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## CONSERVATION

### MOUNTAIN HARES

The *Sunday Herald* reported that mountain hares are facing extinction in large parts of the Scottish Highlands because landowners are killing thousands of them every year in order to protect the grouse shooting industry [Sep 10]. The mammals are being shot and snared by gamekeepers on grouse moors due to fears that ticks carried by hares spread a viral disease, which can be fatal to grouse.

Dr Adam Watson, author of a recent book on mountain hares, found 'massive declines' in the number of hares over the last 10 to 20 years on grouse moors around Deeside. He said: "A preventable catastrophe has befallen the mountain hare. This is a national scandal ... I would say that spring abundance of adults has been reduced by at least five-fold to 100-fold on most of these moors.

"Gamekeepers on several estates have told me they were instructed to reduce hare numbers and to try to eradicate them. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has known what has been happening for years and has done nothing about it. This is supine behaviour, pleasing to or subservient to powerful grouse-shooting interests, but wholly against the wider public interest."

A 2010 study by the former Macaulay Land Use Research Institute and the University of Glasgow concluded: "There is no compelling evidence base to suggest culling mountain hares might increase red grouse densities."

Duncan Orr-Ewing of RSPB Scotland said: "[The hare] appears to be suffering as a consequence of increasingly unsustainable and intensive management of huge swathes of upland Scotland with the sole intention of delivering very large bags of grouse for sport shooting."

SNH accepted that there could have been 'localised extinctions' of mountain hares, and expressed concern about their possible decline. A closed season was introduced in 2011 to limit the numbers shot during the breeding season between March and July.

Rob Raynor of SNH said: "We don't support large, indiscriminate culls of mountain hares and advise moorland managers to talk to us if they are thinking of culling hares in large numbers. SNH condemns any systematic attempt to reduce hare numbers for this reason [an attempt to get rid of golden eagles]... it demonstrates no understanding of the ecology of predators such as eagles. If mountain hares become scarce or absent, the predator will switch increasingly to other more available prey, such as red grouse."

An SNH survey found more than 24,500 mountain hares were shot or snared by 90 sporting estates in 2006-07. Half were killed to try and control a viral illness (louping ill), 40% were shot for sport and 10% for forestry or crop protection.

Tim Baynes, of Scottish Land & Estates, said: "The relatively high numbers on managed moors means that culling will not endanger the population." He said that, although thousands of mountain hares are killed every year, this is less than 10% of the population. A 2007 survey suggested that the animals were present on 64% of the area of driven grouse moors and evidence pointed to a 'stable and robust' mountain hare population.

Alex Hogg, of the Scottish Gamekeepers' Association, claimed that gamekeepers have 'no alternative but to suppress the numbers of mountain hares on grouse moors because of the dangers of the louping ill virus, which can infect humans.' However, the *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog states that humans are rarely affected by the virus and there is no compelling evidence base that culling mountain hares can stop the spread of the virus. The blog says that Lyme disease, a tick-borne disease, is of more concern to humans and is spread by pheasants, amongst other species; 43 million pheasants are released into the countryside each year.

John Rimington of the Hare Preservation Trust is convinced that hares are being killed in breach of European law. He said: "We have information that they are being wiped out on some estates. I don't think gamekeepers give two hoots about them."

See: Watson, A (2013) *Mammals in North East Highlands*. Paragon Press. ISBN 1782221476

### HEN HARRIERS

The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog reported that the *UK 2010 Hen Harrier Survey* has been published in *Bird Study*. The paper reports that Scotland had 505 pairs of hen harrier in 2010. There is said to be sufficient habitat to support an estimated 1467-1790 pairs.

Since 2010, there has been a consistent downward trend of breeding success in Scotland, according to a report from the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme.

See: [www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00063657.2013.839621#UpRwSrsokgt](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00063657.2013.839621#UpRwSrsokgt); [www.scottishraptorstudygroup.org/SRMS\\_Report12.pdf](http://www.scottishraptorstudygroup.org/SRMS_Report12.pdf)

### ORONSAY ORCHID

The *Herald* reported that Irish lady's tress, a rare orchid, has been found on Oronsay, by Colonsay in the Inner Hebrides for the first time. The orchid is thought to grow at very few sites in the UK and Ireland; the discovery of around 160 plants on Oronsay is therefore a significant find.

RSPB Scotland, which has a nature reserve on the island, believes the orchids have probably been lying dormant underground waiting for the right conditions in which to flower.

### INVERSNDAID GOATS

The *BBC News* website reported that RSPB Scotland has resumed a cull of feral goats around Inversnaid, on the eastern shore of Loch Lomond [May 13]. RSPB wants to reduce goat numbers on its 2,000 acre reserve from about 69 to 30 in the coming years. 20 goats are due to be shot this year. The local community council and the British Feral Goat Research Group believe the population of goats remaining after the cull may be too small to survive a series of harsh winters, and emphasised the value of the goats to the local tourism industry.

Alan McDonnell, of SNH, said: "A recent survey found that goat numbers are higher than previously thought, and the cull is necessary to bring numbers down to a more sustainable level. Pollochro Woods is a protected natural site and part of the Loch Lomond Woods Special Area of Conservation. The protected features in these woods include the native woodland habitat itself, mosses and lichens - which are all threatened and important elements of Scotland's nature."

A Forestry Commission Scotland spokesman said: "There is a real need to balance the long-term restoration and management of Loch Katrine, Loch Ard and surrounding areas with the increasing numbers of feral goats. Managing the feral goat population also reduces the risk of them becoming a hazard for road users in the area. This is done in consultation with the local communities so that we can fully explain what we are doing and why."

**DEER**

The Herald reported that a study by Edinburgh, Cambridge and Calgary Universities studied 40 years of data gathered on a population of wild red deer on the Isle of Rum. They found that calves which were orphaned in the first two years of life were very likely to die sooner compared to those with surviving mothers. Male calves orphaned after the age of two were likely to survive but females orphaned after two years of age continued to struggle to survive in the long-term.

The report claimed that males orphaned in their first year were slow to develop their first set of antlers and have poor growth in later life, indicating that the physical effects of orphaning may be lifelong.

Professor Josephine Pemberton, from the University of Edinburgh, said: "Calves are weaned at around seven months and afterwards benefit from their mother's knowledge of food and shelter, and from a settled social group, but lose these benefits when their mother dies."

The research is the first to examine the impact on calves of losing their mothers during development and its findings support best practice guidelines which encourage deer stalkers to avoid leaving orphans.

Alastair MacGugan, of SNH, said: "This echoes our best practice guidance, as trying not to leave calves orphaned is a basic tenet for those stalking deer. This research highlights how this is not just a welfare issue, but also impacts on the health and success of individual deer for the rest of their lives."

The study was supported by the UK Natural Environment Research Council, the Natural Sciences & Engineering Research Council of Canada and SNH.

The study is published in the *Behavioural Ecology and Sociobiology Journal*.

**INVASIVE SPECIES**

Two mobile phone apps, which allow people to quickly and easily record sightings of non-native species, are helping to track different species and monitor the effects of climate change. The AquaInvaders app allows people across Scotland to report freshwater invasive species, while the Sealife Tracker covers marine invasives, as well as a number of native species that indicate climate change. The app recorded a trigger fish this month off Mull, for instance; a species common in the Mediterranean, its migration north is a climate change indicator.

The two apps join PlantTracker, which was introduced in 2012 to allow the public to easily record invasive non-native species.

**BREEDING BIRDS**

SNH has released the latest figures tracking the abundance of Scotland's terrestrial breeding birds. Between 1994 and 2012, the abundance of terrestrial breeding birds increased by 12%. Farmland and woodland birds increased by 10% and 56% respectively; upland birds decreased by 18%.

