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CONSERVATION

WESTERN ISLES MINK

The Hebridean Mink Project (HMP) has run since 2001 with the aim of protecting internationally important populations of wader birds from the fur farm escapees [Sep 11]. A total of 2,200 mink have been trapped and removed from Lewis, Harris and Uist.

The number of surviving mink was predicted using computer modelling in a partnership between Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the University of Aberdeen. A commissioned report has been published, *Analysis and Future Application of Hebridean Mink Project Data*. These models provide important information on the expected population characteristics using actual trapping data. One scenario suggested that mink extinction could happen as early as this year, and another estimate that there would no longer a viable mink population by 2021. Mink had become extinct by 2017 in 80% of the simulations.

Iain Macleod, of HMP, said: "This computer modelling exercise was carried out to help us understand how the mink population on Harris and Lewis has responded to the intensive and long-term trapping work. All the computer modelling does is add exhaustive support to the impression held by the project's staff, namely that the population of mink in Lewis and Harris is now extremely small. All our efforts are now focused on the few remaining individuals and their eradication; the last two years of the project will allow us to achieve that. We are looking for information from the community and for volunteers who want to help us with our new electronic trap system. The bulk of the work is done and what is essential now is that the investment of time, money and effort is not lost and that we trap out these last few remaining individuals. It is the biggest mink trapping dataset in Britain and probably Europe, possibly even the world, and it was worth a thorough analysis to see what could be gleaned from the dataset and whether anything could be learnt for similar schemes in the future.

"It is very difficult to prove a negative [if all the mink have been eradicated]. I personally think we have a small handful of animals left. But it could be 20, plus or minus 20. If there are only a few it's not absolutely vital we catch them all as long they don't meet up and mate. They only live for three or four years so we hope they will just die out. One of our methods is to create monitoring tunnels right across the islands, where we can see the footprints on clay paths. The minks try to seek out their own kind by following it and this, in itself, disrupts their territorial behaviour. So rather than going out looking for a mate and finding one, they think there is some locally and keep going round in circles."

The Herald reported that there is a general belief that North Uist, Benbecula and South Uist have been successfully cleared. Traps with fish were laid to catch hedgehogs for relocation which would attract mink if they were there.

There are claims that, in Lewis, as the mink had gone the rat population was out of control to the point that they were attacking cars. Mr Macleod said: "There is no direct link. With these small rodents you need to kill 70% to 80% year on year to put them into decline. The important factors are

the climate and food available, not the predators that eat them."

However, he said that more people were now keeping hens and chickens, as the mink were not such a threat, thus attracting rats to their feed.

See: www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=2097

FLYING FLOCK

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) has received £110,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to help protect meadows in Fife. The award is part of a larger £3m project, Save Our Magnificent Meadows, led by Plantlife, which aims to save the UK's remaining fragments of wildflower meadows.

SWT will use this award to expand its Flying Flock, a pioneering grazing scheme using Shetland sheep. The sheep have helped to protect and restore some of Scotland's most valuable grassland habitats, improving their biodiversity through carefully timed conservation grazing.

RUM RATS

The Scottish Farmer reported that an electronically-tagged rat has been set loose on the Isle of Rum to help understand the impact of brown rat behaviour on colonies of Manx shearwaters. Brown rats are recent colonists, probably arriving on boats. As on all offshore islands where rats have jumped ship, they have an adverse effect on native species.

SNH, which owns and manages Rum National Nature Reserve, is concerned that rat numbers and predation may increase in the future. This project on rat ecology will inform future management policy for the globally import Manx shearwater breeding site.

SHETLAND EIDERS

The Shetland Oil Terminal Environment Advisory Group (SOTEAG) found that there were 5,782 eider ducks around 80% of Shetland's coastline in 2009. A follow-up survey covering 90% of the coast found just 4,627 birds in 2012, a decrease of 20%.

Martin Heubeck, of SOTEAG, said the cause was unknown: "A lot of people would say that duckling predation by skuas and gulls has been severe, but it's been the case for a long time. Predator nets have been set at both mussel farms and salmon farms; one mussel farmer actually reported that anti-predator nets were drowning eiders, but the scale and the extent of it is really a big question mark."

PINE MARTENS & SQUIRRELS

The Sunday Herald reported that a new study, by the National University of Ireland, has shown that pine martens prefer to eat grey squirrels than red. Grey squirrels are fatter and slower than the nimble reds, so make a more attractive and easier meal for the martens, opportunistic predators.

The research concluded that the spread of pine martens could be a critical factor in the success or failure of grey squirrels. A survey over 9,000 square kilometres in central Ireland found that red squirrels had become common and greys had suffered a population crash in areas where pine martens were active. The authors, Emma Sheehy and Colin Lawton, suggest that their findings also apply to Scotland. They said that this is the

first evidence of a grey squirrel retreat and could prove highly significant in terms of red squirrel conservation.

Rob Raynor, of SNH, said: "The Irish evidence shows there may be a link, albeit a strong link, between pine marten expansion and grey squirrel abundance, but we're not aware of any evidence that shows a clear cause and effect. Without this, we feel it would be premature to draw firm conclusions on the practical applications in Scotland and elsewhere. But we will keep a close eye on any future research."

The study is published in the journal, *Biodiversity and Conservation*.

CORN BUNTING

RSPB Scotland announced that a trial management scheme on 19 farms across Aberdeenshire and Inverness-shire is helping corn bunting conservation. Silage and hay cuts in the northeast are late enough to encourage the birds to make nests in these fields. Over the five year study, more than half of the nests started in May and June were in hay meadows but more than two-thirds of these were then lost during June and July mowing.

By delaying mowing by a few weeks, less than 5% of nests in meadows were lost, and overall breeding success increased by 20%, halting and even reversing local population declines.

A combination of late mowing and other agri-environment options such as un-harvested crops, over-winter stubbles, and reduced herbicide use in cereals could be critical in corn bunting conservation and save the species from local extinction.

See: www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/science



FARMING

CAP

The *Scottish Farmer* reports that the Scottish Government has asked the Westminster government to increase the coupled support ceiling for Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds from 8% to 13% [Dec 13]. The Scottish beef industry has shown itself to be enthusiastic in its support of continued, or even increased, support payments coupled to actual livestock headage but the sheep industry remains split over the idea.

