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CONSERVATION

SEABIRD NUMBERS

A report by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), *Abundance and Productivity of Breeding Seabirds*, confirms that seabird numbers are continuing to decline. From 1986 to 2012, the number of seabirds breeding in Scotland has dropped by 46%. Of the 11 species for which abundance could be calculated, nine have shown sustained declines since 1986. The largest declines have been for Arctic skua (80%), a decrease of around 5% since 2011, Arctic tern (72%) and black-legged kittiwake (68%). Numbers of black guillemot and common gull have remained stable.

The number of chicks produced (breeding productivity) has fluctuated over the period but declined since 2000. By 2012, the productivity was 76% of the 1986 level, an overall decline of 24%.

The continuing decreases have been linked to a range of factors such as food shortages, weather conditions and predation by non-native species such as brown rats and mink. The number of small shoaling fish, which are an important food source for many seabirds, may have fallen. These fish are probably being affected by rising sea temperatures because of climate change, as well as other factors.

Scotland's seabirds are internationally important with around four million breeding seabirds of 24 species. The recent drop in numbers follows two decades of occasional years of poor breeding but poor years have happened more often, and with more severity, since 2000.

This seabird indicator was prepared using data from the Seabird Monitoring Programme, a partnership project, led and co-ordinated by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. The indicator is part of a suite of biodiversity indicators which are used to assess the state of Scotland's biodiversity.

See: www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/our-changing-environment/scotlands-indicators/biodiversity-indicators/biodiversity-state-indicators-list; www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B424907.pdf

FARMLAND BIRDS

SNH has released a report which looks at the populations of ten of Scotland's farmland birds over the past ten years, using data collected largely by volunteers. The research was limited to the Scottish mainland, as there was insufficient comparative data from the islands.

The number of farmland seed-eating birds, such as linnets, skylarks, tree sparrows and yellowhammers, rose. On the other hand, four out of the five farmland waders declined. Curlew, lapwing, oystercatcher and redshank have all significantly declined.

Trends for farmland seed-eater birds have tended to be more favourable in Scotland in recent years than in England and Wales. Farmland birds have largely shown declines since the 1950s, with major declines in the 1970s and into the 1980s. More intensive farming, climate change and changes in the areas where Scotland's farmland birds spend the winter have all contributed to these decreasing numbers.

Phil Harrison, of St Andrews University's Centre for Research into Ecological & Environmental Modelling, funded by Scotland's

ClimateXChange, said: "The next stage is to look at what drives these changes, such as land use change and climate change. Changes in the farmland bird community are believed to have been driven mostly by land use change in recent decades, but we need to model the likely effects of future climate change, whether the effect is direct or indirect, as a result of climate-related land use change. This information will hopefully be used for regional and local conservation policy."

The increase of some farmland birds has been aided by programmes such as the Farmland Bird Lifeline project (funded by the RSPB, SNH and the Biodiversity Action Grants Scheme) and the Scottish Rural Development Programme. These programmes have given grants and advice on developing insect-rich habitats, including leaving grass margins around arable fields, managing winter stubble, and leaving set-asides unsprayed and uncut throughout the summer.

Bruce Wilson, of the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), said: "We are at a crunch time for Scotland's farmland wildlife. Crucial decisions are currently being taken by the Scottish Government regarding how much money will be spent and where it will be spent in the next round of agri-environment schemes. To help reverse the decline in farmland birds such as waders, the SWT is calling for the maximum possible money to be taken from direct payments for owning land to be put into schemes that allow land managers to help wildlife recover. This report shows that waders such as redshank and lapwing are still in decline and the SWT has been asking the Scottish Government to be more strategic with the limited pot of money available to better target agri-environment money to areas where it will do the most good."

See: www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/our-changing-environment/scotlands-trends/trend-notes

ASSYNT DEER

The *Northern Times* reported that five sporting estate owners joined forces to issue an 'open' letter urging John Muir Trust (JMT) supporters to withhold financial backing from the group in an escalating row over the group's deer management policy in Assynt, north-west Sutherland [Feb 13].

The dispute centres round the annual stag cull on JMT's 9,140 acre Quinag estate. SNH has recommended that 20 stags be taken from Quinag. However, the JMT's stated intention is to more than quadruple that figure in order to protect ancient woodland on its ground from foraging animals. Neighbouring estate owners claim that the increased cull would impact on their deer figures and also on the wider economy, and consider that the solution would be to erect temporary fencing round the woodland. JMT has not disclosed its stag cull numbers for this season, which ended on 20 October. JMT had not attended recent meetings of the West Sutherland Deer Management Group.

Denis Mollison, co-founder of the JMT, said in an email response to the landowners: "The dissension you are trying to stir up in the local community has the potential to do much more damage to the fragile local economy than any land management mistakes that either you or the JMT are likely to make. This is neither wise nor public-spirited."

Stuart Brooks of the JMT wrote: "Our objective is to see a healthy deer herd capable of existing sustainably within a healthy environment. I don't think we disagree on that. All the biological evidence clearly demonstrates that this is currently not the case – grazing pressure from deer is too high. Reducing the deer population (not eradicating it) and controlling it through stalking is not incompatible with your objectives. The Scottish Government's rural affairs committee is so concerned about the failure of the current deer management system to protect designated sites that it is looking at the issue of deer damage to the natural heritage across Scotland. Your actions continue to draw attention to these issues."

Mr Brooks claimed that the West Sutherland Deer Management Group was not 'functioning properly.'

HONEYBEE RESERVE

Britain's first honeybee reserve is to be set up on Colonsay and Oronsay. A Scottish Government Bee Keeping Order, aiming to protect the native black bee from cross-breeding and disease, will come into force in January 2014. It will make it an offence to keep any species on the islands other than the British black honeybee, *Apis mellifera mellifera*. A public consultation saw widespread support for a reserve.

There are currently around 50 native colonies on Colonsay and adjoining Oronsay. The bee sanctuary's purpose is to conserve genetic material for the future.

The government's move is part of a ten-year Honeybee Health Strategy. Most of Britain's native bee species were lost, early in the 20th century, due to the Isle of Wight disease caused by a parasitic mite. As a result bees were imported from all over the world, which then interbred with the native bee. Only pockets of native bees remained intact as a result; Colonsay is thought to be one of the purest, and is free of *varroa* mite.

LOCH KEN CRAYFISH

North American signal crayfish are said to have 'almost completely destroyed' the biodiversity of Loch Ken in Dumfries & Galloway and there is now evidence that they are getting into crops being gathered for silage [May 13]. Regulations prohibit the transport of the non-native crayfish which means that farmers are unable to transport silage bales to feed their cattle.

John Thom, of New Galloway Community Council, estimated that the crayfish were already costing more than £1m per year to the local economy. He said: "They are undermining the flood defences, they are eating the ground-nesting birds and all the marine life in the whole surrounding area so now the bird watchers aren't coming. Great-crested newts, the frogs, all the marine life in the area and its ecological system is actually being ruined."

The *Daily Record* reported that SNH had 'snubbed' a crisis meeting with the community council to discuss the situation. However, SNH said that it wasn't invited to the meeting. Mr Thom said that the crayfish have been reported up to a mile inland from Loch Ken.

The *BBC News* website reported that SNH said that it had seen nothing to suggest that crayfish getting into cattle feed were a major problem in the area. It said that the chances of crayfish survival in silage bales was 'very low.' An SNH statement also stressed it would not expect farmers in the area to stop making silage and feeding it to their animals.

