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SCENES, an independent digest of environmental news in Scotland, was launched in 1987 by Dr James Fenton. Issues 49 to 161 were edited and published by Michael and Sue Scott. It is for anyone with an interest in the land and sea, whether professional or amateur. It is based solely on published material, and contains only news, with no editorial comment or opinion.

SCENES is published monthly, and comes out in the month following the title month.

NOTE: dates in square brackets relate to the most recent reference in *SCENES*.

WEBSITE: www.scenes.org.uk

DEADLINES: News releases and press cuttings for inclusion in *SCENES* are welcomed from organisations and individuals. Please post, or email, them to the address below, by the end of each month.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: The basic annual subscription is £50. Concessions are available for small firms and charities (£28), individuals, and outworkers with a main subscription (£22), students and seniors (£18) and for extra copies sent to the same address (£12).

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SCENES is edited and published by Sue Fenton. Proofreading is by Falkland Islands Proofreading Services.

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email: enquiries@scenes.org.uk

ISSN 0955-226X

Printed by Printsmith Lochaber Ltd



CONSERVATION

NEW NATIONAL PARKS?

The Herald reported that the Scottish Campaign for National Parks (SCNP) and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland have produced a report, *Unfinished Business*, which said that seven new National Parks could be created in Scotland [Jun 10]. They would cover The Cheviots, Galloway, Glen Affric, Harris, Mull and parts of Lochaber, which would take in Ben Nevis, Glencoe and Black Mount. The designation has also been suggested for Wester Ross and the charities have recommended creating a joint coastal and marine National Park centred around Harris. The charities believe that Scotland has been slow to realise the potential of National Parks, with expert reports in 1945, 1974 and 1990 recommending the establishment of a least four or five parks.

The charities point to the SNP manifesto at the 2011 election which included a commitment to work with communities to explore the creation of new National Parks but said that the SNP Scottish Government has taken no action to fulfil this commitment since then. Ministers have agreed to meet with the SCNP in September and will consider the report in full.

There are now 15 National Parks in the UK, of which two (Cairngorms and Loch Lomond & the Trossachs) are in Scotland.

ARGYLL BEAVERS

A report has been published by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) on the effect of beavers on woodland, part of the ongoing monitoring work on the Scottish Beaver Trial in Knapdale Forest, Argyll [Aug 12].

The woodland monitoring has been carried out by the James Hutton Institute, which regularly surveys 105 vegetation plots located around the edges of the lochs where the beavers live and are most active. In November 2011, two and a half years after their release, 13% of trees in the plots were showing signs of beaver activity. Between November 2010 and November 2011, there was a minor shift in beaver activity to areas further from the waters edge, but the majority (72%) were still within ten metres of the loch shores; the most intensive gnawing and felling was within 500 metres of active beaver lodges. The beavers continued to favour trees that were 3-6cm across, with a strong preference for willow and rowan, and tended to avoid hazel and alder. In November 2011, 35% of trees felled had new shoots.

At the end of the five year trial the results of the independent monitoring work will give the Scottish Government the information needed to decide whether beavers should be permanently reintroduced to Scotland.

See: www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=1989; www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotland-nature/safeguarding-biodiversity/reintroducing-native-species/scottish-beaver-trial/the-monitoring-programme/; www.scottishbeavers.org.uk

PINE MARTENS

A survey by SNH and The Vincent Wildlife Trust shows a population of 2,600 to 3,500 pine martens Scotland. They are now re-colonising areas from which they has been absent for more than 100 years. The north west Highlands was one of the

few areas where pine martens survived, following woodland clearance, trapping and persecution. The survey showed that pine martens are now present in Caithness, Moray, much of Perth & Kinross, Aberdeenshire and Angus, and parts of Fife. They have also moved south into southern Argyll, the Trossachs, much of Stirlingshire and some parts of the central belt.

Pine martens are still absent from much of Britain so the recovery is significant. The species was given full legal protection in 1988.

EAGLE DEATH

The Scotsman reported that a golden eagle, discovered shot on a grouse moor near Wanlockhead in Dumfries-shire, died despite prolonged efforts by the Scottish SPCA to save its life [Oct 12]. The number of breeding pairs has decreased to just three, or fewer, in the south of Scotland.

The Scottish SPCA issued a new plea for information about the shooting, which is still under investigation.

The Raptor Persecution Scotland blog says that, based on the extent of suitable habitat, the target number of breeding territories (for the species to achieve a favourable conservation status in the region) has been estimated at 17 in the Golden Eagle Conservation Framework. The blog says that Raptor Persecution Scotland knows of only four currently occupied territories in southern Scotland. Of these, two are occupied by single adults and two by breeding pairs, only one of which has been productive in recent years. The shot golden eagle was an adult male.

British Trust for Ornithology figures show that overall golden eagle populations across Scotland have remained fairly stable over the past few decades. The latest ten-year surveys recorded the number of breeding pairs nationwide at 424 in 1982-83, dropping slightly to 422 in 1993 before increasing to 442 in 2003. RSPB Scotland estimates that there are currently 420 breeding pairs of golden eagles nationwide.

The Raptor Persecution Scotland blog says that the stable population figures are misleading, and that this is a suppressed population, largely being prevented from growth by illegal persecution. A conservative estimate of known or potential eagle territories throughout Scotland was estimated at 716 in the framework, with favourable conservation status in 3 of 16 regions.

See the Golden Eagle Conservation Framework: www.snh.gov.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/Report%20No193.pdf

HEN HARRIERS

The *BBC News* website reported that the public is being encouraged to record hen harriers, along with details including behaviour and gender. The sighting initiative is being launched by the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime (PAW) Scotland. In 2010, there were 500 pairs in Scotland, the bulk of the UK population. RSPB Scotland said that recent national surveys have indicated a 20% decline, with significant decreases in parts of southern Scotland and the eastern Highlands. The birds of prey are struggling to breed in some areas; factors in their decline include the loss of moorland nesting habitat and feeding range, eggs and young being eaten by foxes, crows and other predators,

and illegal persecution. SNH will record the information received.

Ron Macdonald, of SNH, said: "Using sightings from the public, we can assess whether to use some of the new technology at our disposal such as satellite-tagging or camera monitoring, or even where necessary share information with the National Wildlife Crime Unit. We do want people to bear in mind though that these birds are specially protected under the law and nobody should approach hen harrier nests or disturb the birds without a licence from SNH."

See www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Wildlife-Habitats/paw-scotland

RED DEER

SNH commissioned a pilot study of the public perceptions of wild deer. The study suggested positive feelings towards deer are widespread, but leaned towards Highland red deer populations; urban populations were seen as a nuisance. The results showed that 73% of respondents associated deer with Scotland.

Survey respondents had an understanding of, and mixed opinions about, stalking. They recognised the economic importance of hunting but also raised moral and welfare concerns whilst there was wide support for the production of venison.

GIANT HOGWEED

The *BBC News* website reported that SNH has funded a pilot project using sheep to control giant hogweed, along the Deveron River in Aberdeenshire. Blackface sheep are being used, as their dark pigmentation gives them protection from the toxic plant.



FARMING

UIST GEESE

The Herald reported that the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) heard evidence at public meetings that the greylag goose population was 'getting out of control' on the Uists [Aug 12].

In 1986, it was estimated that there were around 700 to 800 breeding pairs in the UK, of which around 150 were breeding in the Outer Hebrides. North Uist crofters then sought to control the spread of the geese which they claimed were causing them substantial agricultural losses. Now the Uists have more than 10,000 greylag geese year-round and that population is growing.