The Scottish Government has also announced new proposals to ensure that only active farmers can receive direct support under the CAP. Farmers would have to keep livestock at an appropriate level linked to the carrying capacity of their land, or demonstrate significant active efforts every year to maintain agricultural land in good condition. Examples of 'significant active efforts every year' to maintain agricultural land in good condition could include mowing or cutting vegetation to agreed specification. Work to agree an appropriate level of farming activity has been underway with stakeholders for about a year.

Rural Affairs secretary, Richard Lochhead, said: "The issue of 'slipper farming' is a particular concern in Scotland where we have around a million hectares of wild land where no farming activity whatsoever is taking place but could qualify for new direct payments in 2015 unless action is taken in Europe. Clearly, reducing support for inactivity means more funding will be available for productive farmers."

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Dave Thompson MSP wrote to Richard Lochhead urging him to set the new Pillar One and Pillar Two agricultural support schemes in such a way as to sustain crofting communities in the Highlands & Islands. He said: "I am extremely

concerned at the suggestion from the Pillar One consultation that rough grazing support be as low as 20 to 25 euros *per* hectare. There are very real worries among crofters and crofting organisations that at this level of support many crofts will cease to be viable. This will inevitably lead to land abandonment, rural depopulation and a substantial fall in the numbers of young stock coming to market from the northwest. I am therefore urging the Scottish Government to set the rates for rough grazing on a scale starting at the very least at 35 euros *per* hectare. This should still allow a rate to be set for higher-intensity farms at over 200 euros *per* hectare."

SRDP

The Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) Stage 2 consultation for the period 2014-2020 says that the Scottish Government proposes to proceed with extending the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grant Scheme (CCAGS) to eligible small land holders located throughout Scotland. It is further proposed that qualifying small farms will be between 3 and 50 hectares, which make up around 37,000 (73%), of the total number of agricultural holdings in Scotland. This would exclude many crofts. The average size of a croft is around five hectares, but some are only a tenth of that whilst a few are more than 50 hectares.

Mr Thompson said: "Crofters would lose out to the higher-intensity operators. I feel that the crofting way of life continues to need its own unique scheme and given that crofts are defined in law it would easily be possible to define a unique Pillar Two scheme that provides adequate support to the crofting community. Further still, I would also urge a rapid movement to the new designation 'Areas of Natural Constraint.'"

Iain Keith, of the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF), said: "On the one hand the government claims, and let me quote from the document, 'Scottish Government highlighted the value-added benefits derived from the provision and maintenance of crofting systems in remote and rural Scotland. Attention in particular was drawn to the fact that crofting tenure contributes towards the maintenance of sustainable agricultural systems that produce supplies of safe and healthy food, protect natural resources and enhance wildlife, habitats and cultural heritage.' And then on the other hand they are to take away the only agricultural support scheme we have and open it up to small farms that are not in remote and rural areas, are not in crofting tenure and do not provide anything like the benefits and public goods crofting is known for."

The *Herald* reported that there are around 17,700 crofts and about 13,000 crofters, and so it is difficult to see how there could be enough money in the SRDP (even if the funding is increased by a third) for an additional 37,000 small farmers, or 20,000 if crofts are included in the agricultural holdings total.

Richard Lochhead said: "While we are proposing to extend the scope of the scheme, we are also proposing that the budget will increase by 35% to reflect this. In addition, support to crofters is not limited to this scheme – they can also access the other support measures under the SRDP. The proposals for support for crofts and small farms are out to consultation."

The first SRDP consultation indicated a strong consensus that support should extend to the whole of Scotland on the basis that small-scale, low-intensity farms play an important role in supporting rural employment and maintaining the social fabric of rural areas.

Iain Keith said: "Richard Lochhead needs to be made aware of how his officials are interpreting

some of the consultation findings – they seem to be playing 'fast and loose' with the facts. When the government claims that 60% of respondents agreed to CCAGS being extended to non-crofters, this finding is presented as if it is in response to a question applied Scotland-wide. But, in fact, the question in the consultation only asked if the extension should apply within the crofting counties – not throughout Scotland. In addition, the unsupported 'strong consensus' the government is claiming exists for extending the scheme over the whole of Scotland appears to have been formed by simply disregarding the opinions of the 40% of respondents who didn't want CCAGS extended to non-crofters. It is obvious that this 40% wanted funding retained within the crofting counties because that is where crofters are. At the very best, therefore, there could only be 60% support for the change proposed by the government if all the remaining were in favour, which is not demonstrated. That is not a 'strong consensus' and should not be portrayed as such."

The SCF said that the little financial support which crofters receive is under threat of significant reduction under the proposed CAP reforms. Opening up the CCAGS to non-crofting interests and a delay in the introduction of Areas of Natural Constraint demonstrated how Holyrood is 'on the brink of abandoning the periphery.' Norman Leask of SCF claimed that the large farm lobby did not like crofters having their own scheme, and had stepped up lobbying pressure to the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) called for a greater portion of the SRDP budget to be used for wildlife-friendly farming initiatives – commonly referred to as agri-environment schemes. SWT also ran an online campaign calling for Richard Lochhead to commit at least £60m *per* year to agri-environment schemes, rather than the proposed £49m *per* year. Bruce Wilson said: "SWT is aware of the relatively poor budget allocation given to Scotland compared to the rest of the UK, however, we were disappointed by the short-sighted decision taken by the Scottish Government to give rural development schemes – where agri-environment schemes are funded – a low budget share. Agri-environment schemes give us a chance to pay farmers for the benefits they provide above and beyond food production, like carbon storage or water quality improvement."

Consultation on the Stage 2 proposals closes on 17 March.

WORKING CROFTS

The Crofting Commission is conducting a postal census of crofts. At the time of the Crofting Reform Bill in 2010, there were almost 2,000 absentee crofters and an unknown number of neglected crofts in the Highlands & Islands. The annual notice will establish what activity is being conducted on the crofts, and how many people live there.

GREYLAG GEESE

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has announced a pilot scheme that will introduce the shooting and sale locally of greylag geese under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. The geese have been threatening crofting in North Uist, South Uist and Benbecula in the Outer Hebrides. There is a general prohibition of the sale of wild goose carcasses, introduced in the 1960s across the UK for conservation reasons to remove any commercial incentive in relation to hunting geese. The scheme is also being trialled in Orkney [Sep 13].