FLOW COUNTRY

A new computer model, developed to help guide forest and conservation planning in the

Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland, has been published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*. It details the results of work by SNH, RSPB Scotland, Forest Research and Forestry Commission Scotland.

The research has identified areas where redesigning forested areas in the far north should benefit some of Europe's richest peatlands and their nesting concentrations of dunlins, golden plovers and greenshank.

Before the nature conservation importance of the Flow Country was fully understood, trees were planted on large tracts of peatlands in the 1970s and 80s, resulting in the loss of open habitats.

See: onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1365-2664.12173/abstract

CANNA RABBITS

The *BBC News* website reported that the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) is to cull rabbits on the island of Canna. The NTS estimates that there are more than 16,000 rabbits on Canna. The animals have been blamed for causing a landslide that affected a road on the island and for damaging archaeological sites. However, rabbits will not be completely exterminated because they provide food for eagles that nest on Canna.

An NTS spokesman said: "There are concerns about the impact that the population is having on the island, given the recent landslide. Following advice from a specialist wildlife advisor, we are about to go out to tender for a contractor to undertake control work on the island. The intention is that much of this work could be carried out before the end of the year. The overall plan is to get the population down to manageable and sustainable levels."

WILDCATS

The *BBC News* website reported that two new kittens, born at the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland's (RZSS) Highland Wildlife Park at Kincaig, near Aviemore, could have a future role in a project to breed Scottish wildcats in captivity for possible release into the wild [Sep 13].

RZSS and the Aspinall Foundation are leading the plans for a conservation breeding programme and the wildlife park will be among the project's main breeding sites.

Douglas Richardson, of the wildlife park, said: "With the wildcat action plan, the contribution that these little chaps may make in the future to their species' survival will hopefully be more impactful. The plan is for a much more aggressively managed breeding programme, running alongside a wide range of other wildcat conservation initiatives that will eventually turn the tide for the species in Scotland."

SUNART BRYOPHYTES

The *BBC News* website reported that SNH commissioned a survey of the Sunart Oakwoods in Argyll, and has created an online tool to help developers avoid prime bryophyte habitat when planning micro hydro-electric schemes in the area. The area is one of Britain's richest areas of rare mosses and liverworts. A total of 104 burns were assessed, and 30 were deemed to be internationally or nationally important in terms of the plant life found. Researchers surveying the sites also discovered a liverwort, Holt's scalewort, which had not previously been found in the UK.

See: www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/595.pdf

COIGACH & ASSYNT

The Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded £3m, in a stage one pass, to conserve 150,000 acres of Coigach and Assynt in north west Scotland. The Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape, a partnership

set up to regenerate the area, is led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT). Blanket bog and heath moor are to be restored, paths repaired and fragmented native woodland reconnected. The project is part of a 40 year vision for Coigach and Assynt.

• The *West Highland Free Press* reported that an application has been made by Coigach Wind Power Ltd for a single community-owned wind turbine in Coigach. The campaign group, Protect Wild Scotland, claims that it would affect the status of the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area.

WADERS

The *Scotsman* reported that the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) has called for urgent action by the Scottish Government to save threatened populations of waders. An SGA spokesperson said: "Ground nesting birds such as lapwing, curlew and plover breed up to three times more successfully on grouse moors due to heather burning and legal predator control by gamekeepers. However, keepers are deeply concerned that numbers are declining in these key areas, too, and the SGA is to dedicate 2014 to highlighting the need for tougher action.

"Scotland has lost 56% of its lapwing and curlew populations in the last 17 years, with conservationists blaming climate change and habitat loss through farming practices. Scottish gamekeepers who work the land every day reckon this is only a small part of the story. They feel that unless the Scottish Government listens to practical land managers, waders could pass the point of no return."

Alex Hogg of the SGA said: "It is clear that new conservation responses are needed to help our vulnerable nesting birds. Millions of pounds of tax payers' money has been spent on costly habitat programmes through the advice of conservation bodies. However, the *State of Nature* report, which showed 60% of the UK's species continuing to decline, and the latest BTO breeding bird survey, prove that this approach, when taken alone, has failed to deliver the answers for birds such as waders.

"Our keepers, who have physically protected and work to protect curlew, lapwing and plovers on their ground for years, have been warning that this is happening. We now have an imbalance in our uplands that needs to be addressed by government before Scotland goes the same way as Wales. Conservation in this country has centred around the advancement of protectionist policies, site designations and central hand-outs for habitat programmes without any stipulation for predator control.

"When the public sees the return on investment with this approach, they are entitled to ask where the birds have gone and, if this has failed, why we continue to pay for, and play, a losing hand ... It has been widely accepted that predation by larger predators can have a devastating effect on the survival of vulnerable prey species, particularly when the predators are increasing and their prey decreasing significantly. The government needs to adapt to this scientific reality and use the legal licensing powers it holds to relieve the pressure on some of our wild birds.

"Licences have also been issued to protect sheep at lambing time from ravens, so there are already examples where the powers the government holds can be used bring about positive results. Throwing public cash, which will be siphoned by conservation groups by habitat schemes, without control of predators, is self-defeating.



FARMING

PESTICIDES

Scotland's chief statistician has published three reports in relation to pesticide usage on farms in Scotland: *Arable Crops and Potato Stores 2012*, *Soft Fruit Crops 2012* and *Rodenticides on Arable Farms 2012*.

The total estimated area of arable crops grown in 2012 was 528,467 hectares, an increase of over 5% from the previous survey in 2010. It is estimated that 96% of the crop was treated with a pesticide in 2012. Herbicides were applied to 94% of the crop, fungicides to 92%, seed treatments to 91%, growth regulators to 38%, insecticides to 25% and molluscicides to 10%.

The overall estimated quantity of potatoes stored in 2012 was 960,064 tonnes, a decrease of 15% compared to the 2010 report. Seed potatoes decreased by an estimated 17% to 329,427 tonnes. Ware potatoes decreased by 13% to an estimated 630,637 tonnes in storage. 20% of seed potatoes were treated in store and 35% of ware potatoes.

The total area of Scottish soft fruit crops, grown outdoors or under temporary protection, in 2012 was calculated to be 1,547 hectares, a 19% decrease from the area reported in 2010. It was estimated that 96% of the crop received a pesticide application. 96% of the crop was treated with a fungicide, 93% with an insecticide/acaricide, 60% with a herbicide, 29% with a molluscicide and 29% with a biological control agent.

The pesticide formulation treated area decreased by only 4%.

It was estimated that rodenticides were used on 78% of arable farms in 2012, which is similar to that reported in previous surveys.

See: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/10/8375;
www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/10/6910;
www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/10/7850

• The *Sunday Herald* reported that a Science & Advice for Scottish Agriculture survey has shown that the amount of pesticides applied *per* hectare by soft fruit growers increased from 17.5 to 19.6 tonnes (38%) between 2010 and 2012. Much of the increase was in fungicides to stop rot in wet weather, but the use of chlorpyrifos, an organophosphate insecticide, also rose from 652kg to 718kg, representing a *per* hectare rise of 36%.

Over 1,500 hectares were planted with blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, blackcurrants and other soft fruits in 2012, more than four-fifths of them in Angus. As much as 96% of the crop was treated with at least one pesticide, including fungicides, insecticides, herbicides and biological control agents.

Dr Maggie Keegan, of the Scottish Wildlife Trust, said: "The rise in usage is alarming because of the damaging knock-on effects these toxic chemicals can have on non-target species such as honeybees, bumblebees and other wildlife higher up the food chain."

However, new EU laws would oblige farmers to reduce chemical usage on crops from next year.