Derek Flynn of the SCF said: "Crofting agriculture is very important to the Uists, much of which is designated 'High Nature Value.' The rapid increase in the numbers of geese is accounted for by several factors. People used to shoot geese for the pot, but that gradually stopped when supermarkets came. Reseeding gave the geese a supply of feed that inevitably attracted them to stay and breed. Then a crow eradication programme got rid of the goose's only predator. And despite these vast numbers, geese are still protected by law.

"Biodiversity is of course important, but the key to this is to safeguard the livelihoods of the people who live here; without them working the land the protection of biodiversity cannot happen. We can't even sell wild goose meat. With the robust annual counts and the cooperation of all parties on the islands in supplying shot figures, there seems no reason to not change the law so that geese can be controlled year-round, decoys can be used in August and wild goose meat and products can be sold. Wild goose should become part of the Uist diet – it is local food – but it should also be a commercial opportunity. Crofters

are told they can shoot marauding deer on their crofts but not geese, except at certain times of the year and at the will of the landlord who has the shooting rights and dictates whether crofters can shoot or not. The two objectives are to get funding to continue protecting crops and to change the law regarding geese control and meat sales."

Rebecca Cotton, of Machair Life+, said: "Unfortunately the Machair Life+ project finishes this year and we haven't, as yet, secured another phase. SNH have an 'Adaptive Management' four year trial that controls goose numbers but this alone will not reduce the population to manageable levels. It needs to work alongside a crop protection scheme. Funding for crop protection is to be halted in 2014 as part of recent cuts. If we don't get more funding for these initiatives we will not be able to keep the flood at bay. We cannot afford to lose a year as we are struggling to keep the population stable now. Despite tireless efforts this year – estates, scarers, gun clubs and syndicates shot over 4,000 greylags – the numbers are still rising. Crofters have said that they can tolerate a population of 3,500 to 4,000 geese. If we lose a year of the joint crop protection and adaptive management work, greylags will definitely threaten the growing of corn and, therefore, the raising of cattle on the Uists."

SEVERE WEATHER

NFU Scotland held urgent talks with the Scottish Government concerning the heavy snow in parts of Scotland in March, which saw flocks of sheep trapped under snowdrifts and delayed the growing season. Up to an estimated 10,000 ewes and lambs were lost in the snow, and farmers are calling for emergency financial support. Ministers have already agreed to release £500,000 to help with the disposal of fallen stock.

The areas worst affected by the weather were in Arran, Kintyre and Dumfries & Galloway. The full impact of the weather will not be apparent until later in the year, when stock is delivered to market. As well as having fewer lambs to sell than expected, many face the increased costs of buying breeding ewes to replace their damaged flocks.

NFU Scotland president Nigel Miller said: "We estimate 300 farms in the south-west and maybe three or four in the Borders are heavily affected. The losses on many farms have been 20% of their stock, so if you multiply that then you see the extent of the losses and it's a pretty significant figure." The cost of the lost stock in south west Scotland alone is estimated at £5m.

- Thousands of tons of sandy soil have been blown off fields in Moray during the worst sandstorms in living memory, blocking roads and damaging valuable crops.

- Bee farmers in Scotland, who have also been hit by the bad weather, are to get up to £200,000 from the Scottish Government to help restock their hives; 4,000 colonies are estimated to have been lost due to the prolonged winter weather.

NEONICOTINOIDS

The UK government's Environmental Audit committee has called for a ban on neonicotinoids, pesticides dangerous to bees and other pollinators, by 1 January 2014 [Mar 13]. The UK's Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs refused to implement a ban; the committee said that its approach to protecting bees was 'extraordinarily complacent' and said that the weight of scientific evidence warranted a ban.

As pesticide usage is a devolved issue, the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) has been campaigning for the Scottish Government to act independently of Westminster and lead the way in adopting the precautionary principle to ban

use of neonicotinoids on outdoor crops in Scotland. This would benefit honey bees, bumblebees and other insect pollinators as well as agricultural ecosystems and farmers who rely on pollinators for crop and soft fruit production. Agricultural systems are reliant on crop pollination and this 'free service' currently provided by bees and other pollinators is estimated to be worth £43m per year to Scotland's economy. Neonicotinoids account for 1% of all pesticides used in Scotland and are mainly used to treat oilseed rape crops and some seed potatoes, as well as some horticultural crops and winter-sown cereals. The proposed restrictions would only affect certain uses of the pesticides on crops with flowers that are attractive to bees.

The Scottish Government admitted to the committee that their own recently published field trial was seriously compromised because the 'control site' bees picked up traces of the neonicotinoid even though the experimental foraging crop had not been treated with the pesticide.

The European Commission decided to ban the use of the three insecticides collectively known as neonicotinoids; the ban is due to come into effect later in the year.

Rural Affairs Secretary, Richard Lochhead, urged the UK government to accept EU restrictions on the use of neonicotinoids. However, he said that the measures should not be implemented until more evidence has been gathered. Mr Lochhead said that a two-year delay would allow any existing stocks of pesticide to be used and give enough time to ensure that any alternatives on the market do not make matters worse.

Mr Lochhead said: "The Scottish government takes the health of bees and other insect pollinators very seriously but, in this case, the science has not been clear cut. Ministers have to therefore make careful judgements in the absence of conclusive evidence. I recognise that this is a highly sensitive and emotive subject. It is, therefore, disappointing that the results from the bumble bee field trials were inconclusive. When it comes to protecting our biodiversity and wildlife, there are times when taking a precautionary approach is perfectly justifiable. It is in the interests of our environment and our farmers that we have healthy bee populations but we know there are a wide range of factors affecting these valuable pollinators. I do not think that year after year of debate over what the science tells us will get us very far or help our bee populations or farmers. That's why I am suggesting a precautionary approach with a built-in breathing space and exit strategy."

SCHMALLENBURG

The Ieach reported that the Schmallenburg virus (SBV) has been discovered in a closed dairy herd on the Barony campus of Scotland's Rural College in Dumfries & Galloway [Mar 13]. Birth defects have now been found in a calf in a suckler herd in Dumfries-shire.

Surveillance had previously identified animals containing antibodies to SBV but these had been bought into Scotland from at-risk areas. The disease is spread by midges and can cause congenital disorders in lambs and calves. Schmallenburg is also present in Ireland, and infected midges may spread across to the west coast of Scotland.

FARMLAND WADERS

The Strathspey & Badenoch Herald reported that the Strathspey Waders & Wetlands Initiative is a partnership aiming to halt the decline in farmland waders. It is urging farmers and land managers to ensure that wetlands and wet habitats are in good condition, and to create more small feeding sites. A number of farms are also managing rush to create the type of short sward preferred by lapwing for nesting. Less productive pieces of ground are being

used to increase biodiversity without having any negative effect on the production of quality livestock.

Catherine Vis-Christie, of the RSPB Futurescapes project, said that 12 species of wading bird were found in Strathspey, numbering over 3,200 in 2000. By 2005, two species had been lost and the overall population had fallen by 1,000. By 2010, only nine species were recorded and the numbers had fallen to just over 1,800. She said that the biodiversity of the area is going down with the reduction of the local habitats. The last species to disappear from Strathspey was the wood sandpiper; dunlin and woodcock have already been lost. The Futurescapes project wants to interconnect all the fragmented wood and marshland to regenerate the landscape, well beyond the boundaries of local RSPB reserves, in order to preserve special wildlife such as lapwing and capercaillie.

The scheme is supported by RSPB Scotland, the Cairngorms National Park Authority, Scotland's Rural College, CKD Galbraith and Agroecosystems.

CAP REFORM

An EU Council meeting in Luxembourg outlined plans that would ensure that the existing Rural Development Programme can be rolled over into 2014, thus avoiding a gap between the existing Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and its successor for Single Farm Payments (SFP), Less Favoured Area Support Schemes and the Agri-environment Schemes [Mar 13].

