



# Nature Champions

Autumn Newsletter 2024



Image © Jamie McDermaid

Welcome to the autumn edition of the Nature Champions Newsletter!

A particularly warm welcome to the newest MSP Nature Champions, **Edward Mountain MSP** (Atlantic Salmon), **Marie McNair MSP** (Grey Seal), **Michael Matheson MSP** (Short-eared Owl), **Bill Kidd MSP** (Ancient Woodlands), and the 100th Nature Champion of this Parliament: **Roz McCall MSP** (Northern Brown Argus)!

These shortening autumn days usher in a very busy period for much of Scotland's wildlife. Some species, including red squirrels, are in overdrive looking to store up energy ready for the winter, whereas others, like mighty basking sharks, move away from our shores searching for warmer places to spend the colder months. Elsewhere, deer are rutting and providing a seasonal soundtrack to the glens, whilst grey seals are returning to their traditional breeding grounds to give birth to their pups.

Autumn is also evidently a very busy time for MSP Nature Champions and for members of Scottish Environment LINK! Here we highlight some of this activity from the past few months - from Motions to site visits - as well as hear a bit more from Scottish Environment LINK members about their current work. In this issue, you can read about Buglife's new '**Curtns for Light Pollution**' public awareness campaign, as well as Woodland Trust Scotland's advocacy to **support tree payments for farms and crofts**. Dr Lauren Hartny-Mills of Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust also shares the results of recent research that has documented record highs and lows of **sightings of minke whales and basking sharks** in the Hebrides over the past year.

Speaking of Scotland's seas, Scottish Environment LINK were delighted to be joined by nine Nature Champions on a boat trip along the Firth of Forth at the beginning of August. On the visit, we heard from LINK members about our marine environment, its international importance for wildlife, yet also the significant threats that it faces from climate change, unsustainable fishing and pollution, among other pressures. It was fantastic to see so many MSPs and their species and habitats represented on the visit and we hope to lead more group cross-party visits in the future - watch this space!

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

*Andy Marks*  
Nature Champions Coordinator, Scottish Environment LINK

## Nature Champions in Parliament

### Green Flag Award

To congratulate the 80 parks and open spaces that were awarded the Green Flag Award by Keep Scotland Beautiful, **Joe FitzPatrick MSP**, Nature Champion for Community Green Space, lodged a Motion to help recognise the very best of the country's outdoor areas, alongside those in his Dundee City West constituency.

### Tree-planting Targets

Nature Champion for the Oak, **Monica Lennon MSP**, asked the Scottish Government in a Parliamentary Question how the reported expected delay to its 2025 tree-planting target would be mitigated. Oaks are among the best known and most readily identified native trees in Scotland.

### Rainforests & Deer

**Graham Simpson MSP**, Nature Champion for the Ash and the Bilberry Bumblebee, asked the Scottish Government about the exclusion of Scotland's rainforests from deer management incentive scheme pilots. Scotland's rainforests are at risk from over-grazing and invasive non-native species.

### Scotland's Seabirds in Decline

In September, following the publication of the latest Birds of Conservation Concern report, **Maurice Golden MSP**, Nature Champion for the Kittiwake, lodged a Motion highlighting the international importance of Scotland's seabird populations and their catastrophic declines. Five more seabird species were added to the UK red list.



### IFAW Award

**Ariane Burgess MSP**, the Nature Champion for the Eurasian Beaver and the Aspen, lodged a Motion congratulating Dr Roisin Campbell-Palmer, Head of Restoration with the Beaver Trust, on receiving one of the prestigious International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) Animal Action Awards for her work on beaver conservation.

## Curtns for Light Pollution!



As we are well into autumn and longer, darker nights lie ahead, Buglife is urging its supporters to [Nurture the Night Shift](#) by avoiding artificial light from escaping into the natural world.

Earlier this year, we launched a campaign called '[Curtains for Light Pollution](#)' to encourage everyone to help protect nature by the simple act of drawing curtains and closing blinds. Light pollution is the anthropogenic alteration of light levels from those occurring naturally; it can have negative impacts on both wildlife and people. Artificial light interferes with the natural rhythm of day and night, disrupting the circadian rhythm of wildlife as well as humans. Unlike other environmental challenges, the solution to light pollution is fairly straightforward - where the flick of a switch or closing of blinds can instantly make a difference. 'Curtains for Light Pollution' is a soft approach towards educating everybody about the adverse impacts light pollution can have on world's biodiversity, and the small changes that can make a big difference to our natural world. With light pollution increasing at around 10% globally every year, it is vital that we do what we can to preserve the nocturnal environment.

Among the species most prominently impacted by light pollution are bioluminescent invertebrates which rely on their own glow to attract mates. In the latest update of [IUCN Red List of Threatened species](#), six out of the ten European Glow-worms and Fireflies assessed are threatened with extinction. The Common Glow-worm (*Lampyrus noctiluca*), although the most widely distributed, has been categorised as Near Threatened. Research indicates that light pollution can significantly disrupt their mating, leading to population losses. Even low levels of artificial light can hinder females from attracting mates.

To protect nocturnal species and wider biodiversity, we need stronger policies recognising light as a pollutant. At Buglife we want everyone to think of light in the same way we think of heating our buildings. We want to trap light inside, keeping it useful and reducing how much escapes. The colder darker months are the perfect time to get into the habit of drawing the curtains and lowering blinds as soon as we turn the lights on. Please join our 'Curtains to Light Pollution' campaign, and help us to [reduce light pollution](#) by pledging to keep inside light, inside!