Between 2011 and 2012, however, the all-

species and woodland indices increased by 4% and 12% respectively. The reasons for changes are unknown although some of the increases may be due to the improved weather conditions during the 2011 breeding season, allowing recovery of populations of birds that had declined during the harsh winters of 2009 and 2010. Upland and farmland terrestrial breeding bird indices showed no significant change over this period.

The statistics showed that migrant woodland birds such as the chiffchaff, blackcap and willow warbler all increased in number, with chiffchaffs increasing in population the most.

Resident woodland birds that increased in numbers include the great-spotted woodpecker, great tit and goldcrest. However, cuckoo and capercaillie demonstrated sustained long-term declines. Capercaillie declines have been linked to losses of suitable habitat, predation, weather conditions during chick rearing and disturbance.

Farmland birds that have increased in number since 1994 include the goldfinch and yellowhammer. The whitethroat and sedge warbler, both migrant birds, also saw their populations grow. Species that decreased in number over the period included the lapwing, kestrel and greenfinch, possibly due to changes in land use, predation or disease.

Ravens, cuckoos and snipe all saw their numbers grow in the uplands but curlews, dotterels and common sandpipers experienced population declines.

Paul Wheelhouse, minister for Environment & Climate Change said: "We are designing the next agri-environment-climate scheme, and intend to target all of the on-the-ground options to ensure that specific species and habitats are protected, as well as ensuring the most appropriate environmental management plans occur in the most suitable locations and this offers opportunities, through supporting conservation work by land managers, to benefit farmland and woodland birds, as well as upland species."

The figures are presented in a way that smooths out year-to-year fluctuations. The data used in the report primarily come from the British Trust for Ornithology, Joint Nature Conservation Committee RSPB Breeding Bird Survey.

See: [www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/official-statistics/official-stats/terrestrial-breeding-birds](http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/official-statistics/official-stats/terrestrial-breeding-birds); [www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/trends/scotlands-trends](http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/trends/scotlands-trends)

**DESIGNATED SITE MANAGEMENT**

A report, *Evaluation of SNH Programme of Advice for Designated Site Management*, commissioned and published by SNH, examines the role of land managers and the quality of advice and support offered to help them improve management of protected places. The findings confirm that advice is required to raise awareness on the conservation value of sites and to help make changes on the ground.

Some farmers and land managers reported a lack of financial incentive, bureaucracy and an absence of flexibility to allow them to tailor management options for designated sites.

See: [www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=2076](http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=2076); [www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=2075](http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=2075)

 **FARMING**

**FOCUS FARMS**

Scotland's first three Climate Change Focus Farms have saved almost £60,000 between them over the past three years and two of the businesses

reduced their carbon footprint by at least 10%.

The farm sites were selected as part of the Scottish Government's *Farming for a Better Climate* programme [Jun 10]. The farms are Torr Farm, Auchencairn, Castle Douglas; Glenkilrie Farm, Blairgowrie and Stewart Tower Farm, Stanley, Perthshire. The fourth farm, Upper Nisbet in the Borders, still has one year left of the trial to run with results expected in 2014.

The programme was delivered by Scotland's Rural College. New farms will be selected to carry on the initiative.

Richard Lochhead, the minister for agriculture, said: "What we have here is good examples of how low carbon farming can benefit the livelihoods of farmers and still maintain a healthy business. They have made simple changes, recorded financial savings and have continued to operate in a competitive industry. Based on these findings we will look how a contribution to climate mitigation could be delivered as part of CAP Greening. I hope other farmers across Scotland will look at this programme and consider how they can implement similar practices on their land and play their part in lowering the country's carbon footprint overall."

Measures taken by the farmers included cutting energy bills, improving soil structure and fertility to boost yields, using less fertiliser and small changes in livestock management. The cumulative benefits add up, not only for the individual farm; if all farmers were to take up similar climate change mitigation measures, there could be a significant reduction in emissions from agricultural activities across Scotland.

**CAP**

The UK government has announced the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) budget. The existing share of direct payments (Pillar 1) will be retained. All four nations will take a nominal cut of 1.6% between 2013/4 and 2019/20. In inflation adjusted terms (at 2011 prices), this is a 12.6% reduction. Scotland will receive a Pillar 1 allocation of around €4,096m, and a Pillar 2 allocation of €478m.

The UK government has decided not to award up to €230m between 2014 and 2020 of CAP funding known as the 'convergence uplift' to Scotland, which goes against the wishes of both the Scottish Parliament and the European Union [Oct 13].

The Scottish Government said that the only reason that the UK qualifies for the uplift is because of Scotland's low payments under the current system. However, the UK government has confirmed that it will not pass on the uplift to Scotland and will instead impose deeper cuts to Scotland's CAP budget, leaving farmers in Scotland with the lowest per hectare payments in Europe.

The Herald reported that the new CAP deal includes commitments to review the internal allocation of UK CAP funds by 2017, and the potential for Scotland to extend the amount of coupled support it can make to farmers.

The Scottish Government has been offered limited access to the UK's flexibility to make coupled payments that go beyond the 8% limit; extra coupled payments of up to 10% have been offered in the livestock sector.

NFU Scotland has written to the European Commission to seek clarity on the proposals for convergence of area payment rates across Europe, and to see what safeguards it has in place to ensure that transferred budgets are used to deliver true convergence within the recipient member state. EU member states are required to move the area payments to their farmers towards the EU average of €196 per hectare by 2020. Scotland's average payment is closer to €100 per hectare. NFU Scotland is also seeking a legal opinion on the CAP budget allocation.

*The Scottish Farmer* reported that the Scottish Government considers that EU farm support money should go only to those upland farmers who maintain at least a minimum livestock density. The so-called 'Scottish clause' is a requirement for active use of eligible land, created to tackle the problem of 'slipper farmers' – those who have been living off historical entitlement to subsidies whilst no longer actually farming to the same level.

However, Jeremy Moody, of the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers, said that the EU would need convincing that it should take a step back towards headage payments. The EU considers that a minimum stocking density, or a linkage to agricultural production, would break World Trade Organisation rules which state that production payments cannot distort the market.

**DIFFUSE POLLUTION**

New guidance, *Diffuse Pollution and General Binding Rules*, has been published which sets out advice for land managers. The guidance was drawn up in partnership with key stakeholders including the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), NFU Scotland and Scotland's Rural College. It includes advice on the application and storage of chemical fertiliser, organic manure and slurry, and pesticides; keeping of livestock in proximity to water environment; cultivation of land; the use of sheep dip and steading drainage.

See: [www.farmingandwaterscotland.org/farmingwaterscot](http://www.farmingandwaterscotland.org/farmingwaterscot)

**SCOTLAND'S FARM STRUCTURE**

The chief statistician has released the Scottish figures from the *EU's Farm Structure Survey*, including information on soil conservation, livestock breeding practice and renewable energy production. The data are used to help monitor greenhouse gas emissions. The remainder of the EU data is due in 2015.

About 20% of tillage used conservation methods, about a third of holdings kept all their land in general crop rotation, and less than 20% of land was left bare during the winter. Less than 10% of manure and slurry was incorporated straight away, which would be beneficial for the environment and crop-growth.

Just over 20% of farms reported diversification, the most common form being tourism. 3% reported generating renewable energy for the market, with the figure rising to 10% if home-use is included. One in eight holdings reported that more than 10% of their turnover came from other gainful activities at the location.

Of holdings that bred cattle or sheep, less than 15% used the best available genetic information, such as Estimated Breeding Values. 53% of ewes were mated using a home-bred ram, with 1% artificially inseminated. About half of the cows were mated using a brought-in bull, but with 18% mated using artificial insemination.