Richard Lochhead, the cabinet secretary, said that he would continue to press for the transitional arrangements to be extended to the whole programme, allowing member states and their regions to determine their priority for continued investment.

Under the new CAP, the area-based system of calculating SFP is due to replace the current system in 2015. Richard Lochhead said that there was a strong case for Scotland to get a bigger share of the UK budget. Future support will be based on land type; farms with more intensive levels of production would lose out to farmers with more limited production. Mr Lochhead said: "We can't justify taking support away from fragile hill farms in remote areas where farmers have no choices and moving it to the most versatile land."

EU farm ministers set an average support target of £168 (€196) per hectare across the EU by 2020. Nigel Miller of NFU Scotland said that Scotland was a long way short of this target.



WOODLANDS

RIVER ORRIN

2,500 native trees, supplied by the Woodland Trust Scotland, have been planted by the Cromarty Fishery Board as part of a project to improve riparian habitat along the banks of the River Orrin on the Fairburn Estate near Muir of Ord in Ross-shire. This follows years of work to clear rhododendron from 6 km of riverbank. The work was supported by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency restoration fund.

DEER & FORESTRY

Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland has launched a public consultation seeking views on its draft document, *Deer Management on the National Forest Estate – Current Practices and Future Directions*. It outlines the significance of deer on the National Forest Estate and the FC Scotland's proposed approach to managing deer over the next three years, 2013/2016. The consultation runs until

8 July 2013 and will be managed through the Scottish Government consultation website. *email: bruce.sewell@forestry.gsi.gov.uk; telephone: 01463 232811* See: www.forestry.gov.uk/deermanagement

WOODLAND CARBON

The first Woodland Carbon Code group scheme validation has been awarded to Buccleugh Estates which has 11 woodland projects in Dumfries & Galloway, the Scottish Borders and England. The Woodland Carbon Code is a voluntary United Kingdom standard which helps to ensure that 'carbon forestry' projects deliver the carbon benefits which their promoters claim.

See: www.forestry.gov.uk/carboncode

CHALARA

FC Scotland announced that special financial support will be available to help meet the costs of the removal and destruction of infected, recently planted ash trees in the 'sheltered' and 'buffer' areas identified in the *Chalara* Action Plan for Scotland [Mar 13]. Support will also be provided for replanting such sites with alternative tree species.

The action plan identifies a 'sheltered' area in north west Scotland where, as a special precaution, all recently planted ash trees on infected sites will need to be removed and destroyed under the terms of Statutory Plant Health Notices. An associated 'buffer' area will also see the removal and destruction of recently planted ash trees showing signs of infection.

The grant support rates are £550/net ha, where recently planted ash trees, including their roots, can be pulled out and burned. £1000/net ha for larger, recently planted ash trees which need to be cut and then burned, with chemical treatment applied to their stumps to prevent re-growth and £1000/net ha for replanting with alternative tree species in those situations where the gaps created will prevent successful woodland establishment.

The grant support is an interim measure until the next round of the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) comes into being, which should include specific provisions for grants relating to tree health measures.

In Scotland there are now 111 confirmed sites where *Chalara* has been detected, comprising three nurseries, 11 wider environment sites and 97 new planting sites. See: www.forestry.gsi.gov.uk/chalaragrants

• Edinburgh University research suggests that nine million, or 90% of ash trees in Scotland, will become infected within a decade with the *Chalara* fungus that causes ash dieback. The infection is mainly present in the central belt and the east. It is hoped that the spread in Scotland can be slowed down sufficiently to find an answer which will reduce the impact north of the Border.

The study, published in the journal *Atmospheric Environment*, calculates that the overall impact on the environment will depend on whether ash trees are replaced by another tree species, and how quickly. Many ash trees were planted to fill the gaps left by Dutch elm disease in the 1970s and 1980s. There is also concern over the potential impact of the loss of ash trees on the ecosystem, and on climate change.

TREE PLANTING

Scottish Farming Leader reported that FC Scotland is seeking views on new draft guidance on tree planting on agricultural land. The guidance has been produced in response to the report of the Woodland Advisory Group [Oct 12].

WOOD OF CREE

200,000 native trees have been planted at RSPB Scotland's Wood of Cree reserve over the past six

years. Already the largest ancient oak woodland in the area, volunteers have been planting new trees to link about 12 miles of woodland from Newton Stewart to Glentworth.



FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

SEALS & FISHFARMS

The Sunday Herald reported that Scotland's freedom of information commissioner, Rosemary Agnew, has ordered the government to name the individual fishfarms which have shot seals by 7 May [Jan 13]. She said: "The evidence does not provide a compelling argument that the threats are any more likely to occur or be acted upon because of the information being disclosed. Retrospective information is unlikely to provide sufficient detail for threats to be the result of targeted action."

According to official figures, fishfarmers shot 449 seals in 2011 and 2012 to prevent them from eating salmon. A further 443 seals were killed around the coast by salmon netting firms and river fisheries.

The names of the fishfarms licensed to shoot seals were requested by Don Staniford, from pressure group the Global Alliance Against Industrial Aquaculture. He called on fishfarmers to stop shooting seals, and instead install anti-predator nets. According to the Scottish Government, only one in five of Scotland's 215 active fishfarms have predator nets. The government has not insisted on the nets because they can trap and kill other animals, such as otters and dolphins.

Scott Landsburgh, of the Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisation, said: "Clearly, satisfying campaigners and achieving headlines is more important than public safety. We stand with salmon netters in our commitment to exclude and deter seals and to shoot only when all other measures fail. This is entirely legal and necessary to protect fish welfare."

SEALS & SALMON NETTING

The Sunday Herald reported that the Annual General Meeting minutes of the Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland quoted George Pullar, director of Usan Salmon Fisheries in Montrose, as saying that netting companies should be able to shoot 'as many seals as necessary' to protect their salmon.

The minutes of the AGM, held in Dunkeld in November 2012, record that Pullar 'stated that it was pointless having a restriction on the number of seals which could be shot.' He said: "It is important to have the ability to shoot the number of seals that are causing damage to the fish or the fishery, and a quota is not practical."

John Robins from the Save Our Seals Fund said: "At the moment the government relies on the figures supplied by the netters to determine how many seals are being killed."

Pullar insisted that Usan Salmon Fisheries adhered to its licence for shooting seals, though he wouldn't say exactly how many were being shot. He said that his company has spent tens of thousands of pounds erecting seal barriers and strengthening nets, and is trialing acoustic scaring devices. But it was always going to be necessary to kill seals 'as a last resort.'

He said: "The seal population is out of control, and we're struggling with the severe damage they do every day. I don't want to shoot any seals, but we have to control the seals that are marauding our nets. We don't want to fall out with anyone, but we're legally entitled to protect our livelihood, our jobs and our income."

SOUND OF SEIL FISHFARMS

Argyll & Bute Council has approved Meridian Salmon Group's plans for a fishfarm to be relocated further down Seil Sound, despite considerable local opposition [Mar 13]. The biomass is to be doubled at the same time, to 2,500 tonnes. Representing 600,000 mature salmon, this is the maximum that can currently be licensed for any fishfarm in Scotland. As consultees, the Argyll Fisheries Board had argued that it would be better to relocate without simultaneously increasing the biomass, in order to discover if the new site was better than the existing one.

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) is 'minded to licence' a further fishfarm at Pol na Gile in Seil Sound for 1,500 tonnes, with at least five other farms in the same sea loch system. No Environmental Impact Assessment was required for either development, despite the cumulative effect present. The Save Seil Sound group is considering making a complaint to the EU.

• An application has been made to SEPA for another 2,500 tonne installation in a proposed new site off the bay at the south west corner of the Isle of Shuna, west of Rubh'an Trilleachain.