Laura Stewart, director of Soil Association Scotland, said that agricultural pesticides could damage the environment and leave toxic residues in food. She said: "Particular problems arise when more than one type of chemical is used in a so-called cocktail effect. Research on mixed chemical use, even at low levels, shows it can affect reproductive, immune and nervous systems."

Nick von Westenholz, of the Crop Protection Association, said: "Pesticides are among the most heavily regulated products in the UK. Quite simply, fruit grown using pesticides is safe to eat.

It's a shame the great benefits they provide to growers and consumers alike are undermined by simplistic objections."

The Scottish Government attributed the increased use of pesticides to 2012's record wet summer. A spokeswoman said that it was mainly due to the increased use of fungicides to treat fungal diseases which thrive in wet conditions.

AGRICULTURAL CENSUS

Scotland's chief statistician has released the *June 2013 Agricultural Census*. There was a noticeable move from winter-planted to spring-planted crops, with wheat down 14,000 hectares, offset by an increase of 7,000 hectares in spring barley and 8,000 hectares in spring oats. The areas planted with potatoes, oilseed rape, and crops for feeding to livestock all saw decreases, with a small increase in the area of vegetables for human consumption.

Livestock numbers continued to decline with the total number of cattle down by 2% to 1.80 million. Within this, the number of beef cattle fell 2% to 725,950 with the number of dairy cattle remaining virtually unchanged on 2012. The number of calves fell by 4% to 531,132.

There was also a further fall in the number of sheep, down 2% to 6.57 million. This was chiefly due to a 167,000, or 5%, decrease in lambs, much of which was related to the poor weather.

Pig numbers saw a large fall, down 12% to 319,000 which is likely to be linked to the reduction in meat processing facilities, but part of a long-running trend. Poultry saw a 4% decline to 14.2 million, though this is within the normal fluctuations of poultry numbers.

The amount of agricultural land that was rented again fell, by 21,000 hectares or 2%, to 1.37 million hectares. This means that 24% of agricultural land is rented. There were an estimated 7,100 holdings with tenancy arrangements, down 370 (5%) since 2012.

The area growing strawberries and blackcurrants increased, but raspberries continued to decline. There were 67,400 people employed on agricultural holdings, which was about average for the last ten years. About 79% of the area of Scotland is agricultural land, in 52,700 agricultural holdings. See: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/10/5891

CEREAL HARVEST

Scotland's chief statistician has released the latest estimates of the Scottish cereal and oilseed rape harvest. The figures show that the latest increase is due to an anticipated 11% improvement in overall cereal yields. This follows a 15% fall in yields last year. The total area of land sown has remained largely unchanged, though oats have replaced wheat and oilseed rape in some areas. After a difficult start to the year, growing conditions improved although the high degree of variability across the country introduces additional uncertainty around current estimates.

Spring barley is estimated to increase by 15% to 1.7 million tonnes and winter barley by 6% to 294,000 tonnes. With both higher yields and areas, production of oats is estimated to rise by around 80% to 195,000 tonnes. This is in part due to the replacement of wheat and oilseed rape which experienced a poor start in some places. Production is expected to fall by 6% for wheat, to 630,000 tonnes, and 2% for oilseed rape, to 104,000 tonnes.

Scottish cereals are still being harvested and these figures are very much provisional estimates. Final harvest estimates will be announced in December. See: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/10/3258

CAP

A cross-party letter has been sent to the UK government calling for about €230m in extra EU farming subsidies to be allocated to Scotland [Sep 13]. The UK qualifies for the 'convergence uplift' from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) only because of Scotland's low payments under the current system. All other parts of the UK are above the threshold set by the EU for external convergence, and it is only because of Scotland's extremely low average level of Pillar 1 payments per hectare that the UK as a whole fell below the threshold and qualified for an external convergence uplift.

The letter follows a debate in the Scottish Parliament where MSPs agreed that the UK's full uplift should come to Scotland in its entirety.

COMMON GRAZINGS

Consultations on possible changes to common grazing regulations have been launched by the Crofting Commission. They will run until 22 November. Contact; email: cc2013@crofting.scotland.gov.uk; telephone: 01463 663439

BEE HEALTH

The *BBC News* website reported that the University of Dundee is to extend a study looking at the health of bee populations across the country [Jun 13]. It has now been awarded funding from the Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC). The *Nosema ceranae* parasite, previously not thought to be widespread in the UK, has been found to be widespread in Scotland and has been implicated in causing disease and colony failure in bees.

The BBSRC funding will allow the scheme to be extended to include screening for other parasites and map honeybee populations in Scotland, with help from Science & Advice for Scottish Agriculture.

The data set will be combined with information on local land use, pesticide exposure and honeybee colony failures to assess the relative impact of all threats to the decline of honeybees.



WOODLANDS

PHYTOPHTHORA RAMORUM

The Scottish Government is providing funding of £1m to assist efforts to control *Phytophthora ramorum* which is killing larch trees in Galloway [Aug 13]. *P. ramorum* was first found in Dumfries & Galloway in 2011 but is now widespread in the region; most of the larches will be felled over the next two or three years. Work is also under way to make best use of the affected timber.

ROSAL FOREST

Rosal Forest in north Sutherland was put on the market by Forestry Commission Scotland for £1.85m after the local community did not register an interest. The 6,356 acre woodland is in Strathnaver and includes historical settlements dating from the Highland Clearances in the 1800s. However, the environment minister, Paul Wheelhouse, intervened and the sale has now been stopped at his request. It is understood that the minister wanted to avoid repeating the situation with crofters on Raasay [Sep 13].

Professor Jim Hunter, the crofting historian, said: "The Forestry Commission has done a good job of interpreting Rosal and making the place accessible to visitors. I'd have very little faith in private owners of the sort presently active in the Highland land market being keen either on encouraging visitors or on commemorating the clearances."

TIRORAN FOREST

Forestry Commission Scotland has approved the Ross of Mull & Iona Development Group's application to the National Forest Land Scheme to buy Tioran Forest on Mull. The group hopes to be able to develop woodland crofts in the 792 hectare forest, and widen access to the woods.

**FISHFARMING & FISHERIES****AQUACULTURE WEBSITE**

A new website and database has been launched which will provide a central location for an integrated, geographic and up-to-date view of aquaculture activity in Scotland. The website also provides information about industry location, types of aquaculture, leases, licenses and reports on controlled activities and shellfish hygiene monitoring.

The website is the result of a partnership project between the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Marine Scotland, the Food Standards Agency in Scotland and The Crown Estate.

- The *Sunday Herald* reported that SEPA has agreed to delete the number of farmed fish killed by disease from the public database because the Scottish Salmon Producers' Association (SSPO) argued it would be commercially damaging [Feb 13]. The database was published on 1 October by the Scottish Government. It includes the weight of fish that have died but omits the number, which critics say masks the scale of the problem when fish are small. The database also omits information on sea-lice.

Guy Linley-Adams, solicitor to the Salmon & Trout Association (Scotland), argued that the lack of weekly site-specific sea-lice data was an 'obvious gap' in the database. He said: "It is looking increasingly silly of the Scottish government to refuse to require that data to be published."

See: http://aquaculture.scotland.gov.uk/data/fish_farms_annual_emissions_record.aspx?spr_data_id=42122

ISLE MARTIN FISHFARM

The *Scotsman* reported that Highland Council has given planning permission to Wester Ross Fisheries Ltd to consolidate operations into a single group of 46 steel fish cages at the Isle Martin fishfarm in Loch Kanaird, near Ullapool in Wester Ross.