90% of farms were run on a day-to-day basis by the occupier or a member of their family. 4% of farms were owned by companies or institutions. 31% of those managing farms (occupiers or managers) were aged over 65, with a further 27% aged 55 or over. 3% were aged under 35. 15% were female, and one in six had completed at least two years of agricultural training. See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/01079](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/01079)

 **WOODLANDS**

**FOREST WINDFARMS**

*The Press & Journal* reported that Forestry Commission Scotland has 14 turbines in operation on forest land in Highland, Moray

and Aberdeenshire, and a further 63 under construction [Sep 12]. Planning permission is being sought for a further 40 turbines, with a number of hydro developments also proposed. An additional 50 turbines are in operation, split between private and public woodland. FC Scotland intends to produce 2 GW of electricity from renewable projects on its estate by 2020, raising an estimated £3.7m per year if the targets are met.

Struan Stevenson MEP said: "FC Scotland should be looking after and planting trees and they should not be allowing the felling of vast swathes of forestry for this purpose."

FC Scotland said that the land would not be sold off, but handed over on long leases. It said that the renewables contracts would benefit the taxpayer, with the profits being invested back into forests.

Graham Lang, of Scotland Against Spin, said: "There are multiple conflicts in this approach. Forests are for trees and for wildlife and for people to enjoy. Windfarms are industrial structures. Their construction and operation will require many trees to be felled. They will drive out wildlife. They will ruin people's enjoyment of the forest environment. Windfarms and forests don't mix. When David Cameron wanted to sell off forests in England, there was a national outcry and he was forced to abandon his plans. Yet in Scotland there has been no public debate about whether we want to see our forests industrialised or handed over to private developers."

**WOODLOT**

*The Galloway News* reported that Scotland's first woodlot licence has been awarded on the Corsewall Estate near Stranraer in Galloway. The new form of forest tenure is being piloted which allows an area of woodland to be leased, and then managed to sell the timber provided.

 **FISHFARMING & FISHERIES**

**SALMON NETTING**

The Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland (SNFAS) voted against an automatic blanket postponement of the netting season; the start of the netting season has been postponed voluntarily by six weeks, until April, for the past 14 years [Feb 13].

Hughie Campbell Adamson, of the Salmon & Trout Association (Scotland), said: "The intention to start earlier shows the netsmen are determined to kill a proportion of the scarcest, most vulnerable and indeed most valuable of our salmon runs. For many years rod interests have given maximum protection to these fish and now virtually none are killed by anglers in the early weeks of the season. In fact most rivers operate 100% catch and release until May or even later."

He called for Scottish ministers to intervene. George Pullar, of Usan Fisheries near Montrose, said that for the last 14 years, many salmon netters had given up a proportion of their income for no return and to the benefit of others. He said: "By any judgment, this does not smack of people who want to damage the very species from which they derive their livelihoods. We are in discussions with several fishery boards regarding refraining from fishing in the early part of the season in return for fair compensation. It is therefore only right in these difficult economic times that appropriate compensation should be agreed where one sector loses out by not exercising their legal rights, to the clear advantage of those that continue to do so. We are not alone in this

view; the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards also advocates payment of fair compensation in exchange for refraining from netting. The reality is this industry supports many rural families and is far from the preserve of the wealthy."

He said that, regardless of catch and release, which in itself resulted in the death of a proportion of salmon, angling proprietors could still derive income from their fishing rights from the opening of the season.

Thousands used to work for netters round the Scottish coast, but with the advent of fishfarming in the 1970s providing cheaper salmon, there has been a sharp decline in netting.

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "We recognise the significant support shown by anglers for voluntary action to protect vulnerable early stock components including catch and release and the Salmon Net Fishing Association's six-week delay to the start of the net fishing season. We support these voluntary measures, and have encouraged both the SNFAS and the District Salmon Fishery Boards to enter into early local discussions to agree a proportionate and pragmatic way forward."

**SOLWAY COCKLES**

The *BBC News* website reported that a partnership, led by Marine Scotland, is looking at management methods for Solway Firth cockles which are sustainable and of maximum benefit to the economy [Apr 13]. Gathering cockles in the Solway Firth has been banned since September 2011 in order to allow stocks to recover.

Allan Gibb, of Marine Scotland, said: "The overwhelming desire of everyone who contributed [to the public meetings] was for a sustainable long-term cockle fishery. The need for a partnership of local community, industry and agencies working together towards common goals was recognised as the only way to achieve this. A steering group chaired by Marine Scotland has now been established to co-ordinate a broad range of complementary work-streams, all geared towards building a management model which will deliver safe and sustainable fishing practices for the future."

A new study will test a Territorial User Rights for Fisheries (TURF) model for management of the fishery. The TURF approach works by awarding exclusive access to fishing areas to a clearly defined group and has proved to be effective in managing issues such as overfishing and weak economic returns in other parts of the world. The study will test a number of elements, including safe and controlled hand gathering of cockles on the beach; transportation between the beach and a single collection point; fair and transparent payment of cocklers and the use of a single distribution point.

The Solway Firth Partnership has also commissioned a further study to examine management options, including a study of the cross-border context of the potential fishery.

• *The Galloway News* reported that Marine Scotland has granted a small co-operative of local hand-gatherers exclusive access to the closed fishing grounds. The small-scale commercial fishery will be piloted over three months and the results used to devise a management strategy for sustainable fishing.

**LOCH GILP**

Raised levels of *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) bacteria have occurred in a sample of common cockles collected during regular monitoring from Loch Gilp in Argyll. Shellfish from this area may pose a risk to human health and are not suitable for harvest or consumption.

**FAROESE SANCTIONS**

The Faroese government has begun proceedings against the EU's decision to impose sanctions against them, which ban imports of herring and mackerel products from the islands [Aug 13].

It claims that the measure breaches a World Trade Organisation agreement. Dr Bjorn Kunoy, legal adviser to the Faroese government, said he did not think the latest development hindered the chance of an agreement on quotas.

**NORTH SEA COD**

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) said that the latest International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) data showed that cod stocks were only slightly above what are considered sustainable, and kept cod on its list of 'fish to avoid.'

An MCS spokeswoman said: "The efforts of fishers and managers have placed cod in the North Sea on the road to recovery. Programmes such as the Conservation Credits Scheme, which rewards fishermen for adopting conservation measures with additional days at sea, together with more effective long-term management plans will hopefully see the fishery continue to recover in the coming years. There are more sustainable cod fisheries that we currently rate as 'fish to eat.'"

Jim Masters, of the MCS, said: "MCS uses a methodology for rating fish stocks based on the best available science for single-stock assessments, the same scientific advice that is used to set quotas. Cod stocks have only now, after years of restrictions and hard work from the fishing industry, just come up from the precautionary limits."

*The Press & Journal* reported that ICES evidence to the European Commission said that there was an abundance of cod, and saithe, in the North Sea. As cod and saithe are the main predator species, their growing presence is having an impact on haddock, herring, whiting and sandeel numbers. Changing management target fishing mortality for cod and saithe therefore influences the yield of other stocks more than the management targets for those other stocks.

Bertie Armstrong, of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF), said: "If a predatory fish such as cod increases in stock biomass, as is currently happening, there will be an impact on the populations of its prey items, which include other fish and shellfish. There may be the need in the future to fish harder for predatory species such as cod to ensure that this desirable balance is achieved. Cod prey extensively on sandeels and the recent poor breeding success of our seabird populations in Scotland, many of which rely on sandeels for food, could well be down to an increase in cod affecting sandeel numbers."