MARINE SEDIMENTS

SEPA has published *The Occurrence of Chemical Residues in Sediments*, the results of surveys from 2010 to 2012 showing the levels of certain chemicals used in fishfarming, present in Scotland's marine sediments.

Over 78% of the analyses returned no detectable residues. Of the 170 analyses returning positive values, 98 (58%) were within the environmental standards set by SEPA. Further investigation is taking place where results are above SEPA's environmental standards.

The areas surveyed were Firth of Lorne, Loch Spelve, Loch Fyne (2010); Orkney, West Shetland, East Shetland (2011) and Loch Shell, Loch Erisort, Loch Roag, Loch a Chairn Bhain (2012).

The samples contained only residues of chemicals used in legally authorised medicines. The chemicals are found in products formulated to treat sea louse infestations at salmon farms.

See: www.sepa.org.uk/water/water_regulation/regimes/aquaculture/marine_aquaculture/reports_and_publications.aspx

SALMON & SEA TROUT STATISTICS

Scotland's chief statistician has published the provisional salmon and sea trout fishery statistics for the 2012 season.

The total reported rod catch of salmon (retained and released) for 2012 is 84,950. The proportion of the rod catch accounted for by catch and release is the highest reported since these figures were first recorded in 1994. In 2012, 91% of rod caught spring salmon was released, as was 74% of the annual rod catch. Catch and effort for both fixed engine and net & coble fisheries remain at historically low levels. Reported catch in each fishery was 12,580 and 3,646; 5% and 1% of the maximum reported in the respective time series. Fishing effort in these fisheries was 236.5 trap months and 78.5 crew months; the fifth and sixth lowest, respectively, since records began in 1952.

The total reported rod catch of sea trout (retained and released) for 2012 is 21,691. Catches have declined over much of the period since 1952, when records began and the 2012 catch is the fifth lowest in the time series.

There are clear differences shown among geographic regions in the relative strength of the 2012 rod catch. All mainland regions in the west

of Scotland reported catches which were within the lowest ten recorded for their region over the period 1952 to 2012. The reported catch in Moray Firth and North East regions were, similarly, the lowest and fourth lowest respectively over the same period. Catches in the East and North regions in 2012 were, on the other hand, both among the top ten catches recorded within their respective regions, while the catch recorded in the Outer Hebrides was close to the mid-point in the time series.

The proportion of the total rod catch of sea trout accounted for by catch and release remains among the highest reported since records began in 1994 and accounted for 70% of the catch in 2012. Catch and effort for both fixed engine and net & coble fisheries remain at historically low levels. Reported catch in each fishery was 2,426 and 2,682; 4% and 1% of the maximum reported in the respective time series.

See: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/science/Publications/stats/SalmonSeaTroutCatches

WHITEFISH STOCKS

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation said that a report from the North Atlantic Fisheries College Marine Centre in Shetland, which collated information from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, provides independent verification of the recovery of whitefish stocks.

Whilst some stocks declined prior to the middle of the last decade, almost all have increased since then. In almost all cases, the spawning stock biomass (SSB) measure in the most recent year (2012) was between 50% and at least 100% higher than the average over 2005 to 2007. The one main exception was haddock, for which the upturn started later. However, the SSB of haddock in 2012 was at least 40% higher than the average over the years 2009 to 2011 in both the North Sea and West of Scotland areas.

The SSB of North Sea haddock in 2012 is 4.5 times larger than in 1991; the North Sea cod stock more than doubled in size between 2006 and 2012; the fishing mortality rate for North Sea cod was lower than in any year since 1966; the plaice stock in the North Sea was larger in 2012 than at any time since at least 1960; and the combined SSB of North Sea cod, haddock, whiting and plaice in 2012 was 40% larger than in the 1990s.

WEST COAST PRAWNS

The West Highland Free Press reported that the number of working days for west coast prawn fishermen in 2013 would be set at 95% of the level seen in the years 2009 to 2011, as opposed to the 85% originally proposed by Marine Scotland [Jul 12]. West coast fishermen said that they were being penalised for something that had nothing to do with them; the restrictions were introduced as a result of overfishing by North Sea trawlers in 2011, because of a lack of prawns on the east. This led to the west coast days at sea being exceeded, while the North Sea quota only went half used; EU rules prevent east coast days being transferred.

The west coast fleet has not altered its fishing pattern over the years and a 15% reduction in effort would have seen a five-week reduction in days at sea for some vessels, with consequent effects on the already fragile local economy.

Fisheries secretary, Richard Lochhead, also offered skippers the chance to participate in paid science and research work which could offset the reduction of 5% in the time at sea, and give a better understanding of the fish stocks off the west coast.

The Herald reported that the Scottish Government said that it is restricted by the

European Commission's cod recovery plan, which restricts the west coast prawn boats because they can also catch cod.

**MARINE****SOLWAY FIRTH**

Police and Marine Scotland officers have increased patrols to tackle illegal cockling on the Solway Firth. The shellfish beds in the area have been closed in a bid to allow stocks to recover, although there are concerns that this is being ignored [Sep 11].

SOLWAY DU

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) had been expected to re-start test-firing depleted uranium (DU) shells at the Dundrennan military range near Kirkcudbright later this year [Mar 13].

Defence ministers have now assured the House of Commons that a planned weapon-testing programme will use variants that do not contain DU, a toxic radioactive metal used to harden armour-piercing tank shells. DU has been blamed for cancers and birth defects.

Over 30 years, army tanks have fired 6,700 shells into the Solway Firth from the range, containing nearly 30 tonnes of DU. Some shells were misfired and contaminated the range. High levels of DU were found in earthworms on the site.

PENTLAND FIRTH SURVEY

Sea Watch is to carry out a survey for killer whales, other whales and dolphins in the Pentland Firth between Caithness and Orkney where offshore marine renewable energy is planned. Data was gathered by similar volunteer watches last year.

SPERM WHALES

A pod of 14 sperm whales, probably young males, was spotted from microlight aircraft in the Firth of Forth off North Berwick in East Lothian.

A young male sperm whale was resident in Oban Bay for some ten days at the beginning of the month. Sperm whales are usually seen in deeper water on the north and west coasts.

MARINE SURVEYS

The Illeach reported that habitat studies, funded by Marine Scotland and led by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), are underway in the Firth of Clyde and in Loch Sween.

The Firth of Clyde survey is focusing on Loch Goil and the seabed to the south of Arran and is being carried out by SNH and SEPA. It builds on survey work carried out in 2012. The Loch Sween work will cover the seabed of the loch as well as the Sound of Jura, around the Sound of Danna and the McCormaig Isles. It is being undertaken by SNH and Heriot-Watt University.

The work will inform the management of these areas as well as the consultation for Marine Protected Areas.

MULL REEF

The Sound of Mull Artificial Reef Steering Group has bid for the decommissioned HMS Campbeltown. The ship would be sunk to become a focus for marine life and leisure diving in the seabed below the Sound of Mull. If successful, the artificial reef is forecast to create 10 to 16 new jobs and generate £500,000 to £750,000 net economic impact every year for the local economy. This would be the first artificial reef in Scotland, and only the second in the UK.

MARINE ATLAS

Scotland's Marine Atlas has been published online. It is an assessment of the condition of Scotland's seas, based on scientific evidence from data and

analysis. See: www.scotgov.ehulibrary.co.uk/marine-scotland/marine-atlas/

JOINT WARRIOR

The *BBC News* website reported that practice bombing was halted at Portmahomack in Easter Ross, as three beached pilot whales were discovered on the shore; one later died. British Divers Marine Life Rescue requested that the bombing, part of the NATO Joint Warrior exercise, was moved elsewhere [Apr 12].



POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

SNARING

The new Scottish snaring laws took effect on 1 April, under The Snares (Identification Numbers and Tags) (Scotland) Order 2012 [Jan 13]. Operators must have passed an approved training course, and must have a personal identification number issued by the police. This number must be attached to every snare set, along with a code to indicate the target species, and records kept.

The Scottish Raptor Persecution blog points out that there is no code for mountain hare, suggesting that it is still illegal to snare this species, despite the verdict of the Lochindorb hare snare trial [Feb 13].

However, the blog claims that in February, only 1,376 snare operators, out of an estimated total of 5,000, had attended an approved training course.

The legislation will be reviewed by the Scottish Parliament in December 2016.

ALLIANCE PARTY

The Alliance Party of Scotland, a new political party, has been launched to campaign on windfarm developments which threaten world-renowned Scottish landscapes, and also high energy bills.

Richard Crawford, the party leader, said that the party would fight for a moratorium on windfarms, pending an independent commission on renewable energy. He said: "We want to stop the destructive energy policy that is ruining Scotland and will destroy tourism."

LANDFILL

The Landfill Tax (Scotland) Bill has been published. This legislation would see Scotland take responsibility from the UK government for administering landfill tax from April 2015. It will help to address unauthorised dumping and encourage the proper disposal and recycling of material. It would also create a communities fund to support environmental organisations and help those who live close to landfill sites.

REGULATORY REFORM BILL

The Scottish Parliament's Climate Change & Environment Committee has asked for public views on the Regulatory Reform (Scotland) Bill concerning environmental regulation and the creation of new powers for tackling environmental crime. The legislation will strengthen enforcement and sentencing powers, with the aim of better protecting the environment. The committee is also examining enforcement for the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, including the operation of penalties and cost recoveries. Proposed powers for the courts to order those convicted of environmental crimes to consider compensation will also be examined.



GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

WILDFIRES

The *BBC News* website reported that there were over 240 wildfires in the Highlands at the end of March and beginning of April. An unseasonably dry March contributed to wildfires spreading, despite the cold weather.

RSPB Scotland said it was seriously concerned about the impact on golden eagle nests on open moorland. There are also concerns for migrant birds that were due to nest in the area. RSPB Scotland is already aware of at least one white tailed eagle nest being burned out.

500 acres of immature trees, planted in 2012, together with heathland in Glen Nevis, near Fort William, were destroyed in a blaze.

The Scottish Fire & Rescue Service warned that conditions are 'clearly unsuitable' for controlled burning and asked landowners to halt the practice in the 'tinder dry' conditions. The service issued a reminder that 17 laws determined when, where and how fires may be set, and could result in prosecution if broken.

Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) said that its members were being blamed unfairly for the blaze outbreaks. Luke Borwick, chairman of SLE said: "Some of these fires have been as a result of careless activity by recreational access takers. However, a significant number of fires have clearly been the result of irresponsible actions of other land users burning and not following the Muirburn Code."

The Herald reported that RSPB Scotland called for landowners and managers to exercise restraint and caution when undertaking controlled burning of heather moorland and to abide by the Muirburn Code to prevent harming vulnerable wildlife.

RSPB Scotland is extremely concerned that, due to late snow cover in some areas of Scotland, land managers might be tempted to apply for consent to continue their burning activities beyond the legal cut off date of 30 April. Heather may be burnt up until then to help promote new growth, and to conserve, restore, enhance or manage the natural environment. However, an extension would endanger many birds, some of which are species of high conservation concern.

The Muirburn Code clearly stipulates that burning should not be carried out in 'any areas within a half mile of nesting golden eagles' after the end of February. In some cases this has been disregarded and RSPB points out that the reckless destruction of any birds nest is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1980).

The Scottish Crofting Federation said that a decline in hill farming in recent years could also be partly to blame for the fires. Where livestock numbers have fallen and land is under-grazed, a deterioration in vegetation and spread of bracken can exacerbate wildfires.

PLANNING CHANGES

The *BBC News* website reported that the Planning Minister, Derek Mackay, is consulting on the new National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3) and draft Scottish Planning Policy (SPP). The NPF3 Main Issues Report sets out a range of options for how different parts of Scotland could be developed. The draft SPP includes planning policies on specific topics such as environmental protection, housing and renewable energy.

Mr Mackay said: "By providing a clear vision, the proposals will be used to guide future development that will help Scotland achieve its ambitious renewable energy targets and also increase protection for our country's most

environmentally important areas."

In all, there are 14 proposed national developments. A coal-fired power station at Hunterston in Ayrshire is not included [Jun 12].

In relation to windfarms, the proposals include strengthening environmental protection in the 31% of Scotland covered by the wildest and most scenic land, including no windfarms in the 19% of Scotland covered by National Parks and National Scenic Areas. It is proposed that turbines will be located further away from settlements; the new separation distance proposed is 1.55 miles (presently 1.24 miles).

Murdo Fraser MSP, convener of the Scottish Parliament's energy committee, said: "This announcement is, in effect, an admission by the Scottish Government that areas of scenic beauty are not compatible with windfarms. Unfortunately, this concession comes too late for many communities, and is utterly insincere for those who won't be protected by this."

Jenny Hogan, of Scottish Renewables, said that onshore wind was 'absolutely key' to meeting Scotland's climate change and renewable energy targets. She believed that excluding large areas of the country suitable for windfarms could potentially slow progress to achieving those objectives.

She said: "Scotland is known across the world for its beautiful landscapes and dynamic renewable energy industry and the Scottish government has to balance both of these priorities. Ultimately decisions over where windfarms can and can't be built are for democratically elected politicians both locally and nationally. It is important that the consultation on the National Planning Framework and Scottish Planning Policy brings greater clarity to all those concerned with making decisions about Scotland's landscapes and energy needs."

Patrick Harvie MSP, co-convener of the Scottish Greens, said: "Steering developments away from important landscapes and habitats must be balanced against the need for a transition to a sustainable society."

Dr Maggie Keegan, of the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), said: "This latest planning shakeup could have a significant impact on Scotland's landscapes and wildlife. It's crucial that wildlife and the services provided by nature, such as crop pollination, clean air and water, are recognised as being vital to support Scotland's economy and peoples' health and well-being. Designing in natural features as part of planning should be seen as an enhancement to development. It should be recognised that high quality green infrastructure such as small parks, tree-lined streets and green roofs provide the places where people want to live."

The Herald reported that the broadcaster, Cameron McNeish, said that the government had gone a long way to meet calls by the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, and others, for a national planning policy. He said that no European government had put an outright ban on turbines on particular areas of their country that are seen as nationally important in terms of landscape quality; the Scottish Government could be the first to do so.

RSPB Scotland said that proposals to retain a central Scotland Green Network are also welcome but that it was very disappointing that Scottish Government have not taken up the suggestion made by RSPB and the SWT, that the central Scotland green network approach be broadened out to the rest of Scotland through a national ecological network.

The consultation finishes on 23 July. See: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/NPF3-SPP-Review; www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/04/2377

WILD LAND MAPS

SNH has now published what has been described as the UK's first map of wild land [see below]. 3.7 million acres of land in Scotland is deemed to be natural, remote, with challenging terrain and few modern structures. SNH said that the map was part of government efforts to protect the areas and to guide development. The map forms part of the Scottish Government's new NPF3 and draft SPP [see above]. 43 areas of wild land are marked on the map.

NPF3 and SPP together strengthen environmental protection for Scotland's wildest and most scenic landscapes. They also prohibit the construction of windfarms in the 19% of Scotland which is covered by National Parks and National Scenic Areas (NSAs).

David Gibson of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland said: "We are disappointed at the apparent lack of provision of buffer zones around NSAs and National Parks. From the map it appears that mountain areas in Scotland could appear like islands surrounded by a sea of turbines. Hardly a positive move in this Year of Natural Scotland."

