of how sensitive commercial forest harvesting has been able to preserve a nest site, with a chick ready to fledge! A 2022 RSPB study found that tourism inspired by the eagles generates between £4.9 - 8 million income for Mull every year.



Photo: Alexander Stewart MBE MSP

The Perfume Flower

The new Nature Champion for the Twinflower, **Alexander Stewart MBE MSP**, joined Plantlife Scotland and National Trust for Scotland staff at Mar Lodge Estate National Nature Reserve to learn more about recent conservation efforts to protect this threatened species, including through translocation. One of our rarest pinewood flowers, its scent gives it its common Scandinavian name, the 'perfume flower'.

CIEEM NGO Impact Award 2024

We were absolutely delighted to be presented with the **NGO Impact Award** at the **2024 CIEEM Awards** in London!

The Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) Awards Luncheon took place on Friday 28th June at Leonardo Royal Hotel Tower Bridge, London, and celebrated the achievements of individuals, projects and organisations in the ecology and environmental management sector.

Nature Champions was recognised for its commitment to engaging MSPs from all political parties and promoting active involvement in environmental conservation.

We want to say an enormous thank you to all MSP Nature Champions past and present for your ongoing support and for being a voice for nature in the Scottish Parliament!

[Find out more!](#)



Scottish Environment LINK would like to thank each Nature Champion for your support and for being the voice for Scotland's threatened species and habitats in the Scottish Parliament.



Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 40 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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