SNH said that the long-term goal is to minimise agricultural damage while maintaining a viable goose population. Selling geese will help to generate income for the community and help pay for some of the goose management work.

Licences will initially be provided to enable the sale for a trial period until March 2015.

SEA EAGLES

Donnie Ross from Kincaig, who recently resigned from the Crofting Commission [Sep 13], wrote in a letter to *The Scottish Farmer*. "Nothing short of complete eradication [of sea eagles] will do, and it is the same for the pine marten – both should be absolutely destroyed. The National Sheep Association, the Crofting Commission and Crofting Federation should be backing this to the hilt. Will Mr Lochhead or Mr Wheelhouse do anything about the sea eagle? No, they didn't even prick their ears until a danger to our native eagle was mentioned and for Mr Lochhead to say they are a tremendous tourist attraction is rubbish. If, like me, he had spoken to tourists from all over the world over the last 20 years at 'Working Sheepdogs' here, he would know they don't come for one attraction but to see as much as they possibly can. The oblivion (sic) of the sea eagle wouldn't matter and, indeed, would be an absolute blessing for the countryside and its animals." [Jan 14].

George Macdonald, of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) said on Facebook: "More people need to speak out. Mr Ross of Leault is absolutely correct with his observations." However, his post later disappeared from his page, and he denied that he meant to endorse the eradication of protected wildlife.

The Sunday Herald reported that a spokesman for RSPB Scotland said: "For such a senior member of the Scottish Gamekeepers' Association (SGA) to express unequivocal support for the absolute destruction of our cherished and symbolic native species seems to reflect those outmoded Victorian values that led to their previous extinction. These attitudes have absolutely no place in a modern Scotland. These sorts of comments certainly appear to completely undermine the SGA's oft-voiced claim to be Scotland's true conservationists."

An SGA spokesman said that the association didn't have any policy on sea eagles other than believing that those whose businesses suffered should be compensated: "The SGA does not believe pine martens should be completely destroyed. The Facebook comments by Mr Macdonald were an off-the-cuff viewpoint on a personal site based on a more general feeling that people working every day in the countryside should, instead of taking the view that no one listens to them anyway, voice their concerns. It is everyone's right to voice an opinion equally, regardless of how valid or otherwise people deem that opinion to be. No one should be arrogant enough to say they know someone else's problems."

AGRI-RENEWABLES

The Agri-Renewables Strategy for Scotland has been launched by the Scottish Government. Six key areas have been identified to aid the development of renewables on farms and crofts. These include community involvement & benefits, skills & advice, planning & consents, grid connection, finance & technology costs and research & innovation. Case studies are presented within the strategy. See: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/02/7600



WOODLANDS

NATIVE WOODLAND SURVEY

The Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS), carried out by Forestry Commission Scotland over eight years, has resulted in the first complete map and dataset of native woodlands in Scotland [Aug 12].

Thought to be the most comprehensive habitat survey project ever carried out in the UK, and possibly the first example of its kind in Europe, the survey results include details on the location, type, extent, composition and condition of all native woodlands, and plantations on ancient woodland sites, over 0.5 hectares in size.

The survey found that over 22.5% (311,153 hectares) of Scotland's forests are native woodland; 42% of these are in the Highlands. 46% of native woodland is in 'satisfactory' condition for biodiversity. There is no comparable historic data to compare with the survey, but findings suggest that over the past 40 years a significant amount of ancient woodland has been lost in the uplands. It found that a third of Scotland's native woods show significant damage from grazing animals, particularly deer.

Carol Evans, of the Woodland Trust Scotland, said: "We're happy that the Scottish Government is taking the issue of woodland loss from grazing seriously and is considering forming a working group to look at addressing the woodland loss highlighted by this important and comprehensive survey."

Up to 14% of Scotland's ancient woodland has been lost since the last survey, the Ancient Woodland Inventory, was completed. Up to 12% of the ancient woodland has been lost to what is now just open land, while much smaller amounts – generally less than 1% – have been lost to agriculture or development. Since the survey was completed, a further 7,858 hectares of native trees have been planted.

The dataset is available, free of charge, online. There are reports for each local authority area and one over-arching national report. Regional reports for national parks and the Central Scotland Green Network will be published shortly.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) called for all landowners and managers to support sustainable deer management and adhere to the voluntary deer code of practice in order to reduce the damaging effects of overgrazing to these fragile and rare habitats. Dr Maggie Keegan said: "We know that in some areas of Scotland, deer numbers are too high and are out of kilter with the natural environment. This comprehensive, eight-year, study provides compelling evidence that cannot be ignored – deer in some areas of the uplands are the number one threat to Scotland's ancient native woodlands. These woodlands are home to some of Scotland's rarest species such as capercaillie, Scottish wildcat, Scottish crossbill and the delicate twinflower. This report is timely, as the Scottish Government's Wild Deer Strategy is under review this year and if we are going to reverse the decline to Scotland's most threatened habitats we may have to rethink the current voluntary approach to deer management."

Mike Daniels, of the John Muir Trust, said: "This report confirms what most people who live in, work in or visit Scotland's countryside know – that overgrazing by excessive deer numbers is seriously damaging our native woodlands. We urgently need to move from a voluntary system of deer management to a sensible, regulated approach before we lose any more of our precious native woodland heritage."

Richard Cooke, of the Association of Deer Management Groups and the Lowland Deer Network Scotland, said: "This new piece of work will be extremely helpful in focusing deer management on areas where there are specific issues in relation to deer and native woodlands. We do believe, however, that there has been a significant turnaround in the last 30 years in the impacts of deer on native woodland and it is too easy to blame deer at every turn when other

factors, for example grazing from other herbivores and now widespread tree disease, are also taking their toll."

He said that it was clear that effective deer management planning was vital, particularly at the early stages of any planting or regeneration programme. But he added that all available methods should be used, including deer fencing.

Alex Hogg, of SGA, also called for fencing. Speaking about the survey, he said: "We fear the danger in this considerable piece of work is that conservationists will translate it as a green light to hammer Scotland's deer, which is not the long-term answer."

He said conservation groups were quick to claim there were too many deer, but there had been a 10% drop in deer numbers in the Monadhliaths since 2004, by 26% in Knoydart in seven years and 14% in West Sutherland, also in seven years.