Protect Wild Scotland campaigners have demanded a judicial review of the decision, claiming that Wester Ross Fisheries has been breaching seabed pollution limits for more than ten years; the company has used wooden pens to house the fish, operating without planning permission under a Crown Estate lease and development consent issued in 2003. The site is within a mile of a salmon river.

Despite the community opposition, SEPA, Marine Science Scotland (MSS), Scottish Natural Heritage and local community councils raised no objections, although MSS did raise concerns about persistent problems with sea-lice. Objections came from the Salmon & Trout Association, Atlantic Salmon Trust, Wester Ross Area Fishery Board, Wester Ross Fisheries Trust, Association of Salmon Fishery Boards and the Rivers & Fishery Trusts of Scotland.

ALGAL BLOOM FORECASTS

The *ForArgyll* website reported that the Scottish Association of Marine Science, at Dunstaffnage near Oban, has been part of the award-winning

ASIMUTH team which has developed the Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) Forecast. HAB Forecast won the award for Best Service Challenge from Copernicus Masters, a European Earth monitoring competition.

The service provides a weekly alert for fish and shellfish farmers in the Atlantic Europe area to warn them – one week ahead – of the likelihood of a toxic or harmful occurrence of target species. Early warning of severe algal blooms will give time to adapt the aquaculture operators' culture and harvesting practices so as to reduce potential losses. The system will be fully operationally tested in Shetland in 2014; fishfarms there have suffered several months of closure this year.

See: www.asimuth.eu/en-ie/Pages/default.aspx

SEA-LICE

The *Herald* reported that the Salmon & Trout Association Scotland (S&TAS) has written to the Scottish Government, drawing attention to the fact that the Norwegian authorities have ordered the slaughter of two million salmon infected by sea-lice in Vikna, Nord Trondelag. The fish had become resistant to chemical treatments against sea-lice; the cull aims to protect wild young salmon migrating through the fjords to the sea from juvenile sea-lice being released from salmon farms.

The S&TAS asked what consideration the government is giving to applying similar 'punitive sanctions' against salmon farm operators in Scotland which are unable to keep sea-lice numbers below agreed thresholds [Sep 13]. A Scottish Government spokesperson said: "The Scottish Government fully supports the sustainable growth of Scotland's aquaculture sector with due regard to the marine environment, and our regulatory system is set up to deal with the specific circumstances here."

PENTLAND SALMON

The Pentland Salmon Initiative is to investigate whether migrating Atlantic salmon are likely to be affected by wind, wave or tidal energy devices deployed around Scotland's coast. The project will focus on the Pentland Firth between the north coast of the British mainland and Orkney, which has the potential to become the 'Saudi Arabia of renewable energy' but is also close to all of the rivers of Caithness and northern Sutherland; salmon use it as a route to and from the large east coast rivers further south. The initiative is led by North Highland College UHI Environmental Research Institute.

MACKEREL STOCKS

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) has released scientific evidence which shows mackerel stocks in the north east Atlantic are in 'good health' [Sep 13]. ICES recommended an increase in quotas of more than 60% for 2014; it said that analysis had been hampered by the unresolved dispute with Iceland and the Faroe Islands over quotas.

**MARINE****SEAWEED CULTIVATION**

A draft policy statement on seaweed cultivation in Scotland, and the related Strategic Environmental Assessment, has been published by the Scottish Government [Jul 13]. It includes the management and regulation of seaweed cultivation and aims to facilitate the sustainable development of the seaweed cultivation industry. It informs policy in order to manage and mitigate any impacts from seaweed cultivation. The closing date is 17 November. See: www.scotland.gov.uk/seaweed

**POLITICS & PARLIAMENT****SCALPAY**

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that the Scottish Land Fund has awarded £60,330 to the residents of Scalpay in the Western Isles, to help them to take over ownership of the island [Nov 12]. The owner, Fred Taylor, had offered the island to the residents free of charge, but funding is needed to cover conveyancing costs and to employ a development officer for two years. Once the community takeover is complete, Scalpay Estate will join with the neighbouring North Harris Trust to form one single larger community-owned organisation.

GEESE

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) appeared before the Scottish Parliamentary Petitions Committee to call for the Scottish Government to do more about the escalating numbers of geese devastating crofters' crops [Jul 13]. The petition asked the government to address the problems created by increasing populations of wild geese in the crofting areas as a matter of priority; to reassess its decision to stop funding existing goose management programmes and to assign additional resources to Crop Protection and Adaptive Management programmes to ensure this threat to the future of crofting is averted.

The petition has now been directly referred to the committee for rural affairs.

DEER MANAGEMENT

Scottish Environment LINK has published a briefing document, *Deer Management to Improve Scotland's Natural Heritage: Time for Change*. It has also submitted evidence to the Scottish Government's Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment committee.

LINK states that the effective and sustainable management of the rising deer population is of serious conservation concern in Scotland today. Large areas of our uplands and native woodlands have been ecologically impoverished over several centuries, due in large part to the impacts of high deer numbers maintained for sporting and estate capital value purposes. Significant damage to the natural heritage associated with deer management has been on the radar of public authorities for decades. To make progress, fundamental changes to deer management systems are urgently required. This approach will reduce current land management conflicts, and increase other rural development opportunities in the countryside.

See: www.scotlink.org/files/policy/ParliamentaryBriefings/LINKDeerMgmtBriefingOct13.pdf; www.scotlink.org/files/policy/ConsultationResponses/LINKDeerTFEvidenceOct13.pdf

**GENERAL ENVIRONMENT****ST CYRUS CAMP**

The *Press & Journal* reported that land near Eskview Farm, St Cyrus, Aberdeenshire has been levelled in preparation for a permanent site for traveller caravans. The development does not have planning permission, and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest bordering the St Cyrus National Nature Reserve. No consent has been sought from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) for the project.

The developer, James McCallum, has now applied to Aberdeenshire Council for retrospective planning permission; the council has issued a temporary stop notice at the site.

BUILT DEVELOPMENTS

The 2012 Visual Influence Of Built Development National Indicator, published by SNH, states that built development can be seen from 71% of Scotland. The figure, using data gathered in 2012, has increased from 70% since the last report using 2010 data, and from 65% since 2008.

See: www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/our-changing-environment/scotlands-indicators/natural-heritage-indicators

COLONSAY GRAVEL

The Herald reported that Argyll & Bute Council threatened to take legal action against Alex Howard, owner of the Colonsay Estate over the condition of the Rubh Aird Ala Ais beach, as it was covered in large holes. Mr Howard explained gravel was being removed without his permission and blamed local crofters.

A crofter said that people have taken gravel from the beach for generations, and had paid Mr Howard about £100 for ten tonnes. The same amount would be £1,000 to bring in on the ferry. Technically the gravel belongs to the laird, but the stones are actually washed up by the sea. Builders from the mainland then wrecked the beach by taking stones from really sensitive areas, to use on a new house on the island.

PENTLAND PARK

A campaign has begun to double the size of the Pentland Hills Regional Park and to extend it over the whole range of the Pentland Hills. The park currently starts just south of Edinburgh and covers parts of Midlothian and West Lothian.

Christine Grahame MSP is planning to pilot a Private Member's Bill through the Scottish Parliament. The park is governed by several local councils but Mrs Grahame has suggested that a separate independent body be responsible for the park, which would be better positioned to access funds from more sources.

Bob Barr, of NFU Scotland, said that when the park was set up there had been promises from the authorities that there would always be enough funding available to manage it, but the reality was that the funding had dwindled. Mr Barr believes that farmers have been left to take on much of the work, and act as unpaid caretakers. He said there should be a mechanism to recognise their contribution, and it was unclear how any extension could be funded. When the park was established, landowning and farming interests in the Scottish Borders and Lanarkshire voted against it. Mr Barr said that, unless new money was available, an agreement to extend was unlikely.