Richard Lochhead, the fisheries minister, said that cod stocks have more than doubled in the last five years, and fishing rates are the lowest observed since assessments began in the 1960s: "North Sea cod is recovering and is fished within international limits and will not be harmed if people eat fish caught by Scottish fishermen."

**GEAR VANDALISM**

The *BBC News* website reported that the Scottish Government is to set up a taskforce to tackle deliberate acts of vandalism of fishing gear at sea and help resolve disputes within the industry. The Marine Scotland initiative aims to prevent disputes among fishermen, ranging from local and nomadic fishing operators to trawlers and creelers, competing in the same area of sea. The scheme aims to ensure such disputes are resolved locally without any need for intervention by

agencies. Independent consultants are currently undertaking a survey of gear conflict.

There is also to be a review of technology that has been deployed to manage fisheries and inshore fisheries management arrangements will be assessed. In some areas, such as Burghead on the Moray Firth, local codes of conduct and voluntary agreements are already in place.

Bertie Armstrong, of the SFF, said: "Both static and mobile fishing operations are entirely legal and worthy of encouragement and support."



**MARINE**

**BRAHAN PROJECT**

Marine Scotland's Brahan project has been launched which provides live information about the speed and direction of Scotland's ocean currents up to 200 km offshore. Using high frequency radar, the results are not currently available from existing methods. The data will aid scientific research together with pollution control, the offshore oil and gas sector, the renewable energy sector and shipping.

The new technology is already being used by Heriot Watt University in the prediction of natural and pollutant transport, initially in the Shetland/Orkney region.

The radar system has been installed at North Ronaldsay lighthouse in Orkney and Sumburgh Head lighthouse in Shetland. The tidal and residual surface currents in two 180 km radius arcs either side of the Fair Isle Gap will be monitored for six months. Results will be supported by data from a variety of other methods including Acoustic Doppler Current Profilers, low-cost drifters and gliders.

Marine Scotland Science is leading the project with support from BP Exploration; UK-IMON; The Met Office; Nexen Petroleum UK Ltd; ICIT, Heriot-Watt University; Qualitas Remos; and CODAR Ocean Sensors.

See: [www.thebrahanproject.com](http://www.thebrahanproject.com)



**POLITICS & PARLIAMENT**

**INDEPENDENCE WHITE PAPER**

The First Minister published a White Paper on independence, *Scotland's Future*. Chapter eight deals with *Environment, Rural Scotland and Resources*, which focuses on the creation of a Scottish Energy Fund, oil and gas extraction and green energy.

The White Paper sets out reforms of the Crown Estate, consultation on the greater local ownership of assets and greater autonomy for the islands and ownership of the foreshore and local harbours. Scotland would have direct representation in Europe for agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture and receive a higher share of the UK funding allocation, befitting its importance to the sectors.

It states that an independent Scottish Parliament would have the chance to enshrine protection of the environment in a written constitution and would be able to negotiate increased European funding for environmental protection. See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/11/9348/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/11/9348/0)

**DEER CONTROL**

*The Herald* reported that the effectiveness of the current voluntary system of deer control was scrutinised by MSPs on the Rural Affairs, Climate Change & Environment committee [Oct 13].

Ahead of the meeting, the committee convenor, Rob Gibson MSP, said: "There has been a concerted campaign by several estates

in West Sutherland to pressurise the John Muir Trust (JMT), owners of Quinag in Assynt, to stop their demands for a deep deer cull, return to West Sutherland Deer Management group meetings and accept that temporary fencing is a solution to gross overgrazing of high nature designation sites at Ardvar [Feb 13]. They have circulated an open letter that attacks the JMT making dubious claims that the voluntary actions of the other estates in the deer management subgroup are supported by the Scottish Government."

But a spokesman for the Scottish Gamekeepers Association said that Mr Gibson's comments appeared to be a calculated attempt to influence the committee. He said: "To have this, from the actual convener of the committee, just days before the start of the evidence sessions is bound to cast doubts over how balanced this process is going to be and we can only hope that other members of the committee will approach the discussions with the level of open-mindedness and clear-headedness that is clearly required."

Dr Maggie Keegan, of Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), gave evidence to the committee. She said: "SWT believes that unsustainable grazing, browsing and trampling is one of the key threats to Scotland's biodiversity, along with climate change, habitat fragmentation, invasive non-native species and pollution. SWT believes wild deer can be part of flourishing, ecologically functional landscapes across Scotland and we support sustainable deer management. This can be achieved by members who make up deer management groups working together to set appropriate cull targets for deer, in response to public and private interests."

The *BBC News* website reported that Scottish Environment LINK claimed that the population of red deer alone has increased from 150,000 in the 1960s to about 400,000 today. LINK argued that large areas of the country's uplands and native woodlands have been ecologically impoverished due to the large number of deer on Scotland's sporting estates. It calls for major changes to the present voluntary system and want to see a new statutory system which would require private landowners to meet deer cull targets set by SNH.

However, the Association of Deer Management Groups said that the population had declined in many areas and was now less than 300,000. In its submission to the committee, the association said that new regulations would fail to resolve disputes over deer numbers, while increasing bureaucracy and costs. Land managers also believe undergrazing may become a problem if deer numbers are heavily reduced, leading to the loss of species-rich grassland and an increased risk of wildfires.

Duncan Orr-Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, told the committee: "It's very difficult to have a proper debate about this when we don't have an effective deer management plan. We have a voluntary approach."

Mike Daniels, of the JMT, said: "Whenever someone tries to reduce deer numbers in conservation interests or in the public interest there is a big outcry from neighbouring sporting estates, saying their livelihoods is in danger and it's all terrible. I think that demonstrates the current system doesn't work."

**PAIRC ESTATE**

The *BBC News* website reported that Barry Lomas, landowner of the Pairc Estate on Lewis, has offered his tenants almost all of the land in order to end a nine-year legal battle over ownership of the estate [Dec 12]. A site in Gravir, earmarked for an electricity subsea cable converter station, is not included. Also excluded from the purchase is land between Eishken Lodge and Steimreway which Eishken Estate plans to buy. The purchase price



of the land, and interposed lease in respect of a planned windfarm, is £500,000.

Residents of the Pairc Estate had been pursuing a compulsory purchase of the estate, which Mr Lomas has challenged in the courts. *The Herald* reported that, after brokered discussions, the crofters accepted Mr Lomas' offer and abandoned the hostile buy-out, although an amicable purchase is likely the more expensive option. It also offers quicker and more certain purchase, community ownership of almost the whole estate, and more control over the lease for renewable energy development, with a much higher return to the community.

Pairc Trust members are confident that the purchase could be 100% funded by the Scottish Land Fund, Western Isles Council and their existing resources.

### NATIONAL PARKS

*The Herald* reported that Ramblers Scotland, in a briefing to the Scottish Parliament before a debate on national parks, urged MSPs to press the case for a third national park to be established as soon as possible [Apr 13]. The organisation also called for the Cairngorms National Park to be extended to protect it against windfarms.

Dave Morris, of Ramblers Scotland, said: "The SNP Government has been too slow in developing Scotland's National Park system. Apart from extending the southern boundary of the Cairngorms National Park down to Blair Atholl, they have done virtually nothing since then to promote our national parks system. It is time for a third national park. The Western Isles need the economic boost that national park designation will bring to the Harris area. For the visitor to Scotland from afar, what better way to advertise the presence of outstanding scenery and wildlife on the Atlantic seaboard?"

Islanders on Harris voted overwhelmingly in favour of the island being designated as a national park in 2009. The Western Isles Council did not support the bid, and Scottish ministers decided against it [Jan 11].