See: www.forestry.gov.uk/NWSS

SCOTS PINE

The Herald reported that the charity, Trees for Life, warned that higher priority must be given urgently to the conservation of Scotland's pinewoods. Alan Watson Featherstone said that several giant Scots pines at Trees for Life's Dundreggan Conservation Estate near Loch Ness were uprooted and blown over, and others badly damaged in severe storms in December. Some of these were probably more than 200 years old. Ancient pines were also lost in the Glen Affric National Nature Reserve.

The vulnerability of even well-established Scots pines to extreme weather was highlighted, something that was likely to increase with climate change. A Trees for Life spokesman said: "In a healthy forest ecosystem, deer numbers would be in balance with regenerating trees but imbalances in the Highlands landscape have created a 200 year generation gap for Scots pines. Until fencing and conservation-oriented deer culling began in the past two decades, there were no trees younger than 150 years in most locations."

- *Dothistroma* needle blight normally affects lodgepole and Corsican pine in Scotland; Scots pine was believed to have low susceptibility to the disease. However, there has been an increase in the distribution and severity of the disease on Scots pine, particularly in Scotland.

AIGAS FOREST

The Scottish Land Fund has awarded £221,000 to Aigas Community Forest to purchase part of the 700 acre Aigas Forest, near Beaully in Easter Ross. It will also lease the remaining area of commercial woodland, bringing the whole forest into community control.

STORR WOODLAND

50,000 native tress will be planted in the Storr Woodland, in north Skye, as part of improvement works planned by Highland Council.



FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

LOCH ETIVE

The Herald reported that Argyll & Bute councillors have approved Dawnfresh Seafoods' application for a ten cage fishfarm expansion on Loch Etive [Dec 13]. Dawnfresh currently operates five fishfarms on the loch, with the proposed new site expected to be the largest.

A spokesman for the Friends of Loch Etive campaign said that 89% of residents they had polled objected to the application: "Despite a persuasive presentation from Ardchatten Community Council, a powerful legal challenge

by us and a series of strong arguments against, the councillors ignored all the protest and huge local opposition to the plan. So much for local democracy.”

WILD FISHERIES REVIEW

The remit and scope of the independent Wild Fisheries Review has been announced by the Scottish Government [Jan 14]. The review will look at how to manage, conserve and develop wild fisheries to maximise the sustainable benefit of Scotland’s wild fish resources to the country as a whole and particularly to rural areas.

A panel, chaired by Andrew Thin, will include Jane Hope and Michelle Francis and will be supported by a Technical Advisory group comprising Marine Scotland Science, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency and the Institute of Fisheries Management.



MARINE

NATIONAL MARINE PLAN

The *Sunday Herald* reported that ministers are consulting on a national marine plan to enable the sustainable economic growth of fishing, renewable and other marine industries [Jul 13].

The Scottish Fishermen’s Federation (SFF), in a submission to the consultation, said: “Sea fishing, which has a tradition almost as long as the existence of the nation, deserves protection in the planning process in the same way as protection in the terrestrial planning process is granted to agriculture. Unfortunately, the opposite is the case when it comes to be assessed against sustainable development. The additional twist of the screw is that fishermen will not receive any form of compensation for the loss of their livelihoods and the inevitable depression that will bring to families and communities.”

The SFF claimed that fishing is being given a lower priority than marine renewables and suggests that the plan threatens the historic right to fish in Scottish waters, granted in legislation passed by a former Scottish Parliament in 1705. Bertie Armstrong of SFF said: “Any new plan must take account of existing and traditional rights, while explaining properly any change of regulation or approach.”

Professor Murray Roberts, of Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh said: “The SFF response rests on the erroneous assumption that agriculture and fishing are similar, though in fact they are fundamentally different. One uses the land to grow crops or farm animals, while the other relies on capturing wild animals from the marine environment. The analogy is stretched to breaking point when it’s suggested that trawling the seabed is like ploughing a field. It is vitally important that the scientific evidence underpinning future sustainable fisheries is not misrepresented.”

The Clyde Fishermen’s Association, in another submission, warned that marine renewables encouraged by the plan could damage the future of fishing.

Calum Duncan, of the umbrella group Scottish Environment LINK, said: “Everyone wants a viable and healthy fishing industry, and introducing measures to reduce the environmental footprint of fishing activities will help the industry in the long-term.”

Alex Kinninmonth, from the Scottish Wildlife Trust, said: “[The plan] fails to fully recognise that healthy seas and the protection of natural resources are a requirement for the long-term prosperity of the marine economy and coastal communities.”

DALGETY BAY

The *BBC News* website reported that UK defence minister, Andrew Murrison, said in a parliamentary written reply to Gordon Brown MSP: “I will write to you shortly with the detail of the timelines for the further scientific risk assessment and other work necessary to identify an appropriate long-term solution [to the remediation of radioactivity] at Dalgety Bay in Fife. This timetable has been agreed between the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and the Ministry of Defence and should result in identification of the preferred management option for the site by summer 2014. Once work on identifying the most appropriate long-term management option has concluded, we expect to play an active part in supporting SEPA in their engagement with wider stakeholders ... to discuss the practicalities of implementation” [Jan 14].

CLIMATE CHANGE

Professor Mike Burrows, of the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) near Oban, is the lead author of a report, *Geographical Limits to Species – Range Shifts are Suggested by Climate Velocity*. It highlights that marine life living in the North Sea is particularly at risk from rising sea temperatures because it is trapped by coastlines, with no direct route to the North Atlantic which could offer refuge.

The paper, published in *Nature*, shows how fast, and in which direction, local climates have already shifted which is crucial information for anticipating the future. The research also pinpoints vulnerable areas, which will help focus conservation efforts.

Professor Burrows said: “Knowing the areas of potential vulnerability to the effects of blocked shifts can help focus conservation efforts. When, in a particular location, temperatures exceed the upper limit for a certain species, that species can no longer live there. Likewise, when temperatures in another place become warmer than a species’ lower limit, that place can become newly habitable. This analyses shows where you’d expect to see species relocations. Mapping these areas around the globe shows those places where biodiversity may be compromised by climate change, alongside all the other threats to life in an increasingly crowded and developed world.”