Stuart Brooks, of the JMT, said: "As the Scottish Planning Policy consultation document spells out, many of our upland, mountain and coastal areas are sensitive to human activity and have little or no capacity to accept new development. The JMT has long believed that a special designation would be the most effective long-term safeguard for our wild land, bringing clarity and rigour to the planning process. In the meantime, however, we will participate in this consultation to help ensure that positive words in support of wild land can be translated into robust action to keep them wild."

"We also note that there are currently a number of large-scale developments in the planning pipeline that are located in the heartland of some of our core areas of wild land, as indicated on the mapping published by SNH. In the light of the content of today's consultation documents, we would hope that these will now be reconsidered by the relevant planning authorities."

See: www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/looking-after-landscapes/landscape-policy-and-guidance/wild-land/mapping/

WILD LAND

The Scotsman reported that Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has drawn up new guidance which will designate about 28% of the country's landscape as 'wild land.' The areas identified by SNH are largely in the north and west Highlands. Planning guidance is being prepared for local councils, stating that windfarm applications should not be approved, except in special cases, on wild land. SNH says that the designation won't mean a guarantee against development, but an approved map of wild land would effectively identify a 'precious national resource.'

Brendan Turvey of SNH said that windfarm applications would still need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. He said: "What we are saying is that wild land is important and sensitive to windfarms. Wild land means there isn't much there in terms of human artefacts. It may be possible to conceal a small hydro scheme without affecting the wild land resource, but a large windfarm might be a different matter."

The Herald reported that a government spokesman said: "Alongside planning authorities, SNH, RSPB and others, the Scottish Government will work closely to ensure construction and habitat management of windfarm developments are exemplary and that impacts are minimised. We are consulting on a new draft Scottish

Planning Policy and the National Planning Framework main issues report [see above]. This will allow us to hear a full range of views on how wild land character should be protected by the planning system."

The Herald reported that SNH data revealed the proportion of Scottish land which could be counted as being 'without visual influence of built development' dropped from 41% in 2002 to 28% in 2009, mainly due to the presence of windfarms. Since 2009, the number of wind developments has proliferated but there had been no further tracking of the extent of wild land. SNH warned in a 2011 memo: "Windfarms are being built rapidly in relation to other forms of development and they are highly visible due to their locations."

The John Muir Trust (JMT) said that it was concerned that the tracking had not been done for four years and that this precious Scottish asset was at huge risk of disappearing whilst the Scottish Government discusses a new statutory designation for wild land. A study carried out by JMT and Leeds Wildland Research Institute shows that only about one third of the top 10% wildest land in the UK, most of which is in Scotland, is protected through National Scenic Area designation, which protects land of outstanding scenic value. Only about 6% has National Park status.

The JMT said: "Without a proper framework to protect what remains, wild land will continue to be eroded by as yet unforeseen developments." The trust raised concerns with Scottish ministers that wild land has not always been given due weight by planning officers, which they say is contrary to its status as an asset of national importance under existing planning policies.

• *The BBC News* website reported that Holyrood's public petitions committee heard from the JMT and SNH about how best to protect Scotland's wild land. In a submission to the committee, the JMT stated: "Wild land in Scotland provides important ecosystem services, sustaining numerous forms of life including key biodiversity species and providing for essential climate change mitigation and adaptation, for instance, retention of carbon in peat, providing high-quality water supplies and contributing to natural flood defences. Wild land does not receive clear and explicit recognition or protection within the Scottish planning system, or when decisions are made on sustainable land use. As a consequence, as more accessible and less sensitive sites are developed, some of the best wild land faces the threat of being lost forever."

The JMT said that it cannot afford to challenge every inappropriate planning application.

• Pat Wells of the Stop Highland Windfarms Campaign, writing to the letters page of the *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald*, said: "If the intention to protect the wildland areas mapped by SNH is genuine and not simply a PR exercise, there is an urgent need for a more robust and transparent planning system whereby the voice of local communities is not disregarded and where planning authorities are unable to challenge appeals by developers due to lack of human and financial resources ... There are many instances where the local authority has been the determining body (because the development is under 50 MW) and elected representatives of local communities have refused the application, only for its decision to be overturned on appeal to ministers ... numerous section 36 (over 50 MW installed capacity) windfarm developments recommended for refusal by planning authorities have been rubber-stamped by Scottish Government ministers."

RAASAY CONSULTATION

A consultation is being held on how best to manage Raasay's sporting rights to maximise community benefits in future [Feb 13]. All islanders were

asked for their views on three options:

- A long term let of up to 175 years granted to a local community group – either the Raasay Crofters' Association or another community group (which could include the crofters)

- Putting the lease on the open market with the winning bidder being required to demonstrate community benefit

- Exercising the right to buy over the land (which would include rights over the lease)

Paul Wheelhouse, the Environment & Climate Change minister, said: "We want to ensure that we put in place a system which meets Raasay's needs and allows the community to reap the maximum economic and conservation benefits from the valuable sporting assets and this will inform our policy in respect of any similar scenarios which present to us elsewhere in Scotland in the future."

CATHKIN BRAES

Cathkin Braes, in the south side of Glasgow, has been given official Local Nature Reserve status by the city council. 148.6 hectares of parkland will be managed for wildlife.

POLLUTION PROSECUTION

Scottish Water was fined £20,000 at Paisley Sheriff Court after being found guilty of dumping partially-treated sewage into a protected wetland area. Two unlicensed dumps were made from the company's Lochwinnoch sewage treatment works around Castle Semple Loch, Renfrewshire, in October 2010.

The sewage and sludge spilled over an area of scrub, a public footpath and into the wetlands beside the loch, making the area unsuitable for wildlife, smothering plants and starving the surrounding water of oxygen. Castle Semple Loch is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest and has a watersports centre, RSPB bird reserve and a salmon fishery. The discharge resulted in the removal of all public access to the loch for over a week. After it had all been cleared, the site took months to recover. However, there proved to be no long-term effects on the ecosystem.

- Scottish Water pled guilty at Hamilton Sheriff Court to a total of seven charges, and was fined £9,750 for illegal discharges and sewage pollution in Ayrshire and Lanarkshire. The first incident saw sludge being wrongly discharged into Craufurdland Water, near Kilmarnock. Raw sewage was also discharged into Cander Water, near Stonehouse, South Lanarkshire.

CAIRNGORMS LANDSCAPE

SNH commissioned a study, *Ecosystem Service Provision in the Cairngorms National Park: Case Study of Past and Future Management of Geodiversity and Biodiversity*, showing how Glentanar and Aviemore in the Cairngorms National Park have altered since the 1700s. The research suggests that economic and social factors have, at times, had a greater influence than climate. Over-exploitation also played an important part in changing the landscape of the Cairngorms.

The report states: "Careful research into the unique historical characteristics of how and why rural Scottish landscapes developed will help modern management schemes identify the best methods to preserve them."

See: www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/554.pdf

GREENSPACE FUNDING

Almost £500,000, from the latest round of the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) Development Fund, has been awarded to nine new projects across the central belt. The CSGN, the biggest greenspace project in Europe, stretches

from Ayrshire, Inverclyde and Dunbartonshire in the west to Fife and the Lothians in the east. It encompasses 19 local authorities across 10,000 km² and has the potential to benefit 3.5m people, 70% of Scotland's population. 19 existing projects, from the previous round of applications, were awarded funding in 2013-15. See: www.centralscotlandgreennetwork.org

GREENHOUSE GASES

Scotland's chief statistician released a report, *Emissions and removals of greenhouse gases from Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern, Ireland: 1990 – 2011*.