Claire Baker MSP secured a debate in parliament, asking for a national strategy group to determine how a policy on national parks should develop, following the publication of the *Unfinished Business* report [Apr 13]. However, the Scottish Government issued a statement before the debate saying that there would be no more national parks designated in 'this period of economic difficulty.' Paul Wheelhouse, the environment minister said at the end of the debate that communities' aspirations could be raised, only to be thwarted by the lack of money to establish new parks. He said that earmarking sites for long-term designation would not be wise as it could lead to a quasi-bidding process between communities; the two existing national parks might also suffer.

### WILDLIFE CRIME

The Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment committee at Holyrood considered the *Wildlife Crime Report (2012)*.

Scottish Land & Estates submitted written evidence to the committee, saying that raptor persecution receives 'too much media attention' whereas poaching should be the focus of enforcement and publicity. Poaching is the most commonly recorded wildlife crime, as shown in the report.

However, the *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog responded, saying that raptor persecution is happening on a scale far greater than the police-recorded figures. Its effect is having population-level impacts on species such as golden eagles, hen harriers, red kites and goshawks. Raptor

persecution is not caused by 'a few incidents' – they are caused by widespread, systematic incidents.

### MOUNTAIN HARES

Alison Johnstone MSP has lodged several parliamentary questions concerning mountain hares in Holyrood [see CONSERVATION above]. She asked for information on the health of mountain hare populations and whether they were in favourable conservation status. She also asked for information on the numbers of hare culled annually and the impact on golden eagles. She questioned the government on the availability of information about the relationship between hare culling and diseases transmitted to red grouse. Ms Johnstone also asked about the number of licences granted for culling mountain hares.



## GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

### FAVOURITE SPECIES

A poll was organised by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and VisitScotland to highlight the Year of Natural Scotland. The public were asked to vote for their favourite species from the 'Big Five' species; the golden eagle won, followed by red squirrel, red deer, otter and common (harbour) seal. In the 'other' category, the Scottish wildcat won, closely followed by the pine marten and the puffin.

RSPB Scotland has launched an on-line petition to have the golden eagle named as Scotland's national bird. RSPB Scotland is hoping that Scottish ministers will formally designate the species as a national symbol.

- An online survey was conducted by the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh of Scotland's favourite native trees and plants. The Scots pine, *Pinus sylvestris*, collected 15% of votes cast, just ahead of the Scottish bluebell, *Campanula rotundifolia*, which attracted 14%. These were followed by the rowan, Scottish primrose and silver birch.

- Forestry Commission Scotland is conducting a poll for Scotland's national tree. See: [www.forestry.gov.uk/scotlandsnationaltree](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/scotlandsnationaltree)

### WILD LAND

A consultation has been launched by SNH on a map showing core areas of wild land across the country [Sep 13]. The map, first published in April, is a result of SNH's work to advise Scottish Government and others on the extent and location of the wild land resource in Scotland. As part of the recent Scottish Government consultations on the *Main Issues Report for the National Planning Framework 3*, and draft revised *Scottish Planning Policy*, a number of respondents offered comments on the detail of the wild land map [Aug 13]. In light of these comments, the government asked SNH to carry out a consultation on the map.

A large area of South Uist is included on the wild land consultation map. Stòras Uibhist, the community landowner on South Uist, fears that moves to describe much of the area as wild land could herald a new Highland Clearances when, according to the latest census, the population is declining.

Huw Francis, of Stòras Uibhist, wrote to Rural Affairs & Environment secretary Richard Lochhead to warn him of their concerns and invite him to visit the island. Mr Francis said: "If the Wild Land designation is introduced in the way that has been suggested there will be a serious impact on the ability of this community to regenerate the local economy and reverse

population decline. The so-called Wild Land of South Uist has been occupied, managed, altered, built on and farmed by island residents for thousands of years. Calling it an untouched wilderness disparages the long history of island living and imposes a romanticised and erroneous external construct on this community that will perpetuate the economic decline of the island economy ...

"This community has no intention of destroying the environment of the Uists, that their forebears created through hard work. Much of Scotland was once designated as land fit only for sheep, which resulted in the Clearances. If Scotland continues to be designated as fit for nothing but conservation, a new clearance of rural Scotland will take place."

Mr Francis said that it would have been unlikely that the community projects being pursued on Stòras Uibhist land would have secured planning consent if the Wild Land proposal had been implemented to its fullest extent.

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that a spokeswoman for SNH said: "This map identifies those areas where Scotland's most extensive wild landscapes can be found. There are no plans to designate these areas, and we are not arguing for this. These wild land areas currently bring substantial economic, social and environmental benefits to their communities and Scotland ... Current government policy is to safeguard areas of wild land character – this map doesn't change this policy but provides an indication of where the key areas of wild land are. It is for the local authorities to assess the impact of proposals on wild land. Individual proposals will need to be considered on their merits, but our view is that areas are increasingly sensitive to development as you move away from the edge and into the heart of an area."

Mick Blunt, of the John Muir Trust, writing on the letters page of *The Herald* said: "[Mr Francis'] suggestion that the map poses a threat to the local economy and will lead to population decline smacks of scaremongering. Of the £24m in grant funding and investment cited by Mr Francis, not a penny would have been withheld had this map been in place, and not one project would have been adversely affected. No significant development, other than an occasional tree planting project, has taken place in the core wild land area for many years. Only around 6% of Scotland's Core Wild Land is community-owned, with a further small portion owned by government and non-government organisations. The vast bulk is in the hands of private landowners.

"The proposal by the Scottish Government is not designed to curb economic activity by communities, but to offer some protection to Scotland's rugged wild landscapes against the juggernaut of large-scale commercial development that is being driven by energy corporations in collusion with private landowners. The publication of the draft Core Wild Land map marks a recognition that these internationally renowned landscapes deserve to be protected in the public interest rather than treated as the exclusive property of landowners to be exploited for commercial gain. It is not protection that led to the desolation and depopulation of much of the Highlands & Islands, but the kind of *laissez-faire*, deregulated free-for-all that Huw Francis seems to want to preserve."

The *West Highland Free Press* editorial said: "The proposal by SNH to designate much of the west Highlands between Applecross and Cape Wrath as 'wild land' is an attempt to create national parks by another name ... the Scottish Government and Highland Council will be persuaded if not obliged to regard such glens as places where 'nature' and 'wildlife' have priority over the development of human industry. The definition of such industry is

at present deliberately vague ... it is hardly worth repeating that barely an acre of the west Highlands has not been affected by human development, and that this entire region is underpopulated chiefly because for the past 200 years, a variety of landowners and governments have preferred it to be occupied by animals, domesticated and wild, than by human beings."

The consultation concludes on 20 December.

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

**HILL TRACKS**

Nine environmental organisations under the auspices of Scottish Environment LINK have published a report, *Track Changes*, concerning the construction of hill tracks outside the planning system [see RECREATION below]. The report presents photographic evidence of the damage caused by unregulated track construction, and calls on the Scottish Government to bring all tracks into the planning system to ensure that public oversight and minimum standards are met [Jun 13].

The report claims that the spread of hill tracks across the country has contributed to the rapid loss of wild land in Scotland, and has damaged sensitive landscapes and habitats, including in protected areas.

Funding was provided by the contributory organisations, Scottish Environment LINK Discretionary Project Fund and the Scottish Mountaineering Trust.