In the North Sea, the centre of distribution of cod moved 100 km northwards between 1961 and 2001 whilst in the same period plankton in the North East Atlantic have shifted 1,000 km.

A SAMS spokesman said: “While some species may be able to adapt fast enough to changes in their environment and while others may disperse to colonise new habitats with thermal conditions they can tolerate, there will be species that can neither adapt nor move. Those species are likely to go extinct.”

SOUND OF BARRA SAC

Voluntary Action Barra & Vatersay (VABV) has been appointed to facilitate the development of a community led management structure of the Sound of Barra Special Area of Conservation (SAC) that will be presented to ministers this summer [Jul 13]. A management group will be established later this year with support, as required, from Marine Scotland.

Western Isles councillor, Donald Manford, said: “Since the last century our community has been striving to stem the relentless loss of influence over the environment and resources around our shores. We have for the first time an exciting opportunity to create a structure which will empower the people who work here to actively manage our resources.”



POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

DEER CONTROL

The *BBC News* website reported that the Scottish Parliament’s Rural Affairs, Climate Change & Environment committee has been examining how the present voluntary deer management code of practice, introduced in 2012, is working [Nov 13].

It said that it was taking too long to implement effective deer management plans across Scotland, and some deer management groups lacked public accountability. In the absence of large predators, Scotland’s deer population has to be controlled to limit over-grazing.

The committee said that local groups must have their plans in place by the end of 2016 or face further action if the current voluntary system fails.

The committee’s convener, Rob Gibson MSP, said: “There is no doubt this is a controversial subject, with strong views on either side of the debate. What was clear from the evidence our committee heard was that we need deer management groups to be effective and environmentally responsible, bringing in all interests, not just those of landowners. At the moment, the picture is patchy and inconsistent. The committee considers that there is no definitive evidence of the need to introduce a statutory duty of sustainable deer management for deer management groups. However, if all 43 deer management groups do not get their act together, this committee will have no choice but to recommend further action.”

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that the committee concluded:

- The impacts of deer rather than their absolute numbers is most important when considering approaches to deer management
- In some areas there is a need to implement further practical measures to protect the biodiversity of designated sites and the wider landscape and environment. The committee requested research on the impacts of deer outwith designated sites, and the impacts on the natural heritage of changing herbivore numbers in our uplands, following declines in the number of hill sheep.
- It recommended that the Scottish Government undertakes an assessment of the effectiveness of Section 7 agreements, as part of the forthcoming review of the current wild deer strategy

Richard Cooke, of the Association of Deer Management Groups, said: “There is much in this report with which we agree, for example that the impacts of deer rather than numbers are most important, and that it is premature to undertake a review of the Code of Practice on Deer Management at this time. Whilst there are many deer management groups that are exemplary in what they do, there are a number that, for one reason or another, do not attain the required level of performance. We know that there has to be improvement in certain quarters and, even before the inquiry began last autumn, we had actively begun the process to effect this.”

Dr Maggie Keegan, of the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), said: “SWT is pleased that the Rural Affairs committee has heeded the advice from environmental organisations like ourselves who think that in some areas of Scotland not enough is being done to manage deer in a sustainable way. Sustainable deer management means striking the right balance between the public and private interest to ensure that the best outcome is achieved to support the rural economy and allow for protection of the environment. It is a difficult task at the best of times and is impossible if there is no deer management plan in place.

“There is no doubt that in some areas deer are out of balance with nature; indeed, the new native woodland survey pointed the finger at red deer

as having the greatest impact on ancient and native woodland [see WOODLAND above]. So with this in mind, SWT hopes the Scottish Government takes on board all the committee's findings including supporting the 2016 deadline."

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Alex Hogg, of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, said: "We found it strange this subject was brought back to parliament when it was agreed during lengthy consultations of the WANE bill that the Code of Practice should be introduced and given time to bed in. Progress towards goals has been made and more needs to be done before we can accurately assess the effectiveness of this. It would be unfair, in any situation, for a judgement to be delivered part-way rather than at the end of a process."

SEA EAGLES

Angus MacDonald MSP asked in a parliamentary question how many farmers and crofters had applied for compensation under the Sea Eagle Management Scheme, broken down by parliamentary constituency [Jan 14].

Paul Wheelhouse, the environment minister replied: "The scheme pays for positive management of sheep flocks, in order to reduce conflict with sea eagles. It does not pay compensation for lamb losses. The scheme ran for three years from 2011-13, and closed in summer 2013, but Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) will honour all agreements entered into under the scheme. Through the scheme, SNH offered three-year management agreements (MAs) to land managers.

SNH received 70 applications, all of which resulted in MAs being offered to the applicants. Of those 70 MA offers, 62 have been accepted or concluded by the land manager and seven agreements were rejected by the applicants. The final management agreement was only offered recently, so it is not known whether the land manager will accept the offer.

Of the 62 concluded agreements, one contains 'special measures to reduce impacts from sea eagles'; two contain 'promotional measures'; four contain 'special measures to benefit sea eagles' and 58 contain 'sheep management measures.' Some MAs contain more than one element.

17 of the MAs are with crofters/common grazings: nine are in Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch; one in Argyll and Bute; five in Caithness, Sutherland and Wester Ross and two in Na h-Eileanan an Iar.

Two of the MAs are with constituted community groups as 'promotional measures' agreements, of which one is in Argyll & Bute (Mull) and one in Na h-Eileanan an Iar.

43 MAs are with farms/estates (*i.e.* not registered croftland) of which 31 are in Argyll & Bute, nine in Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch and three in Caithness, Sutherland and Wester Ross.

SNH has commissioned a review and evaluation of the scheme and this will be completed in March. It will help inform the design of a new scheme, along with advice/input from the Sea Eagle Stakeholder Group, which advised on the design of the current management scheme.

SNH will work with bodies such as the NFU Scotland and the Scottish Crofting Federation over the coming months to design a scheme that best meets the needs of land managers and others with an interest in sea eagle management.

• The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Jackson Carlaw MSP also asked a question during Rural Affairs questions at the Scottish Parliament. He said that farmers and crofters felt helpless at not being able to protect their sheep from a predatory sea eagle in the way that they would

protect their stock against any other predators. Cabinet secretary, Richard Lochhead, spoke of the value of tourism caused by the introduction of sea eagles, and agreed to meet farmers to discuss their concerns.