The Friends of the Pentlands welcomed the proposal. It pointed out that when the Pentland Hills Regional Park was first proposed, about 30 years ago, it was suggested that it should be much bigger. After meetings with landowners, the southern part of the range was excluded and the current boundary is the one which was designated in 1986. A spokesman said: "We have a regional park that comprises approximately 45% of the Pentland Hills. The extension to the boundary could ensure better protection of the area, provided adequate funding was made available. The south-west Pentlands has landscape that is completely different from the north in that it is more open moorland, almost wild land. We would not wish to see this change."

Nigel Willis, of Save Your Regional Park, said that the bill could also lead to greater protection for Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, near Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire and Lomond Hills Regional Park in Fife. He said that the bill 'should be widened to include protection from industrialisation, otherwise nothing has really been gained.'

He said that more than 300 wind turbine applications for in or around the three parks' boundaries have been considered or are being planned. Around 20 planning applications in the Pentland Hills and surrounding areas have been lodged. Regional parks are usually funded by neighbouring councils and do not have the same planning restrictions as national parks.

Mr Willis said: "Of the three regional parks, Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park has taken the brunt of developers' attempts to turn the park into an industrial estate with proposals for over 300 giant turbines in or just outside the park. Of these proposals, excluding small turbines, 28 turbines have been constructed in the park, 15 just outside and there is a current application for ten more, with five more at the scoping stage. If we want to conserve our regional parks for future generations, something needs to be done before it is too late." [See ENERGY below].

GREENBELT BUILDING

Plans for a new sports centre, to include 12 tennis courts and a nine-hole golf course, have been put forward for the Park of Keir, between Dunblane and Bridge of Allan. Residents have previously resisted any plans to build housing on the greenbelt, which could effectively join the two towns together.

BROWNFIELD SITES

A report, commissioned by SNH and written by Buglife, highlights that while brownfield sites get their name because they've been developed on in the past, these areas are quickly re-colonised by insects, flowers and birds once they become derelict. A surprisingly high number of rare species have been recorded on the brownfield sites, including approximately half of rare solitary bees and wasps and a third of rare ground beetles.

The report provides guidance on how to identify the best brownfield sites for wildlife and recommends that local authorities re-develop brownfield sites in a coordinated way to ensure that, as some brownfield sites are lost, others within a city are created. Brownfield land can contribute valuable green space in urban areas.

See: www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=2062

AIRTHNEY GREEN

The Herald reported that Graham's Dairy has resubmitted plans for a 'new town' on green belt at Airthney Kerse between Bridge of Allan and Causewayhead north of Stirling. The site is owned by Grahams, who said that the plan 'will open up the green belt to public use.' The plans for Airthney Green include a school, public park, sports pitches, health centre and housing – the original plans included 800 homes. The Save Bridge of Allan group is objecting to the loss of green belt land and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency objected because of the flood risk to buildings and people. Grahams said that the planning submission included a public park that would remain designated green belt. There will be a long term maintenance fund and a flood alleviation scheme would be built.

Councillor Mark Ruskell said: "There has been uncertainty and piecemeal erosion of this green belt for years. It is time to put the issue to rest once and for all and rule out any further development on the Airthney Kerse."

GRANGEMOUTH FLIES

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) is monitoring Oran Environmental Solutions' recycling plant in Grangemouth; a large number of flies have been reported.

SEPA has made 43 site inspections and issued seven enforcement notices between April 2012 and July 2013, partially suspending the licence twice.

RECYCLING

Nine Scottish councils met the Scottish Government target of recycling more than 50% of their household waste in 2012, with Clackmannanshire, Stirling, Falkirk, Perth & Kinross and East Renfrewshire at the top of the table. The remaining 23 councils failed to meet the target. Shetland, Dumfries & Galloway, Orkney, Glasgow and Argyll & Bute were at the bottom of the table. Some areas, including Orkney, Shetland, the Borders and Renfrewshire, actually recycled less in 2012 than the year before.

Households recycled 41.2% of their waste on average in 2012, up 1.1% on the previous year. The Scottish Government's long-term aim is to recycle 70% of Scotland's waste by 2025.

Zero Waste Scotland has published figures which show that more than a million households now have access to a food waste collection service, more than double the number that had the facility a year ago. The Scottish Government has invested £20m to help local authorities roll out food waste collections to households across the country.

See: www.sepa.org.uk/waste/waste_data/waste_data_reports/lacw_reporting/household_waste_reporting.aspx

ROADKILL

The *BBC News* website reported that drivers in the north east of Scotland are being asked to help researchers by recording roadkill. The information will be used in the Mammal Atlas for Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Moray and the Cairngorms National Park, compiled by the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC).

Badgers and hedgehogs are the animal most commonly run over. The records can help to identify where there may be hotspots or issues with particular species, and mechanisms implemented to reduce wildlife deaths.

NESBReC is a partnership between Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen City Council, SNH, the University of Aberdeen, the RSPB and Forestry Commission Scotland. See: www.nesbrec.org.uk

NEW LANARK QUARRY

Save Our Landscapes, which opposes proposals by Cemex to extend Hyndford Quarry near New Lanark in South Lanarkshire, said its research had suggested four out of five visitors would be less likely to visit the area if the quarry was built, affecting 200 local jobs. The extension would be in a 'buffer zone' between the quarry and the Falls of Clyde [Aug 13].

Professor Mark Stephens, of Save Our Landscapes, said: "The economic case for the extension into the New Lanark Buffer Zone has always been feeble. The local authority has confirmed that there are plentiful supplies of sand and gravel under existing permissions. The quarry could operate outside the buffer zone for a decade."

CHILDREN & NATURE

A report published by the RSPB, carried out by the University of Essex, has suggested that children in Scotland are more connected to nature than those in the rest of the UK. The research measured young people's enjoyment of the outdoors; how at one they felt with nature; their empathy for creatures; and their environmental responsibility. The study showed that 27% of young people in Scotland are highly connected to nature.

The RSPB hopes that now a baseline figure has been established, the research can be repeated

in future to see what practical difference public policies are making to young people's experiences.

WATER VOLES

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission Ltd (SHELTL) and SNH have been working together to protect water voles during construction of the Beauly to Denny upgraded power line [May 13]. Mike Shepherd, of SNH, said: "The survey works undertaken by SHELTL are providing valuable new information about water vole populations, and we very much welcome the extensive measures being taken to protect them from any harm during construction work."

CARBON EMISSIONS

The *Sunday Herald* reported that SEPA has named the Scottish industrial plants responsible for the most carbon emissions. Top of the list were the Longannet and Cockerzie coal-fired power stations on the Firth of Forth, followed by the Ineos oil refinery at Grangemouth, the Peterhead gas plant and the ethylene plant at Mossmorran in Fife. Whisky distillers William Grant & Sons at Girvan in South Ayrshire and the Diageo plant at Leven, Fife also featured in the top 25.

LANGHOLM HEN HARRIER

The satellite tag on one of the young hen harriers, tagged this year on Langholm Moor in the Scottish Borders, has ceased to transmit. Cat Barlow, on the *Making the Most of Moorlands* blog, said that the most likely explanation of the sudden lack of transmission was illegal persecution, and that the police had been informed.