Scotland is a net sink of greenhouse gases from LULUCF activities. The size of this sink has increased by 156%, from -2.055 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (Mt CO₂e) to -5.270 Mt CO₂e, between 1990 and 2011. Between 2010 and 2011, the size of the sink decreased by 4.3%, from -5.509 to -5.270 Mt CO₂e. The sink increased steadily between 1990 and 2010 (168.1% increase in 2010). The decline in the sink between 2010 and 2011 was in line with expectations due to reduced planting levels since the 1980s; extensive conifer plantations established in the mid 20th century are now reaching felling age, with reduced removals from forest and increased carbon stocks in harvested wood products.

In 2011, for the LULUCF sector in Scotland, net emissions/removals were dominated by the large Forest Land sink (-7.382 Mt CO₂e) and Cropland source (4.780 Mt CO₂e). There were 0.225 Mt CO₂e of nitrous oxide emissions. Estimates of methane emissions are small, at 0.009 Mt CO₂e.

The National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory report is produced by the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology for the UK Department for Energy & Climate Change, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Department of Environment.

The LULUCF sector includes carbon stock changes, emissions of greenhouse gases (CO₂, methane and nitrous oxide) by sources and removals of CO₂ by sinks from land use, land use change and forestry activities. Removals of greenhouse gases are conventionally presented as negative quantities.

See: naei.defra.gov.uk/reports/reports?report_id=734

EDINBURGH AIR POLLUTION

An additional six miles of roads in Edinburgh, including Princes Street, George Street, most of the Royal Mile and the Grassmarket, have been added to the list of areas with air pollution from transport.

Edinburgh City Council said it was looking at ways to cut pollution in the busiest parts of the city. It is extending its existing three air pollution problem zones: central, St Johns Road and Great Junction Street and adding two new ones at Inverleith Row and Glasgow Road. The Cowgate, the Grassmarket, most of Gorgie Road, London Road and the top of Easter Road will be added to the central zone. The Great Junction Street zone has had Bernard Street, Commercial Street and North Junction Street added. Councils are obliged to declare air pollution problem zones for locations where European, UK or Scottish air quality targets are not going to be met.

However, the council is currently consulting on low emission zones and said that 98% of Edinburgh meets strict air quality standards.

NEW LANARK

The Scottish Government's five-year management plan for the New Lanark World Heritage Site has been published. Save Our Landscapes said that

the plan promised to preserve the protected area but made no mention of Cemex's proposal to extend its Hyndford Quarry into the buffer zone around New Lanark [Feb 13].

Professor Mark Stephens, of Save Our Landscapes, which opposes the extension plans, said that it was a disappointing omission. He said: "The nomination documents [for the world heritage site] identified the landscape setting as being intimately bound up with the value of the site. It identified quarrying explicitly as a threat to the site and gave UNESCO assurances that the site has been protected from quarrying. [Yet] there is no reference in the management plan to the threat posed by the proposed quarry."

ARGYLL MINERALS

Lorne Resources Ltd has applied for planning permission to sink test bores at 30 sites in Lagalochan Forest near Kilmelford in Argyll, over three years. The company is looking for copper and precious metals; initial aerial survey work was carried out in the Oban area last year. The company will use Forestry Commission Scotland's haulage route from Inverinan to Lagalochan to transport equipment.

ALLT LORGY

A pioneering river restoration project on the Allt Lorgy, a tributary of the Dulnain/Spey, will help to restore valuable riparian habitat and contribute to flood alleviation downstream. The river had been straightened in the past, mainly for agricultural purposes, but this resulted in degraded salmon spawning habitat and affected the way the water flows downstream, especially at times of high flow.

With funding from the Cairngorms National Park Authority, the Scottish Government, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Woodlands Trust Scotland and the Spey Fishery Board, work has been undertaken to restore the river to a more natural state, improving habitats and creating a more diverse ecological environment.



ENERGY

AARHUS CONVENTION & WINDFARMS

The Herald reported that Susan Crosthwaite, a community councillor, has written to the UN's Economic Commission for Europe to complain about the Kilgallioch windfarm in South Ayrshire [Mar 13]. She claims that breaches of the UN's Aarhus convention were made in the determination of the case, in regard to reliable and transparent information on environmental matters, and sufficient participation in decision-making.

The 96 turbine windfarm is due to be built near Barhill, within South Ayrshire & Galloway Biosphere, an area awarded UNESCO status in recognition of its ecological importance. The complaint will be considered as part of the wider case brought by Christine Metcalfe in regard to the Carraig Gheal windfarm [Mar 13].

The Scottish Government is responsible for planning, but the challenges were raised against the UK government, which contests the complaint, because it is a signatory to the Aarhus Convention.

WINDFARM UPDATES

Aberdeenshire: The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has objected to PNE Wind UK's plans for the Hill of Braco windfarm near Hatton. The MoD said that the planned windfarm would compromise the radar at nearby RAF Buchan.

Scottish Borders: Plans for Banks Renewables' 13 turbine windfarm on Quixwood Moor near

Grantshouse were narrowly approved. Councillor Jim Fullarton said that he found it strange that Quixwood was deemed acceptable when the committee had agreed to consult on limiting turbine sizes in smaller developments in the area.

Inverness-shire: Highland councillors voted not to object to SSE's Stronelairg windfarm on the Garrogie Estate in Inverness-shire [Feb 13]. The council recommended that the windfarm be reduced from 83 to 67 turbines.

The John Muir Trust (JMT) said that ministers should still call a public inquiry despite the vote and warned one of Scotland's core areas of wild land could 'disappear under a forest of steel turbines the height of the Forth Bridge, spread across an area of peatland the size of a small city.'

Helen McDade of JMT said: "We are disappointed the majority of councillors chose to ignore expert opinion from bodies which include Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the Cairngorms National Park, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and JMT. Despite this, the fight to save the Monadhliath Mountains will continue. Reports this week have suggested the Scottish Government is open to wild land protection. Once we industrialise any area of wild land, it is gone forever ... It [is] irrational for Glenmorie and Dalnessie windfarms to be subject to a public local inquiry, while Stronelairg, which is larger than both of these combined, is allowed to go through without any public scrutiny."

However, councillor Margaret Davidson, said: "That sort of landscape breaks my heart. There isn't a tree in sight, they have long gone. It has been hammered. It is a sporting estate. It is full of grouse butts, access tracks. Is that wild land? I think that is debatable. If we don't put windfarms in places like Stronelairg, where will we have them?"

SSE argued that the presence of the Glendoe hydro scheme with its kilometre long dam and 40 km of existing tracks meant the site does not constitute wild land. SSE said that the proposed Stronelairg windfarm is located in one of the Highland Council's search areas for windfarms, was sensitively sited around significant hydro-electric infrastructure and was not visible from any of the main tourist routes in the region.

The Strathspey & Badenoch Herald reported that Councillor Dave Fellows said: "It is said that few local people objected. Of course few local people objected; nobody lives there; it's wild land ... How can we possibly destroy this simply because national policy on wild land is still in the making? ... Much is made of the fact this landscape is punctuated by roads and hydro scheme intakes. Yet we have seen the impact of the Glendoe scheme on the landscape is relatively insignificant, and fundamentally low level. There is no comparison between the impacts of Glendoe and 67, 135 metre turbines."

David Baldwin, Highland Council's planning officer, said that peat slide concerns were raised by SNH but that a 'buffer zone' had been included in the plans to alleviate any potential problems. He said that the landscape's wildness would be affected but the presence of the Glendoe hydro station nearby had already affected it to some extent.

Fraser Wallace, of JMT, writing on the letters page of *The Herald*, said that SSE claims that the windfarm will not impact on deep peat. The company admits in its environmental statement however, that a quarter of the site is on peat deeper than one and a half metres, with nearly a further quarter more than one metre. One metre is the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's definition of deep peat.