*Shreoshi Das*  
Advocacy Officer, Buglife

## Record Highs and Record Lows



2023 saw the highest sighting rates and numbers of minke whales yet recorded in the Hebrides, but the lowest known for basking sharks, says [a new report](#) by the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust.

Published last month by Scotland's nature agency, NatureScot, the report presents findings collected during the Trust's marine research expeditions onboard its research vessel, Silurian, over the past three years, together with sighting rates and numbers for minke whales and basking sharks from the 20 years the programme has been running.

The latest findings suggest changes in sightings rates for minke whales and basking sharks, and a possible association between these two highly mobile and long-lived species. When sighting rates for basking sharks are high, they are low for minke whales, and vice versa.

Sighting rates of minke whale soared to 1.57 per 100 km last year – the highest in the two decades of the research programme. In contrast, sighting rates for basking shark fell to 0.07 sightings per 100 km in 2022 and 2023, the lowest recorded by the Trust since its monitoring began. Rates did fluctuate over time though and more work is needed to analyse these trends and to investigate any potential causes.

These findings present important information for decision makers to consider when developing monitoring and management strategies for the Sea of the Hebrides Nature Conservation Marine Protected Area, which has been designated for both basking sharks and minke whales.

In the face of the nature and climate emergencies, and with marine life at risk from human activities including entanglement, pollution, underwater noise and habitat degradation, gaining new insights and understanding into what is happening in Scotland's seas is vital. Long-term monitoring undertaken by the Trust is crucial to improve understanding of the impacts, and how best to protect and restore biodiversity.

Read the full report [here](#).

Dr Lauren Hartny-Mills  
Science & Conservation Manager, Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust  
Image © HWDT

## Trees on Farms



Native trees are important in so many contexts – they should be considered essential infrastructure in our towns in cities, they make up our healing and inspiring woodlands, and, in our farming systems, can bring a variety of benefits for business, wildlife and natural processes.

Woodland Trust Scotland's latest campaign is calling on the Scottish Government to [support tree payments for Scottish farms and crofts](#) in order to help farmers and crofters integrate more trees onto their land and improve Scotland's agricultural land for people, climate and nature.

Covering around 80% of Scotland's land mass, Scotland's agricultural land holds huge potential for nature restoration while maintaining high quality food production. Our parkland trees are at particular risk – as these living legends come to the end of their life, who is going to plant the parkland trees of the future? At the moment there are no grants to support farmers and crofters to plant the heritage and biodiversity-rich trees of the future.

Integrating trees into farming systems in a variety of ways also has benefits for:

- Water and flood management
- Shelter and shade for livestock from unpredictable weather and increasing temperatures
- Improved soil quality for arable crops
- Additional crops such as firewood, fodder, fruit and nuts
- Essential habitats for wildlife
- Overall improved farm productivity

We want to ensure that funding for expanding tree planting is high up on the agenda of for the new agricultural support scheme. Woodland Trust Scotland's campaign will be running throughout the winter and hopes to demonstrate the public support for transforming our agricultural sector and for planting the [Living Legends](#) of the future.

Sarah Madden  
Policy Advocate, Woodland Trust Scotland  
Image © Andy Marks

## Nature Champions Activity!



Photo: CIEEM

### World Bog Day!

In July, the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) celebrated World Bog Day with Nature Champion for Blanket Bogs, Fiona Hyslop MSP. On a visit to Black Moss Nature Reserve earlier in the year, Fiona heard more about the restoration work at the site, including dam installation, reprofiling work and the removal of conifer trees.



Photo: Jamie McDermaid

### Nature Champions Boat Trip

As part of National Marine Week, nine MSP Nature Champions joined Scottish Environment LINK members in August for a boat trip around the islands of the Firth of Forth, including Bass Rock, home to the world's largest colony of Northern Gannets. On the visit, attendees learnt more about Scotland's internationally important marine environment and some of the extraordinary wildlife it supports.



Photo: Scottish Environment LINK

### White-beaked Dolphins

**Ash Regan MSP**, Nature Champion for the White-beaked Dolphin, met with Whale and Dolphin Conservation and Scottish Environment LINK staff to learn more about these majestic dolphins and discuss how we can better protect them in Scottish waters. White-beaked dolphins are especially unusual in that they are known to travel and form mixed pods with other dolphin and whale species.



Photo: Alexander Burnett/Twitter

### Great Scottish Squirrel Survey

To help raise awareness of the 2024 Great Scottish Squirrel Survey, **Alexander Burnett MSP**, Nature Champion for the Red Squirrel, recorded a video for social media to encourage members of the public to share their squirrel sightings over the week of the survey. This video also featured a special guest - a red squirrel that ran behind Alexander and helped itself to a feeding station as Alexander introduced the survey!



Photo: Simon Ritchie

### Glasgow's Ancient Woodlands

At the beginning of October, Woodland Trust Scotland staff met with the new Nature Champion for Scotland's Ancient Woodlands, **Bill Kidd MSP**, to introduce him to these complex and irreplaceable habitats. Ancient Woodlands are lands that have been continually wooded since at least 1750. Garscadden Wood LNR is one of the oldest semi-natural ancient woods in Glasgow and in Bill's constituency.



Photo: Mark Ruskell/Twitter

### Bee Walk!

Nature Champion for the White-tailed Eagle and for the Moss Carder Bee, **Mark Ruskell MSP**, joined Bumblebee Conservation Trust staff at the University of Sterling for a late season bee safari around the university campus. Mark also heard more about Bumblebee Conservation Trust's #BumblebeeManifesto, including their calls to better regulate the use of managed bees to safeguard wild species.

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.

Want to change how you receive these emails?  
You can [unsubscribe from this list](#).