The *BBC News* website reported that Tim Baynes, of Scottish Land & Estates, said: "The central allegation in [the] report that landowners build hill tracks without any public oversight is simply not true. While there are some circumstances where a formal planning application is not necessary, the reality is that there are many safeguards in place, particularly in relation to protected sites. Hill tracks provide farmers with vital, safe vehicular access to feed and check their livestock, particularly in winter when snow is on the ground. Once a route has been established, it will naturally be used by others including gamekeepers, those monitoring wildlife and their habitats, recreational users, mountain rescue teams and firefighters. There is rigorous oversight from a range of bodies including local authorities, SNH and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency."

The local government and planning minister, Derek Mackay, said: "I will be looking again at the planning powers that we have in place to ensure there is adequate enforcement. I asked to see the evidence and I have seen more evidence of people ignoring the guidance and planning policies. There is a careful balance to be struck between realising the economic opportunities, such as in agriculture, and protecting the environment."

*The Herald* reported that the study accepts that many tracks have been put in for legitimate purposes, but said that legislation granting Permitted Development Rights does not define agriculture or forestry: "As a result, these rights have been effectively extended to cover tracks built for other purposes, notably for field sports. This has led to a rapid increase in the number and size of tracks constructed in recent years."

The report provides a list of case studies selected from the Borders to Sutherland, including Ledgowan Estate [see RECREATION below]. The estate had claimed an agricultural purpose for the track but its own website said: "The estate includes 18 kilometres of track so you can explore the local wildlife and area with a local safari company."

See: [www.swlg.org.uk/uploads/6/3/3/8/6338077/track\\_changes\\_-\\_link\\_hill\\_tracks\\_report.pdf](http://www.swlg.org.uk/uploads/6/3/3/8/6338077/track_changes_-_link_hill_tracks_report.pdf)

The Scottish Government's planning permission for the 137 mile Beaully/Denny upgraded transmission line was on the basis that the temporary construction tracks be removed [May 13]. However, *The Herald* reported that all landowners need to do to make them permanent is to apply to the local council. Around 60 roads covering almost 100 miles could be involved.

Three planning applications have been made to Highland Council which have been called in by Cairngorms National Park Authority as they are within its boundaries. A further two have been made to Perth & Kinross Council. Agents acting for Glengoulandie Estate said: "The retention of the existing road/track network can be seen as vital to the ongoing Integrated Land Management of Glengoulandie (total area 1,199.4 hectares)." The track, which is almost three miles long, would help the estate with forestry, upland and sporting interests.

Helen Todd of Ramblers Scotland said: "We were partially reassured that the planning conditions required the restoration of these temporary tracks after construction to keep impacts to the minimum, so we are now very concerned landowners along the route are applying to make these tracks into permanent features." She called on the Scottish Government to remind councils of these conditions: "Otherwise any determined developer will get the message that certain conditions may be overturned at a later date."

**CAIRNGORMS HOUSING**

The *Sunday Herald* reported that cosmetics chain, Lush, has donated £7,000 towards the legal fees to environmental groups appealing against the Cairngorm National Park Authority (CNPA)'s plans for housing developments within the park [Aug 13]. The group, including the Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group, has lodged an appeal at the Supreme Court in London.

Murray Ferguson, of CNPA, said: "There have already been two court judgments, both of which resulted in the appellants' arguments being rejected. Despite a cap on costs, this is proving costly to the taxpayer and in terms of staff time, however we will continue to defend the appeal robustly."

**CAIRNGORMS ORCHARDS**

18 new orchards are to be created in the Cairngorms National Park, to help mark the tenth anniversary of the park authority. The orchards will contain eight trees, which will be a mixture of apple, plum and pear. European funding will help to cover the cost of the project. The sites selected are in the Highlands, Aberdeenshire, Moray and Perthshire. The CNPA, Soil Association and Cairngorms Food for Life programme are involved in the project.

**CLIMATE CHANGE**

*The Herald* reported that the draft *Climate Change Adaptation Programme* consultation has been published by the Scottish Government [Jul 13]. Both Glasgow and Edinburgh city councils said that they were disappointed that the draft findings had failed to address key areas including who would pay for preparations to cope with global warming. The plans identify action planned or proposed within the next five years, rather than the flexible, long-term approach that the councils said that Scotland would need if it is to successfully become a 'climate-ready nation.'

Environment quangos raised concerns over the impact of coastal erosion and fears that city centre pollution and urban temperature hot-spots had been overlooked.

Action plans are being formulated to help deal with the effects of climate change and the impact on businesses of more severe weather patterns. Farmers could introduce different crops if climate change affected traditional crop growing, for instance. The government found that floods, new pests and diseases and migration – as people move to higher ground – could have significant effects on Scottish society and its economy.

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities said: "Understanding the risk of flooding does not ensure that action is taken to mitigate the risk. For the most part this requires financial input."

See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/10/4535](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/10/4535)

**WILDLIFE CRIME**

A free mobile phone app has been launched that will enable people to record and report suspected cases of wildlife crime directly to Police Scotland via their iPhone. This will help to improve awareness, detection and reporting of wildlife crime throughout Scotland. The information is then sent to Police Scotland by email. A GPS location can be tagged to a report which will assist officers in locating the incident, which by their nature are often very remote locations, while adding to evidential value."

See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Wildlife-Habitats/paw-scotland](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Wildlife-Habitats/paw-scotland); <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/paws-crime-app/id728400887?ls=1&mt=8>

**NEW LANARK QUARRY**

*The Herald* reported that both SNH and Historic Scotland said that Cemex's plans to extend the Hyndford Quarry will not seriously impact on the New Lanark World Heritage Site near the Falls of Clyde, and have withdrawn their objections [Oct 13]. Land within the 'buffer zone' of the UNESCO heritage site would be developed.

Robiesland Bog, a priority habitat under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, would have to be 'relocated' to accommodate the extension. Save Our Landscapes (SOL) said that Cemex has failed to provide an adequate action plan to safely remove the bog without causing significant impact on the environment. They also say SNH is complicit in allowing the application to proceed without such guarantees.

Mark Stephens, of SOL, said: "Cemex were asked to submit a viable methodology for relocating the peatland safely, but failed to do so. SNH said initially that they would object to the quarry extension if this condition wasn't met, but now they have allowed the planning application to go ahead without it. We are concerned that both Historic Scotland and SNH now operate against the protection principles for which they were created. They have abandoned their responsibility and their actions here have only served to dignify the destruction of this site on behalf of the developers, Cemex. They have done everything in their power to facilitate this extension, which in the case of Historic Scotland, is contrary to the assurances it gave to UNESCO in 2000."

SNH said that its previous objection was based on any damage the bog relocation posed to the Falls of Clyde site; however, its reservations were assuaged by assurances from Cemex that any impact would be minimal. A spokesman said: "Cemex provided evidence that showed that the water draining from Robiesland bog was insignificant, so its relocation would have negligible impact on the Site of Special Scientific Interest. We were satisfied that this was the case. As to whether it's possible to relocate a bog, Cemex have undertaken to carry out research and to come up with the methodology. We have asked the local authority to make this a planning condition."

**CONONISH GOLD**

*The Herald* reported that Scotgold Resources is scaling back its planned gold mine at Cononish, near Tyndrum in Argyll [Mar 12]. The company

cited difficult funding conditions and a fall in the price of gold. Its chairman, John Bentley, said that it would be an 'uphill battle' to get the mine into production. A revised operating plan would focus on the higher grade gold deposits initially with a smaller processing facility; the balance of lower grade material would be mined should gold prices and cost profiles become suitable, under a separate mine plan. It could take two years to get into production once the alternative scheme is put together. Any alteration to the project would 'necessarily require discussion' with the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park Authority.