He said that the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), in its response to the application,

said that SSE did not actually know how deep the peat on the site is. When it surveyed the site, the longest probe used could only reach two and a half metres into the ground. SEPA said that the applicant had no reasonable ability to state that the layout and construction plans avoid impacts on deep peat, and that insufficient detail has been provided in relation to the minimisation of disturbance of peat throughout the whole project. The developer cites five metres as the distance that peat is affected by drains in peat bogs; the University of Leeds said that single drains can affect peat across distances of 400 metres or more. He said that SSE is seriously underestimating the damage to wild land that this development would cause, and the JMT calls for further verifiable and objective evidence to test SSE's claim that Stronelairg will not affect deep peat.

Sutherland: The JMT has asked Highland Council to object to the 26 turbine Glencassley windfarm, near Loch Shin [Jul 12]. SNH has objected, as the development would have a significant adverse effect on the area's peatland. It is concerned about the cumulative impact of the SSE site and the 22 turbine Sallachy windfarm, also at Loch Shin. Planning officials have recommended that councillors do not object to the application, on the condition that three turbines are removed from the plan.

Helen McDade, of the JMT, said that Glencassley was the perfect example of the type of remote, wild land that the Scottish Planning Policy sought to protect. She said: "It would also be built on healthy peatland that, when degraded, will immediately start to release carbon into the atmosphere." An SSE spokesman said: "The JMT is misleading and has got it wrong ... the proposed site has been extensively surveyed and the layout and construction plan does not impact on the areas of deep peat."

PENTLAND HYDRO

Harlaw Hydro is considering building a hydro power generator in the Pentland Hills, at the first outlet from the Harlaw Reservoir. Harlaw Hydro would be the first urban microhydro project to be community owned in the Edinburgh area. Profit would be fed back in to the community through the Balerno Village Trust.

OPENCAST RESTORATION

The Sunday Herald reported that Professor Russell Griggs, who chairs the Scottish Government's Regulatory Review Group, is leading a working group to explore issues affecting the Scottish coal industry. Among issues under review is the restoration of future opencast coal sites.

Dr Richard Dixon, director of Friends of the Earth Scotland, said: "These companies have made large profits at the expense of the environment and local businesses. Instead of trying to prop up an ailing industry, the government needs to guarantee that overdue restoration work will get underway. The Scottish Government urgently needs to reassure communities and planning authorities that no developer will ever be allowed to simply walk away from their obligations to clean up after themselves."

Coal Action Scotland (CAS) has evidence that the restoration of at least a dozen old opencast mines in Ayrshire, Lanarkshire and Midlothian has already been delayed or abandoned. CAS claims that restoration of the Chalmerston mine in East Ayrshire, where production ended in 1998, is now 14 years overdue. CAS said that legal requirements for reinstatement of land should be introduced for all ex-mines; councils should call in restoration bonds and begin restoration immediately.

Oliver Munion of CAS said: "Our fear is that communities across Scotland are being sold out by the Scottish Government which seems to be preparing to allow the industry to break the promises it made to clean up the enormous mess it has made. Many Scottish Coal sites are woefully behind in their restoration, with some lying unrestored for ten years or more. Why should they be given support to open new mines when they've broken so many promises already?"

Claudia Beamish MSP, said: "We need to be wary of accepting a situation where this obligation is relaxed and scaled back. While we will listen to Professor Griggs' work on the broad issues affecting the coal industry, we are clear that this work must not come at the expense of the environmental concerns of communities affected."

• *The Herald* reported that Scottish Coal has gone into liquidation; the company ran six open-cast mines in East Ayrshire, Lanarkshire and Fife. The restoration of old coal mines is now in jeopardy, including Charles Jenck's Scottish World Project at St Ninians near Kelty in Fife. Friends of the Earth Scotland estimates that it costs about £10m to reinstate a basic landscape.

The Scottish Mines Restoration Trust has been set up by the Scottish Government to ensure that environmental obligations are met.

COALBED METHANE

The Sunday Herald reported that Dart Energy has applied for planning permission to extract up to 60 billion cubic feet of coalbed methane at Airth, near Falkirk [Jul 12]. It has signed a £300m deal with SSE for the supply of gas over the next seven years. But independent consultants have warned that the calorific value of the gas is unlikely to be high enough for the National Grid. The gas may need to be blended with higher-quality gas on the grid, which, if permitted, would have cost implications. Alternatively the gas could be enriched by adding propane, a high-risk process that is not included in the current planning applications by the company.

Councillor Mark Ruskell said: "If the gas requires further treatment then it makes a mockery of the current planning applications under consideration by two councils [Falkirk & Stirling]. It's clear that a moratorium is required at the very least until the planning system is able to address all the concerns that unconventional gas developments are raising."

• *The Sunday Herald* reported that SEPA investigated claims regarding the potential release of gas from coal-bed methane wells near Canonbie in Dumfries & Galloway. Methane can be an explosion risk in some concentrations, and causes 21 times more global warming than carbon dioxide.

SOLAR MEADOW

A five-acre site containing more than 2,500 solar panels is based at one of the most northerly locations for solar power in Europe at Edinburgh College in Dalkeith, Midlothian. The solar meadow was designed by SSE Energy Solutions and cost £1.2m. It will generate around 560,000 kW hours of electricity each year. Carbon emissions from the college are predicted to decrease by 300,000 kg *per annum*. Wildflowers and grasses are to be planted in the meadow to increase the site's biodiversity. The meadow will be used as a research centre where the interaction between biodiversity and solar technology is analysed, including the effect of environmental conditions on the output from the solar panels such as weather and pollen.



RECREATION & TOURISM

THE WILD SPACE

The John Muir Trust's new visitor centre, The Wild Space, has been opened in Pitlochry. It was funded by the Reece Foundation, the Peoples' Postcode Lottery, the Gannochy Trust and the Craignish Trust.

OUTDOOR VISITS

A SNH survey has shown that 42% of Scottish adults visited the outdoors for leisure or recreation at least once a week in 2012, a 4% decrease from 2011 (46%). Total expenditure on visits to the outdoors in 2012 was estimated to be around £2.6 billion, down slightly on the previous year. The survey showed that walking was the most popular outdoor recreational activity, listed as the main activity on 73% of visits. Family outings, the main activity on 8% of visits, were next in terms of popularity, followed by cycling and mountain biking (4%).



NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION

Butterfly Conservation needs the public's help to track the expansion of the speckled wood, one of Scotland's most rapidly spreading butterflies. It is expanding its range south from warm 'refuges' around the Moray Firth and the west coast that were colonised centuries ago and remained occupied, while the rest of Scotland became colder and unsuitable. The butterfly is also moving north from England and arriving in the Borders; some have appeared in the Stranraer area that could have flown over from Northern Ireland. Sightings can be submitted online: www.butterfly-conservation.org/scottishspeckledwood

CROFTING COMMISSION

Catriona Maclean has been appointed as the new chief executive of the Crofting Commission, following the retirement of Nick Reiter.

MILLPORT MARINE STATION

The Ardsrossan & Saltcoats Herald reported that North Ayrshire Council has outlined proposals to retain the Millport Marine Biological Station facility [Mar 13].

The council and Highland & Islands Enterprise have commissioned a study to look at the commercial development potential of the station through alternative uses and additional revenue sources.

The council says the results will be used to develop a business plan to support the case for on-going activity at the station. The plan will be completed by June 2013; potential funding sources will then be identified, with a view to allowing the facility to operate self-sufficiently, without the need for on-going revenue support.

NESBREC

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has given a grant of £127,118 to support the voluntary work of the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) over the next three years. Comprehensive wildlife recording is crucial to enable SNH and others in the north east to make informed decisions about economic development, strategic planning, and land management [Mar 13].

NESBReC covers Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City, Moray and since 2009 the area covered by the Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

See: www.nesbrec.org.uk