CARLOWAY ESTATE

The *BBC News* website reported that residents of the Carloway Estate on the Isle of Lewis have voted in favour of a planned community buyout of the land [Jan 14]. In a postal ballot, residents voted by 254 to 86 in favour of the buyout. There was a turnout of 67.6%. The ballot was the first time that 16 and 17 year-olds have been allowed to vote on plans for a community buyout. The Galloway family, owners of the 11,400 acre estate, have agreed to sell.

NATIONAL BIRD

The Petitions Committee sought written advice from the Scottish Raptor Study Group and SNH, following a petition to the Scottish Government to adopt the golden eagle, *Aquila chrysaetos*, as Scotland's National Bird [Jan 14]. Written advice has now been submitted.

The Raptor Persecution Scotland blog reported that SNH has refused to recommend the golden eagle to be Scotland's National Bird. SNH said that it was a contender, but suggested that other species were also worthy of consideration, including the red grouse.

The Scottish Raptor Study Group expressly supports the designation of the golden eagle as Scotland's National Bird and makes clear that this designation would go some way to reducing the current illegal persecution of this species. See: <http://raptorpersecutionscotland.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/snh-response-to-petition-1500-feb-19-2014.pdf>; <http://raptorpersecutionscotland.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/srsg-response-to-petition-1500-feb-23-2014.pdf>



GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

WILD LAND

The *Herald* reported that a Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) study reveals that the developed area of Scotland rose from 65% (19,890 square miles) in 2008 to 71.4% (21,732 square miles) in 2012. The research reveals that the key reason for the dramatic change in recent years is wind turbines. Analysis shows the proportion of visual impact caused by turbines has more than doubled, from 19.9% in 2008 to 41.7% in 2012. The SNH research also shows the proportion of Scottish land that could be counted as being 'without visual influence of built development' has dropped by 31% over 10 years from 12,476 square miles in 2002 to 8,824 square miles in 2012. Twelve years ago it was estimated 41% of Scotland was unspoilt by development. In 2012 it was 29%.

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) says it has become increasingly concerned about the intrusion of windfarms on to mountains and moors with no sign of a curb to their expansion.

Dave Gordon of MCofS said: "We recognise that onshore wind has a role to play in a balanced energy mix, but the current generously incentivised mania for turbines is producing an acutely unbalanced energy mix. We are behaving in a totally unsustainable manner in the name of sustainability. Developers won't stop coming until the money tap is turned off. They don't care about Scotland, just their profits."

The National Trust for Scotland said: "Our research found that development affecting

Scotland's landscapes is a concern for people, who feel these places should be protected. The impact of adverse developments, especially pylons and wind turbines, on lochs and mountains, coastal landscapes and historic settings is a worry."

Calum Brown of the Scottish Wild Land Group said: "I think the wild land is being destroyed and industrialised by windfarms which have little impact on climate change. Wild land is a precious resource and must be protected, but still windfarms keep popping up."

John Mayhew, director of the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, said: "A lot of the damage has been done. But the Scottish Government's wish to expand onshore windfarms means there is more to come."

The National Planning Framework (NPF) and review of Scottish planning policy currently being considered could see windfarms being excluded from the country's national parks and designated scenic areas [Jan 14].

• The *Herald* reported that the John Muir Trust said that the vast majority of those who responded to SNH's consultation on its map of Scotland's core areas of wild land supported it [Jan 14].

JMT analysed the 410 responses received and found that 80% backed the map; 14% opposed it and 6% were neutral. It was criticised by the Crofting Commission and community owners of South Uist.

Stuart Brooks, of JMT, said: "We would now urge politicians of all parties to come together to support the map as the next step towards protecting Scotland's world famous wild land from unsightly and ecologically damaging development. In particular we would ask the Scottish Government to include a reference to the wild land map in the draft NPF, which is now being scrutinised by parliamentary committees."

John Hutchison, of JMT, said: "As one of the main driving forces campaigning for the map, the JMT would emphasise that this is not about preventing small-scale development of renewables or other infrastructure by communities and local people. This is about stopping the mass industrialisation of our wildest landscapes under tangles of turbines, pylons, road and power substations. These developments might generate lavish profits for landowners and distant shareholders, but they create few if any jobs for local people."

See the consultation responses on: www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1184205.pdf

HILL TRACKS

The *Herald* reported that the Cairngorm National Park Authority (CNPA)'s planning committee has refused applications from both the Ben Alder and Drumochter estates to keep stretches of track built for the construction of the Beaully/Denny power line upgrade. CNPA said: "The retention of the temporary access track will neither conserve nor enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area. The access track represents a significant scar in the landscape and is proposed for retention as a matter of expediency rather than the route having been designed to best address the landscape and ecology constraints, which in itself may not have been appropriate."

Ben Alder Estate wanted to keep just under half a mile of track to aid the running of the estate by allowing better management of woodland, deer and moorland fires.

Drumochter Estate wanted nearly three miles of track for ease of taking shooting parties up on to the hill, arguing: "The requirement for estate staff and clients to use the A9 for accessing parts of the estate would be much reduced, offering significant road safety improvements."

When the Scottish Government approved the

Beaully/Denny transmission line in 2010, it was on condition these temporary access tracks be removed because of their environmental impact.

The planning consent given to developers SSE and Scottish Power requires them to return the tracks to their previous state. Landowners who want to retain the temporary access tracks on their land need to apply for planning permission to their local council.

There are almost 60 such tracks covering some 100 miles in SSE's northern section of the 137 mile power line.

Forestry Commission Scotland wants to keep a track with bridges near Kinloch Laggan for forest management. This has yet to be considered by the planning committee.

Guisachan Estate, in conjunction with neighbouring Kerrow Farm, submitted a joint planning application to The Highland Council to retain two of the access tracks that were constructed for the Beaully/Denny line in Glen Affric. The application states that the tracks are required for farm and estate access. WPD Scotland is shortly to submit an application for the Beinn Mhor windfarm on the estate.

NUCLEAR WASTE DISPOSAL

The *Sunday Herald* reported that Babcock, the engineering group that runs Rosyth Dockyard in Fife for the Ministry of Defence (MoD), has submitted an environmental impact assessment (EIA) to the UK government's Office for Nuclear Regulation. The EIA is for the dismantling of seven decommissioned nuclear submarines that have been berthed there since the 1990s.