#### NATURAL CAPITAL

The Scottish Forum on Natural Capital has been launched. This is a new project bringing together public, private and voluntary sector organisations to protect and rebuild Scotland's natural capital, natural resources such as water, forests and biodiversity. It will enable businesses and policy makers to make informed decisions about their impact on the environment, to assess the financial and other benefits they obtain from Scotland's natural capital, and to make a concerted effort to protect it.

The Scottish Forum includes the Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scotland's 2020 Climate Group, the University of Edinburgh, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland, and the Institute of Directors, Scotland.

The Scottish Forum will calculate the monetary value of Scotland's natural capital and the cost of depleting it. This will involve coordinating experts including accountants, people from business, academics and policy makers. It will communicate to a broad range of businesses and other stakeholders the risk of depleting Scotland's natural capital and the huge economic value from protecting and enhancing it. Collaborative projects will be set up to deliver tangible action to protect and enhance Scotland's natural capital.

Scotland's Natural Capital Asset Index was recently developed by the Scottish Government, which has committed to using the index to influence decision-making.

See: [www.naturalcapitalscotland.com](http://www.naturalcapitalscotland.com)



## ENERGY

#### COMMUNITY BENEFIT

Scottish Renewables has outlined a 'protocol' for the payments that companies should make to communities for building onshore windfarms in their localities [Sep 12]. The protocol will ensure a consistent approach to the development of community benefit agreements. It states that for every megawatt of installed capacity, £5,000 of community benefit should be made available to communities. The Highland Council set the same figure as a benchmark several years ago. However, neither local authorities nor Scottish Renewables can enforce the level of payment.

#### WINDFARM UPDATES

**Borders:** Amended proposals from Wind Energy Ltd for a 22 turbine windfarm at Earlsbaugh near the Devil's Beef Tub have been refused, for the third time, by the council. An original bid for 36 turbines was put forward in 2007 and that was scaled back to 24 turbines four years later [Nov 11]. The authority said that the plans are still unacceptable due to the visual impact on the landscape.

**Highlands:** *The Herald* reported that Stuart Young, of the Caithness Wind Farm Information Forum, said that the proliferation of windfarm plans in Highland region, particularly for

Caithness, is reaching crisis point. He asked for a moratorium on all windfarm development of any size in Highlands 'until a viable, sensible planning policy is complete and in place.'

David Alston, of the Highland Council, said: "The appropriate development of renewable energy, including onshore wind turbines, would undoubtedly have been more straightforward if there had been clearer national guidelines and policies from the start."

**Nairnshire:** *The Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that RES has submitted plans to the Scottish Government for the 20 turbine, 60 MW Cairn Duhie Wind Farm near Ferness, on the edge of the Dava Moor between Nairn and Grantown-on-Spey [Oct 13]. The pledged community benefit fund would also include a local electricity discount scheme, the first in Scotland.

**North Uist:** *The BBC News* website reported that Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has approved plans for two community wind turbines at Locheport. The Ministry of Defence said that the turbines would have an 'unacceptable impact' on air defence radar on North and South Uist and St Kilda.

A 14 turbine windfarm at North Tolsta, 10 miles from Stornoway, has also been approved. 2020 Renewables is planning to build the £70m scheme on common grazing land.

**Sutherland:** Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is maintaining its objection to a proposed 47 turbine windfarm at Strathy South [Oct 13]. SNH expressed concerns over potential impacts the development would have on a range of bird species that are key features of the Caithness & Sutherland Peatlands Special Protection Area. SNH expressed concern that the proposal could harm the blanket bog habitat of the Flows, designated under European and Scots law as a Special Area of Conservation, and may also have an impact on seven of Scotland's most threatened bird species. SNH has asked for seven turbines to be removed from the proposal due to likely impacts on black-throated diver and wood sandpiper. Scottish & Southern Energy has been asked to provide additional environmental information, which may highlight the need for more turbines to be removed from the proposal.

**Wester Ross:** *The West Highland Free Press* reported that SNH has rejected claims that the proposed 900 kW community turbine in Coigach would damage the standing of the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area (NSA), despite the fact that it will result in some adverse local landscape and visual impacts. However, SNH said that any further proposals for turbines at this location or along this stretch of coastline would be likely to have significant cumulative impacts affecting the special qualities of the NSA. The turbine would be unlikely to have a significant impact on golden eagles in the area, as the proposed site was on the edge of their territory.

#### OFFSHORE WINDFARMS

**Aberdeen:** Lawyers for the Trump Organisation have challenged the legality of a decision to approve the 11 turbine European Offshore Wind Deployment Centre (EOWDC) within view of his golf resort at Menie Estate on the Aberdeenshire coast [May 13]. At the Court of Session in Edinburgh, his lawyers argued that consent was granted without a licence to generate electricity. His case also calls into question whether Vattenfall Wind Power would be a suitable licence-holder because it has suffered financial losses and reduced investment in the scheme. His legal team has claimed the lack of a site visit to the golf course by planners deliberating on the EOWDC project could be seen as a sign of bias in the decision-making process.

The Trump Organisation's plans are, allegedly, prejudiced by the consent process. A petition lodged by Trump International Golf Links and the Trump Organisation also challenges the decision not to hold a public inquiry into the project in Aberdeen Bay.

**Peterhead:** The Crown Estate has granted an agreement for lease to Statoil for Europe's largest floating windfarm. The Hywind Scotland Pilot Park will have five turbines with a total capacity of 30 MW. It will be located 12-18 miles (20 to 30 km) off Peterhead, Aberdeenshire.

**Solway:** *The Galloway News* reported that Dumfries & Galloway Council has tabled formal opposition to plans for new wind turbines in the Solway Firth in *Planning Scotland Seas* [Oct 13]. A Marine Scotland consultation, which finished this month, included plans to extend the Robin Rigg windfarm and to develop a new site at Luce Bay. The extension site had been ruled out for further development following a consultation in 2011. Concerns were raised about sandbank displacement, the effect on salmon migration and a detrimental impact on the environment, scenery and tourism.

#### MULL HYDRO

A 1,100 MWh hydro-electric scheme on the Allt Achadh na Moine on the east coast of Mull is to be built and operated by Green Energy Mull, a new community benefit society. A share offer has been issued with support from The Co-operative Enterprise Hub.

#### OPENCAST COAL

A new opencast coal mine at Cauldhall near Penicuik in Midlothian has been given planning permission. Planning officers recommended approval, as the development is in the national interest. Hargreaves, which took control following the collapse of Scottish Coal earlier this year, will excavate ten million tonnes of coal over 13 years from the 500 acre site [Jul 13].

*The Herald* reported that Hargreaves said that agreement on restoration, one of the concerns of the campaigners who set up the Stop Cauldhall Open Cast website, would be guaranteed. It also said it would complete the restoration of the nearby Shewington Surface Mine which was left unfinished following the liquidation of Scottish Coal.

Alison Johnstone MSP said: "The impacts on local communities from this proposal, such as noise, dust and heavy traffic, are completely unacceptable. It is utterly illogical to approve yet more coal mining given a whole host of factors. Cockenzie power station is switched off so there's nowhere local for this coal to go. Scotland has already failed its first two annual climate targets so more fossil fuel is the last thing we need, and we've seen landscapes across Scotland scarred by opencast being abandoned by companies that go bust. Hargreaves' plan is contrary to the local plan and the council's economic development strategy."

*The BBC News* website reported that a spokesman for the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) said: "SWT is far from convinced the proposed action to restore habitat after the mine closes will actually happen." SWT pointed out the mine would remove more than 500,000 cubic metres of peat, which may release 50,000 tonnes of carbon.

• The Auditor General, Caroline Gardner, has been called in by the Scottish Green Party to examine whether councils have set aside enough money to cover the huge potential costs of the restoration of disused opencast sites. The funding gap has been made worse by this collapse of Scottish Coal this year.