WILDFIRES

A 350 page guidance document, *Fire & Rescue Service Wildfire Operational Guidance*, has been published. It provides a detailed analysis of wildfires from the relevant legislation to risk assessment procedures; from an intensive examination of how fires in countryside behave to how they are best tackled. It also looks at the different types of fuel the fires feed off, from woodlands, both conifers and hardwoods such as oak and ash, to moorland scrub. It studies the effects of weather on fires and also the impact topography can have on the development of a serious blaze.

Robert Scott, chairman of the Scottish Wildfire Forum, said: "When wildfires occur they impact greatly on many rural and remote areas of Scotland and the UK and can cause substantial environmental and economic damage. This impact ranges from damage to farmland and wildlife, as well as protected woodland and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, to buildings, property and the lives of those who live in rural communities."

PLANNING

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) said that proposed changes to Scotland's planning system would see a presumption in favour of development that is sustainable [Aug 13]. It is concerned that this may shift the emphasis from a plan-led system to a developer-led system. Consequently, this could put a squeeze on Scotland's wildlife and habitats, especially if decisions have to be made by hard-pressed local authorities who have to weigh-up any possible economic benefits of developments.

Dr Maggie Keegan, of SWT, said: "It looks like Scotland is now following the English planning system here, where there is already a presumption in favour of sustainable development. While the SWT is pleased that the Scottish Government

has listened to stakeholder concerns regarding not adopting the term 'sustainable economic growth' in planning guidance, there may be a thin line between presumption in favour of any old development and a sustainable development, so the principles will have to be consistently and robustly applied for it to have any meaning.

"The SWT could envisage possible scenarios where local authorities have to decide whether to give the go-ahead to 'sustainable housing' development in a local wildlife site. Hard-pressed councils could find making objective decision-making very difficult in such circumstances."

REPORT CARD

A 'report card' has been issued by the Institute of Environmental Policy on behalf of RSPB Scotland, SWT and WWF Scotland. It said that, while the Scottish Government had very good intentions concerning the environment, it could do better. Scotland's environmental policies are often well ahead of others in the UK and Europe, but there is a significant gulf between goals and achievements.

The research examines the threats facing agriculture, marine protection and climate change and focuses on the current measures or legislation proposed to address these pressures.



ENERGY

RENEWABLES UPDATE

Since May 2007, the Scottish Government has determined 87 energy applications, including consent for 59 renewable applications: 33 onshore wind, 1 offshore wind, 19 hydro, 4 wave and tidal and 2 Renewable Thermal Plant; and 18 non-renewable projects. It has rejected ten energy applications in the same period, all of which were onshore windfarms.

The Scottish Government's Energy Consents & Deployment Unit is currently considering another 56 applications of >50MW capacity generating stations, including 52 onshore wind applications, 1 renewable hydro application, 1 non-renewable hydro applications, 2 renewable thermal applications. In addition to this there are 13 active applications for overhead lines, and 1 application for a Water Rights Order associated with a hydro development.

WINDFARM LICENCES

The Herald reported that the Scottish Government and Ofgem are working together to establish the licence status of 31 windfarms under consideration by the government. Following the legal ruling at the Court of Session concerning the Shetland windfarm [see below], the government said that only eight of 53 outstanding windfarm applications had generating licences from Ofgem. Another site has exemption from the usual requirement to gain a licence. 14 are at an initial application stage and not yet formally submitted. Windfarm developments of more than 50 MW require approval by Scottish ministers.

Scottish Borders Council has written to the Scottish Government, demanding that RWE Renewables' windfarm at Rowantree near Oxton be refused as it does not have a generating licence. Graham Lang, of Scotland against Spin, said that there was little doubt that other local authorities would raise similar objections.

WINDFARM APPLICATIONS

The Herald reported that local authorities have received 2,508 windfarm applications in the past 18 months. Aberdeenshire had the most applications since March 2012 (428), followed by Highland (376) and Orkney (371).

The *Press & Journal* reported that the numbers could be far higher than that reported, as South Ayrshire, and West Dunbartonshire Councils failed to provide figures.

The Scottish Government said that an additional £725,000 had been made available to 17 councils to help with the additional workload placed on councils.

BIRD COLLISION RECORDS

A new reporting system has been launched by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to make it easier for people to report potential bird strikes at wind turbines. SNH is looking for information such as location (grid reference where possible), date, time, weather, the condition of the bird; species (if unknown then a description or photo), and contact details. SNH will use the data collected to investigate links between migration routes, nesting sites and other patterns.

Contact: Collision.Records@snh.gov.uk See: www.snh.gov.uk/planning-and-development/renewable-energy/onshore-wind/windfarm-impacts-on-birds-guidance

WINDFARM UPDATES

Badenoch & Strathspey: The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that Chris Townsend, of the Save Monadhliath Mountains campaign, wrote to RWE Npower Renewables Ltd and said that if 'is an environmentally responsible company' it has no choice but to accept that the application for a 31 turbine windfarm at Allt Duine near Aviemore is doomed to fail [Dec 12]. The site now lies wholly within the proposed SNH Monadhliath Core Wild Land area [Sep 13].

The development has been the subject of a public inquiry and the resulting report is being currently being considered by ministers. The campaign says that the company should accept it will not receive approval in light of the decision to refuse the Glenkirk windfarm application, on the grounds of significant adverse landscape and visual impact assessment effects on the Cairngorms National Park, and should withdraw the scheme [Jun 13]. The campaign said that Allt Duine's proximity and impact on the park would be much greater than that of Glenkirk. RWE said that the company had no intention of withdrawing its plans.

Borders: The *BBC News* website reported that the Scottish Government has allowed RES' appeal for the 15 turbine Penmanshiel windfarm. The company had claimed that Scottish Borders Council failed to decide on the firm's application within required timescales. The project was cleared after RES cut the number of turbines to 14 on visual impact grounds.

- PNE Wind UK has lodged an appeal over the Brunta Hill windfarm near Westruther [Aug 13]. The local authority had decided that the scheme would have a 'significant and unacceptable' impact on the area.

Caithness: RSPB Scotland has formally objected to an application for the 47 turbine Strathy South windfarm in the Flow Country, an area currently being considered as a potential World Heritage Site. SSE reduced the size of the planned windfarm from 77 turbines in July. SSE already has consent for 33 turbines at Strathy North [May 11]. The development is proposed for non-native conifer woodland, planted in the 1970s and 1980s because of a tax loophole, which allowed any investment in woodland to be written off against personal income tax.

RSPB is concerned that the windfarm development would undermine large scale work to restore blanket bogs which have a wide range of endangered breeding bird species.

Stuart Housden, of RSPB Scotland, said: "This is, without doubt, one of the most worrying

windfarm applications we have seen in Scotland. Not only does it risk harming some of the UK's rarest species, it would make restoration of this core part of the globally important Flow Country much more difficult. The blanket bog and peatland habitat of the Flows is so special and rare that it is protected by law, and is currently the subject of a multi-million pound funding bid by the Peatlands Partnership for restoration and public engagement work."

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) has also raised an objection to the proposed windfarm. The plans include proposals to build on very deep peat, over 3.5 meters in depth. SWT is concerned that the proposal has the potential to negatively affect the neighbouring Caithness & Sutherland Special Protection Area, Special Area of Conservation and Ramsar site, as well as the associated Sites of Special Scientific Interest. SWT believes that the environmental impacts to breeding birds such as hen harriers, golden eagles, greenshanks and merlin, not to mention internationally important bogs, are far too great, but fully supports the removal on non-native conifers in the area to aid with peatland restoration.

- Highland Council has refused plans for Infinergy's 24 turbine windfarm at Limekilns near Reay in Caithness. A separate five-turbine scheme near Watten was approved by the council.