The MoD said that dismantling would not commence until a site for the disposal of more than 500 tonnes of intermediate waste has been identified. It also said the waste would not be stored at Rosyth.

The *BBC News* website reported that the MoD issued a shortlist of five potential sites for the most hazardous waste. Radioactive components will be stored until the 2040s when the UK's Geological Disposal Facility, for the permanent disposal of spent fuel and nuclear waste, is planned to come into operation. The waste will include components from redundant submarines stored in Plymouth, and nine submarines still in service. The shortlisted sites include Chapelcross in Dumfriesshire, owned by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.

The rest will be disposed of as low-level waste in Drigg in Cumbria, or recycled because its contamination is deemed to fall below the regulatory threshold.

John Large, an independent nuclear consultant, said that the packages of waste created were liable to be very large and difficult to transport, and that there was a national policy to store waste where it was generated. The Scottish Government does not want to store radioactive waste in Scotland.

POLLUTION PROSECUTION

Scotbeef Ltd's plant at Bridge of Allan has been fined £26,250 at Stirling Sheriff Court. Paunch contents, together with dung and straw, were allowed to overflow from a concrete midden into a tributary of the Allan Water.

COMMON GOOD LAND

The *BBC News* website reported that East Renfrewshire Council has lodged a petition with the Court of Session in Edinburgh seeking approval to build a new £24m Barrhead High School on Cowan Park in Barrhead [Jan 14]. The Cowan Park Action Group has taken legal advice over contesting the council's move on the town's biggest green space.

The council said the petition was necessary to release the land from 'common good' to allow the school to be built. The Barrhead plan involves demolishing the existing school adjacent to the park and building a new school on football pitches. The council said that the original school would be made into a green space and the proposed footprint of the new school will be 37% smaller than the existing layout.

CULLODEN HOUSING

The Group to Stop the Development at Culloden said that an online petition to stop a housing development at Viewhill Farm near Culloden Battlefield has raised more than 8,000 signatures [Jan 14]. Demonstrations have also been held, at the site and in Inverness. The petition is to be presented to First Minister Alex Salmond, Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, and the Cabinet Secretary for Culture & External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop.

A separate petition is being submitted to the Public Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament.

- The Battlefields Trust has called for the Scottish Government to reverse its decision to grant planning approval. Frank Baldwin, of the trust, said: "We see this as the thin end of the wedge. Allowing houses there risks giving a green light to developers to push through plans to build inappropriately on battlefield brownfield land. Visitors don't want to see modern urban sprawl destroying their views and disrupting their understanding of Scottish battlefields."

Dr Tony Pollard, of Glasgow University's Centre for Battlefield Archaeology, said: "After some soul searching, I have come out against the Culloden housing development. If I don't say no to this I won't be able to live with myself in ten years time when the corridor to the west is covered with houses."

DERELICT LAND

The *2013 Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey* has been published by the Scottish Government. The amount of derelict and urban vacant land in Scotland decreased by 187 hectares (1.7%) to 11,114 hectares in 2013.

Of the 11,114 hectares of derelict and urban vacant land recorded in the 2013 survey, 2,355 hectares (21%) were classified as urban vacant and 8,759 hectares were classified as derelict (79%). The amount of land brought back into use was 402 hectares; the amount of new land reported by local authorities was 189 hectares.

Highland has the highest amount of recorded derelict and urban vacant land containing 1,376 hectares (12% of the Scottish total). North Ayrshire has 1,333 hectares (12%), North Lanarkshire has 1,300 hectares (12%) and Glasgow has 1,195 hectares (11%).

29.7% of Scotland's population are estimated to live within 500 metres of a derelict site; 56% of people living in the most deprived decile in Scotland live within 500 meters of derelict land.

24% of derelict land recorded in 2013 had been previously used for mineral activity (2,028 hectares), 24% for defence (1,987 hectares) and a further 21% for manufacturing (1,771 hectares). The most common previous use for urban vacant land, where previous use is known, was agriculture (21%, or 414 hectares) and the second most common previous use was residential development (20%, or 399 hectares).

3,451 hectares (36%) of derelict and urban vacant land was reported to be developable in the short term. The most common new use for derelict land was manufacturing, with 29% (68 hectares) of the land reclaimed for this purpose.

Residential development accounted for 24% (57 hectares) of new use on derelict land. For urban vacant land, the most common new use was residential development, with 38% (60 hectares) of the land reclaimed for this purpose.

The Scottish Government's Vacant & Derelict Land Fund has contributed (either fully or partially) to the re-use of 305 hectares (in total) of previously vacant and derelict land across Dundee City, Glasgow City, Highland, North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire.

See: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Planning/Publication

BLANEFIELD

The *Herald* reported that 13 homes in Blanefield, Stirlingshire faced a bill of more than £600,000 to decontaminate their gardens of lead and arsenic [Sep 13]. The ground is the former site of the Blanefield Printworks, which closed more than a century ago, and it is thought the chemicals leaked into the ground from dye vats; the housing development was built in the 1950s. The contamination was found as part of a routine inspection.

More than half of the cost is a landfill tax, levied to force companies to clean up industrial sites that fall out of use, and not designed for private residents who have inherited the remediation bill.

The UK government has now agreed to provide £225,000 to meet part of the bill for remediation. Stirling Council has offered £125,000 towards the clean-up. The Scottish Government has now pledged up to £300,000 to help the householders

A Scottish Government spokesman said: "Landfill tax and the decision to exempt disposals of contaminated material is currently a matter for Westminster, who could simply exempt the residents of Blanefield altogether. The Treasury is expected to receive £300,000 from the residents of Blanefield and are simply giving them some – but not all – of that money back."

GROUSE LICENCES

A letter written by Logan Steele of Auchterarder to *The Scotsman* urged the government to introduce a licensing system for grouse shooting estates [Jan 14]. He wrote: "The call from the Scottish Raptor Study Groups for the grouse shooting industry to be licensed is a matter for regret, although sadly inevitable following decades of failed initiatives, joint working groups, codes of practice committees and legislative changes.

"The industry had it within its gift to cease the illegal persecution of birds of prey years ago, but chose not to. Within the past month alone on grouse moors, we have seen a poisoned golden eagle in Angus, a shot buzzard in Stirlingshire, poisoned baits in South Lanarkshire, and an 'illegally killed' buzzard in Inverness-shire (and these are only those offences detected).