Ms Gardner said: "We have asked auditors to undertake some initial fact finding on the extent of the potential issues for the public sector and how these are currently being accounted for and built into financial plans. Further audit work could, for example, feature as part of the next year's annual audit in individual councils or as part of our future programme of national performance audits."

Patrick Harvie MSP said: "It appears that almost every mine has a different arrangement for how the costs of restoration were to be met. Local authority governance of these arrangements has also differed greatly in diligence and success. The local communities who live next to opencast mines are likely to be left with a scarred landscape and broken promises. Local authorities and the Scottish Government face picking up the tab. Unless a financial and governance model that guarantees restoration monies will be available at the end of a project's lifetime it is likely more communities will be blighted and there will be further demands on the public purse."

**UNCONVENTIONAL GAS**

The *BBC News* website reported that Stirling Council is to oppose Dart Energy's planning application to extract gas from coal-beds in the Forth Valley. Dart is awaiting the outcome of an appeal to the Scottish Government for planning permission to drill at three sites in the Stirling area and a further 11 around Falkirk [Aug 13].

Councillors said that there were 'outstanding matters in terms of the potential environmental effects' which had not been resolved. The proposal is also contrary to planning policy in respect of cumulative impact on the area.

**GEOTHERMAL HEAT**

The *Sunday Herald* reported that a study by Aecom and the British Geological Survey into deep geothermal energy has been published by the Scottish Government. It found that the most promising source is the water that has flooded the hundreds of disused mine shafts that underlay large areas of the Central Belt. The water averages 17°C, with higher temperatures at deeper levels.

The water could be pumped to the surface and, in combination with modern heat exchange technology, used to supply central heating and hot water to buildings. It estimates that water from Scotland's 600 cubic kilometres of old mine workings could provide a 'maximum accessible heat resource' of 12 gigawatts.

The study said: "On this basis, mine waters could theoretically provide the equivalent of approximately one third of Scotland's heat demand." It points out, however, that the actual contribution is likely to be less because of the problems of transporting heat over long distances and the possibility that some mines might not be suitable for use.

The study recommends a series of actions by Scottish ministers in the next three years, including the development of a national geothermal energy strategy. It suggests two major new demonstrator projects, at the Clyde Gateway in eastern Glasgow and at Shawfair in Midlothian, by 2016.

Two small geothermal schemes in Scotland that tap the warmth of mine water have been running since 2000. One is at Shettleston in Glasgow and the other at Lumphinnans in Fife, each serving fewer than 20 homes.

The study authors urged the Scottish Government to introduce a presumption in favour of geothermal developments in its current planning policy. They say a proposed renewable heat subsidy of 5p per kilowatt hour 'has been broadly welcomed by developers.'

For the longer term, the study calls on ministers to launch a national geothermal exploration programme aimed at uncovering the potential for extracting heat from hot rocks deeper underground. It also mentions that hydraulic fracturing, fracking, may be needed to help extract the heat. It also recommends new legislation by 2020 to clarify legal ownership of geothermal resources.

**CHAPELCROSS**

The *BBC News* website reported that Magnox Ltd has submitted details of a facility, designed to store radioactive waste for up to 150 years, to Dumfries & Galloway Council. The Chapelcross nuclear site would store 'packages of passive radioactive waste' during the decommissioning process; it ceased power generation in 2004. The company said that the waste stored at Chapelcross could be transferred elsewhere in Scotland 'as and when' suitable disposal sites became available.

**DOUNREAY**

The Highland Council has published *Dounreay Planning Framework 2*, which stated that safe, cleaned up land at Dounreay in Caithness will be made available for other businesses, including renewable energy companies, when work to decommission the nuclear power site is finished in 2025. Some land will remain a restricted area for 300 years after that date as it will be used to store low-level radioactive waste. The framework sets out requirements for the restoration and reuse of land at the 136 acre (55 hectare) site.



**RECREATION & TOURISM**

**ACCESS**

A mass protest walk on Ledgowan Estate in Wester Ross took place on St Andrew's Day, with walkers exercising their legal right of access. The protest came after a number of incidents in which it was claimed the estate was trying to restrict access to the land. *The West Highland Free Press* reported that the Highland Council has written to the estate over its continued efforts to block public access. Previously, the estate has padlocked gates and barricaded rights of way in an attempt to deter members of the public.

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) and Ramblers Scotland urged walkers to remain calm if faced with aggressive land managers.

Under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, the MCofS say people have a right of access to most land and inland water in Scotland, so long as they act responsibly as detailed in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. Landowners should respect these access rights when managing their land or water and act reasonably when asking people to avoid land management operations. They are also expected to cooperate with their local authority and other bodies to help integrate access and land management.

Andrea Partridge, of the MCofS, said: "If anyone feels they have been intimidated or threatened while exercising their statutory rights of access, they should report the incident immediately to the police by calling 101. They should make a note of the time and location of the incident, individuals' names if appropriate, and vehicle registration numbers. By far the majority of landowners in Scotland welcome access on their land and respect the rights and responsibilities enshrined in the law. Unfortunately, there are a few who are not so welcoming, hence the advice to report incidents to the police."

Ms Partridge said any alleged victims should make a note time and location of the incident, individual's names if appropriate, and vehicle registration numbers.

Helen Todd, of Ramblers Scotland, said: "Our rights of public access are world-renowned. Many walkers feel passionate about protecting their right to roam, but they should nevertheless remain calm if faced with an aggressive land manager who is trying to prevent them walking on their land. Walkers can choose to continue on their route or take account of any reasonable advice on an alternative, but they should report any intimidation to the police in the first instance, and also to the Ramblers or MCofS."

**ST KILDA CENTRE**

Land at Mangersta near Uig on Lewis has been gifted by the Hamnaway Estate for a proposed visitor centre dedicated to the St Kilda islands. The area also forms part of common grazing for the livestock of local crofters. The site must now be destocked before a planning application can be submitted.

**ISLE OF MAY**

10,800 people visited the Isle of May National Nature Reserve in 2013 on the *May Princess*, the Scottish Seabird Centre boat and the RIB *Osprey*, together with 111 kayaks and a number of small privately-owned boats. The island has the oldest continuously running bird observatory in the UK.

**CAPERCAILLIE**

A survey of walkers' behaviour was conducted by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) in the woods at Boat of Garten in the Cairngorms National Park, a breeding site for capercaillie [Sep 13]. The birds are sensitive to disturbance by people and dogs. The park authority and the community, with Seafield Estate and SNH, put in place measures aimed at reducing disturbance to the protected species. Walkers are encouraged to keep dogs on a short lead between 1 April and 15 August. A 66% reduction in the number of visits by people with dogs to the sensitive part of the woods was shown. The proportion of dogs on leads has increased from 17% to 37%, and 71% of dogs are now assessed as being under close control.

Capercaillie have bred successfully in the woods in 2012 and 2013.

This is the first time that 'before' and 'after' hard evidence has been collected to show how people have changed their recreational behaviour in the light of an awareness-raising campaign. The 2011 camera monitoring survey was funded by Davall Developments to inform consideration of their planning application for new housing [Jun 13]. SNH paid for a repeat survey in 2013 to assess the effectiveness of the awareness-raising campaign.

See: [www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=2073](http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=2073)

**CAIRNGORMS PARK**

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that the Cairngorms National Park Authority is to commission a park-wide visitor survey from April 2014. The last survey was carried out in 2009/10.



**NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS**

**CROFTING COMMISSION**

Marina Dennis has been appointed as appointed as a member of the Crofting Commission to represent the East Highlands crofting constituency following the resignation of Donnie Ross [Sep 13].