Dumfries & Galloway: The council has rejected proposals for the 11 turbine Loch Hill windfarm at Lochinvar near Dalry. Objectors had highlighted the effects of the cumulative impact of windfarms in the area. An estimated eight red kites would have been killed during the 25 year lifespan of the project.

- Banks Renewables has applied for planning permission for a seven turbine windfarm at Knockendurrick near Tywnholm. The local area has two National Scenic Areas and one Regional Scenic Area. Keith Mycock of Turbine Watch 312 said: "The scenic areas are small and turbines of the height being proposed will compromise the integrity and undermine the economic, social and environmental value of the designations as well as being visible over great swathes of surrounding countryside."

Easter Ross: The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) is opposing a third proposal to build a windfarm near Ben Wyvis.

The MCofS said that ABO Wind UK Ltd's plans for six turbines at Woodlands Farm are the latest in an 'assault' on the Munro [Sep 13]. Clark Crosbie, of ABO, said: "We believe we have used the topography of the existing land form around the site to minimise visual impacts."

Inverness-shire: E.ON Energy is proposing to build the 35 turbine Moriston Wind Farm windfarm near Glenmoriston, near Inverness.

The *Inverness Courier* reported that Kenny Knott, of Fort Augustus & Glenmoriston Community Council, said that the area was already feeling the impact of renewables projects, including five existing or proposed windfarms as well as the Glendoe hydro-electric development. He asked that a study be carried out to assess the cumulative impact of existing and proposed projects.

Lewis: SNH has advised that the proposed 12 turbine extension to the Muaitheabhal Windfarm windfarm on a Lewis estate could be accommodated if six turbines and their associated infrastructure are removed. As it stands, the proposal would have an adverse effect on the integrity of the South Lewis, Harris & North Uist National Scenic Area and on wild land. The larger proposal could affect white tailed eagles and golden eagles. A reduced scheme, taken in conjunction with existing and consented windfarms in the area, is unlikely to threaten

overall populations of the two species, and SNH would not object to a revised proposal.

Morayshire: RES is planning a 20 turbine windfarm at Cairn Duhie near Ferness, north of Grantown-on-Spey. The Dava No More campaign group said that, if this windfarm is consented, there would be over 300 turbines within a 40 mile radius of the Dava Moor. The 17 turbine Tom na Clach windfarm [Jun 13] and Berryburn (29 turbines) are currently being constructed.

Renfrewshire: Historic Scotland is objecting to Renewables' 2020 plans to build a windfarm at Corlick Hill, near Greenock, Inverclyde. The turbines, in Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, would be sited near a Roman fortlet and road, and an ancient hut circle. The plans are also opposed by Save Your Regional Park and the keep Corlick Wild Group. A previous windfarm application in the area was rejected by Scottish ministers and also objected to by Historic Scotland [Nov 03]. 2020 Renewables said that there would be a 100 metre stand off zone around the fortlet and scheduled hut to ensure that they were not affected by any construction.

The Herald reported that Inverclyde Regional Council has been criticised for withdrawing from the West of Scotland Archaeology Service, with campaigners saying that the result would be poorer protection in the park.

Shetland: *The Herald* reported that the Scottish Government is to appeal a Court of Session ruling to withdraw planning consent from the Viking windfarm [Sep 13]. Three judges in the Inner House of the Court of Session will hear the Scottish Government's appeal in February and March 2014.

Lady Clark of Calton set aside the consent granted to the 103 turbine development by Scottish ministers in April last year, following a judicial review brought by campaign group Sustainable Shetland. She held that the decision to allow the 370 MW windfarm to be built was 'incompetent' because the Viking Energy Partnership did not have an electricity generating licence. She also said that ministers failed to take proper regard of the European Wild Birds Directive, relating specifically to whimbrel, a rare species of wader with 295 breeding pairs in Shetland which forms 95% of the UK population. The court also ordered Scottish ministers to pay £60,000 of Sustainable Shetland's legal expenses.

Sutherland: *The Herald* reported that the John Muir Trust (JMT) said that the legal basis of a planned public local inquiry into the 34 turbine Glenmorrie windfarm in Easter Ross had been thrown into confusion by the Court of Session ruling [Feb 13 & see above]. AES Wind Generation, the company behind the development, is not a registered electricity licensee. A spokeswoman said it was 'standard' to apply for an energy licence after planning consent was granted.

Helen McDade, of JMT, said: "Until the legal position has been clarified there is no point in wasting up to £100,000 on a public local inquiry. If the appeal court upholds Lady Clark's decision, the developer will have to resubmit its proposal from scratch, thus rendering meaningless the deliberations of the public local inquiry."

However, the inquiry reporter said that she was not in a position to speculate on the legal judgement of Lady Clark, and could not delay the inquiry on the basis of Lady Clark's ruling on one application. The inquiry therefore proceeded.

- The JMT signalled its strong opposition to the proposed Glenmorrie development at the inquiry. Helen McDade said: "The Scottish Government is about to consult on its Core Wild Land Map of Scotland, which includes Glenmorrie [Sep

13]. We'd have preferred that this inquiry were delayed until the map is finalised, and until other contentious matters surrounding the application were resolved. But more important than the timing are the issues at stake. This part of the Highlands is one of Scotland's finest wild land areas, yet it has been targeted relentlessly by developers over the past few years. Glenmorrie would mark a tipping point, fundamentally changing this entire landscape, and send a message to developers that it is now open season on the mountains of Easter Ross and Sutherland."

OFFSHORE WIND

The Herald reported that Siemens has installed a market-ready version of its 6 MW gearless wind turbine at SSE's test site on the Clyde at Hunterston, North Ayrshire, in preparation for the development of offshore windfarms throughout the UK [Oct 12]. A spokesman for RSPB Scotland said: "The location of this turbine beside the Southannan Sands Site of Special Scientific Interest means that we have engaged with the local authority and developer to ensure construction is minimised during the winter months when this important area of sand and mud-flats becomes particularly rich in birds."

ROBIN RIGG

The *BBC News* website reported that a consultation document on offshore energy developments has included plans to expand the Robin Rigg offshore windfarm development in the Solway Firth, Dumfries & Galloway. Expansion of the windfarm was ruled out by Scottish ministers in March 2011 due to concerns over its visual impact.

Dumfries & Galloway councillor Ian Blake said: "The proposed additional windfarm adjacent to Robin Rigg is considerably larger than the existing site and would without doubt drastically affect tourism in the area recognised nationally and internationally for its outstanding scenery."

ABERDEEN OFFSHORE

Aberdeenshire councillors have rejected a planning application to build an electricity substation at Blackdog for the European Offshore Wind Deployment Centre (EOWDC) proposed wind turbine testing centre in Aberdeen Bay. The plans were recommended for approval by officials [Mar 13]. There was considerable local opposition to the plans. The windfarm development project consists of 11 turbines. EOWDC said that it would consider an appeal.

KISHORN

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Highland Council has approved a planning application, with 31 conditions, for redeveloping the former oil fabrication yard at Kishorn in Wester Ross. The site, which has one of the largest dry docks in western Europe, will now be available for the manufacture and assembly of structures for the offshore wind, wave and tidal renewable industries.

LOCH CARRON HYDRO

Green Highland Renewables is to build a 2 MW hydroscheme on the Allt A'Chonais, near Loch Carron in Wester Ross.

SUBWAY HEATING

Glasgow Caledonian University is working with Strathclyde Partnership for Transport to develop a method of harvesting heat from ingress water into the underground system in Glasgow. The technique would warm the stations and nearby buildings and cut both heating and maintenance costs for the subway. Water in the tunnel is at around 14°C, sufficient for ground-source heating.

SHALE GAS

The *BBC News* website reported that the British Geological Survey is to begin work, next year, on estimating the size of shale gas deposits in the Central Lowlands between Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Lang Banks of WWF Scotland said: "As a result of the latest projections by climate scientists, even the International Energy Agency now says that the vast majority of known fossil fuel reserves need to be left in the ground and not exploited. So, in the interests of tackling climate change and delivering climate justice, irrespective of what the BGS survey reveals, Scottish ministers should be preparing to commit to leaving fossil fuels in the ground. Scotland has an opportunity to continue to define itself as a renewables-first, climate-friendly nation – both within the UK and the wider world."

• *The Sunday Herald* reported that the Scottish Government has announced that it was going to introduce planning rules to require 'adequate' buffer zones between sites and settlements around drilling sites for 'unconventional' underground gas. If the buffer zone were to be established at 2 km, as is the case in New South Wales in Australia, then at least half of the 22 wells which Dart plans at Airth, near Falkirk, will be excluded [Aug 13].

CARBON STORAGE

The *Press & Journal* reported that geophysicists have warned a UK parliamentary inquiry that there is a risk that carbon capture and storage schemes, using offshore oil and gas reservoirs in the North Sea, could cause seismic activity [Sep 12].

SOLAR FARM

The *BBC News* website reported that Elgin Energy plans to create a solar farm on a 100 acre site at Carse of Gowrie on the Errol Estate. The farm would have 70,000 solar panels.

BRIQUETTES

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that RSPB Scotland been awarded planning permission by the Cairngorms National Park Authority to test a recycling programme at Drumguish, by Insh Marshes. Reeds, rushes and scrub will be turned into briquettes for domestic heating as part of the wetlands management plan for the area and to benefit wading birds. The five month pilot is funded by the UK Department of Energy & Climate Change.

 **RECREATION & TOURISM**

LEVEL CROSSINGS

A review of level crossing legislation has been published by the Law Commission of England & Wales and the Scottish Law Commission. Network Rail and outdoor recreation bodies have long been in conflict over the interpretation of the legal basis on which people use the 600 private level crossings in Scotland (crossings where the railway doesn't cross a public highway) [May 05]. Some of these private crossings are miles from any public road. In 2004, Network Rail put signs on these crossings stating that they were private and for authorised users only.

Ramblers Scotland welcomes the recommended provision to create new pedestrian level crossings in Scotland and also the recognition that the establishment of core paths across railway lines is competent under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. These conclusions should improve

the securing of access rights at selected railway crossing points. Ramblers Scotland expects rail operators to respect the existing basis where pedestrian public access is taken across railway lines in Scotland, by level crossings or more informal means, and avoid the necessity for outdoor recreation organisations to lobby Scottish Ministers to bring in the necessary procedures to make all private level crossings subject to statutory public access rights.

See: www.ramblers.org.uk/~media/Files/Scotland%20microsite/The%20Law%20Commission%20and%20the%20Scottish%20Law%20Commission%20level%20crossings%20report.pdf

CAIRNGORMS CLOSED SYSTEM

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that the Aviemore and Carrbridge Community Councils (CC) have requested a review of Cairngorm's closed mountain railway system with Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE), SNH and Highland Council (all signatories to the agreement) which effectively prevents funicular passengers going out onto the plateau outwith winter [Jul 13].

Ray Sefton of Aviemore CC said: "Claiming the closed system is somehow protecting the EU site on the plateau is simply not good enough. Tourism is the lifeblood of Badenoch & Strathspey and stopping our visitors from seeing the magnificent views from the summit of Cairn Gorm, which is not in a protected area, because of some imaginary conservation measure is a scandal. It might even be that laws of discrimination as well as access laws are being broken ...

"Community Councils and members of the public do not normally have the resources to challenge legal opinions that are obtained by the public sector, unlike the special interest groups that are challenging the National Park Plan with a good input of taxpayers money. This difficulty is very convenient for the Cairngorm National Park Authority and SNH ... Those blinkered people who insist that the closed system is not in conflict with the act seem to have forgotten that the funicular was built as a tourist attraction with £26m of public money.

"We are sure that the 75,313 passengers who used the railway last summer and had their trip ruined by being locked into the Ptarmigan station would not agree with the closed system – these people had absolutely no intention of entering an EU site from the Ptarmigan. It shows that the public sector has no respect for our valuable tourists. HIE are using conservation as an excuse to cover a business decision. The evidence we have presented means that the closed system lacks credibility."

However, Dave Brown of Kincaig CC, said: "I know an earlier Kincaig CC was in favour of access being permitted from the summit to the top station on a trial basis, and I appreciate the motives in promoting this wider change but for reasons of safety, litter, disturbance to the ecology and wildlife, plus the possibility that the £7.2m subsidy from the EU would have to be repaid, we feel that the present system shouldn't extend beyond the present guided walk arrangement."

In reply, HIE confirmed that it is not pursuing any changes to the current arrangements.

KITE TRAIL

The *Galloway News* reported that the Galloway Kite Trail is ten years old. The red kites were first released in 2001, and there was one chick that year. There are now around 440 birds; there were 77 nests this year and 91 chicks fledged. The kites are starting to spread out across the region. The trail has benefited local businesses and tourism.

MACHRIHANISH DUNES

Black Hebridean sheep are being used as an environmentally friendly way of maintaining the Machrihanish Dunes golf course in Argyll & Bute, which is built on a Site of Special Scientific Interest [Jul 09].

The sheep thin out the rough on the course and help preserve several rare and protected species of orchids. The course was named the Association of British Travel Agents' Number 1 Eco Golf Course in the World last year.

TRAIN GUIDE

A mobile app and audio guide, *View From The Train*, has been developed by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to help people to understand and enjoy nature and landscape along major train routes. The app is available for routes from Glasgow and Edinburgh to Inverness, Aberdeen and Oban, from Glasgow to Fort William, Fort William to Mallaig and Inverness to Wick and Thurso.

The phone app is free and the audioguide is available from app stores for Apple and Android smartphones and tablets; on Audio Guide from the SNH website: www.snh.gov.uk/train; www.youtube.com/user/ScottNaturalHeritage1

RIVER USERS

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that the Scottish Anglers National Association has called for protected areas for their sport on major rivers, banning rafters and canoeists. It has asked Scottish Natural Heritage, which has the overall responsibility for ensuring that the Scottish Access Code is promoted and upheld, for formal accreditation of commercial river users. It has suggested the introduction of bylaws or exemption from access rights to restrict river use.

 **NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS**

BDS

Danièle Muir has been appointed as the first Scotland Officer for the British Dragonfly Society (BDS). The part time post is funded by Scottish Natural Heritage.

MILLPORT MARINE STATION

The University Marine Biological Station Millport closed, in its present form, on 31 October [Jun 13]. On 1 January 2014, ownership will transfer from the University of London to the Field Studies Council (FSC) and the site is due to re-open as the Millport Field Centre in early 2014. The trustees of the University of London and of the FSC have agreed a Memorandum of Understanding setting out their agreement to transfer the ownership of the physical assets of the station including land, buildings and other facilities from the University to FSC.

Millport will offer facilities for fieldwork at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and will develop its provision through the FSC's expertise in residential and day field courses in environmental sciences of all sorts.

RSPB SCOTLAND

Professor Colin Galbraith has joined RSPB Scotland as chairman of its advisory committee for Scotland.