"The minister of the environment's mailbox has been inundated following the most recent eagle poisoning and with questions from several MSPs, the grouse shooting industry has finally brought upon itself the spectre of licensing. Many members of the public and MSPs alike are sickened with the industry and now is the time to license grouse shooting estates."

Tim Baynes, the director of the Scottish Land & Estates Moorland Group, responded to the same newspaper. He wrote: "Logan Steele wrongly concludes that any bird of prey illegally killed is the responsibility of 'the grouse shooting industry' and published unproven allegations. He cites an incident where there is an active police investigation into the poisoning of an eagle in Angus. Two months on, no evidence has emerged that the killing is linked to anyone on a grouse moor. A shot buzzard in Stirlingshire was found on 2 February last year

(not in the past month as Mr Steele says) on the A873 near Thornhill, a long way from any grouse moor. Poisoned baits were found in Lanarkshire this month, but again a long way from any grouse moor. A buzzard found near Tomatin in December had died of 'unnatural causes.' If Mr Steele has more information he should go to the police, but it is probable his comments draw on the ill-informed rumours which this issue seems to generate."

LAND INFORMATION

The Land Information Search (LIS) has been added to Scotland's Environment website. It is map-based tool designed to assist with land, boundary and access enquiries.

The development of the LIS is a joint venture between Forestry Commission Scotland, SNH and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. See: http://map.environment.scotland.gov.uk/landinformationsearch/lis_map.html

NATURAL CAPITAL

25 organisations have signed up as members of the Scottish Forum on Natural Capital which has a vision to protect and rebuild Scotland's stocks of natural capital on which livelihoods and quality of life depend [Nov 13]. The founding partners are the Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scotland's 2020 Climate Group, Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland, Institute of Directors Scotland and the University of Edinburgh.

Natural capital is the extension of the economic notion of capital to goods and services relating to the natural environment, including lochs and rivers, soil, forests, wetlands, grasslands and our rich marine environment. Natural capital underpins Scotland's economy, providing vital benefits such as pollination, flood protection, natural carbon capture and storage, fertile soil and the range of wild species from which come food, fuel and medicines. See: <http://naturalcapitalscotland.com>

SNARING

The *BBC News* website reported that the Scottish SPCA said that deer are being illegally snared in East Ayrshire, particularly in Auchinleck and Cumnock. There are no circumstances in which it is legal to snare or entrap a deer and anyone suspected of doing so could be subject to criminal proceedings.

GREEN BRIDGES

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that the A9 Green Bridges group is championing the need for the provision of bridges and underpasses designed to allow movement of wildlife across the trunk road. The group considers that current dualling plans do not have adequate provision for wildlife; proposed mitigation measures are inadequate and based on insufficient habitat data.

Transport Scotland said that four new underpasses are planned between Aviemore and Kingussie, which will allow for mammal movements. It said: "Environmental requirements are an essential part of the work to dual the A9."

 **ENERGY**

BEAULY/DENNY LINE

Highland Council has given SSE six months to resolve a 'statutory noise nuisance' emanating from the northern end of the upgraded Beauly/Denny transmission line or it will face legal action [May 13]. The council has issued a noise abatement notice. Failure to comply with the terms of notice without reasonable excuse may

result in prosecution in a sheriff court, under part three of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

People living near the line have complained about the noise for several months, and say that it seriously affects everyday life; at least 1,500 people are affected. A particular compressor has been found to be responsible, which stabilises the voltage going down the line.

WINDFARM UPDATES

Cairngorms: The Save Monadhliath Mountains (SMM) group and Ramblers Scotland have called on RWE Innogy UK Ltd to withdraw the 31 turbine proposal at Allt Duine [Jan 14]. The nearest turbine is one kilometre outside the national park boundary.

SMM spokesman Chris Townsend said: "Though RWE never tire of trying, it is not credible to argue that the windfarm's impact on the park can be overcome. The cabling, roads and turbines will have an irrevocable impact on the landscape, wildlife and ornithology of the park and the Monadhliath Mountains."

Dumfries & Galloway: *The Galloway News* reported that Falck Renewables has applied for planning permission for an 11 turbine, 33 MW windfarm at Mochrum Hill. The application has been reduced from the original 15 turbines planned, and the height of the turbines has been reduced to 126 metres, following public consultation.

- The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoFS) has objected to E.ON's proposed 19 turbine windfarm near Carsphairn. MCoFS said that the site doesn't have the capacity to support a wind energy development without visually fragmenting the mountain landscape.

- Proposals for RES' 15 turbine windfarm at Solwaybank, south west of Langholm, have been recommended for refusal by planning officials [Jun 09]. Original plans were for 21 turbines. Concerns have been raised about the impact on a nearby seismological recording station and interference on air traffic control radars.

Easter Ross: *The Herald* reported that SSE has withdrawn its plans to construct an extension to the Fairburn windfarm in Glen Orrin, as it is no longer financially viable.

Highlands: The *BBC News* website reported that Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) has objected to RES' plans for the 20 turbine, 60 MW Cairn Duhie windfarm on Dava Moor. The site near Ferness, between Grantown-on-Spey and Nairn, is about four miles from the park's boundary. CNPA planning officers had recommended that no objection be raised. Moray Council and the John Muir Trust (JMT) have also objected.

- The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that Highland Council had received 38 pre-application enquiries for renewable energy projects in 2013, the largest number being for windfarms, ten more than in 2012.

South Ayrshire: PNE Wind UK's eight turbine Tralorg windfarm near Girvan has been upheld by the Scottish Government. South Ayrshire Council rejected the planning application last year.

Sutherland: SSE said that it is withdrawing its application to build the Dalnessie windfarm, which was to be the subject of a public inquiry following objections from Highland Council [Feb 13]. JMT had also opposed the application on the grounds that it was on an area of wild land. Helen McDade, of the JMT, said: "This is a major U-turn by SSE and a victory for those who want to see Scotland's wild land protected against large-scale, industrial-style development. This windfarm would have involved not just the erection of dozens of turbines, but the excavation

of thousands of tonnes of rock and the construction of tens of miles of access roads on a spectacular wild landscape. This was an unsuitable development that should never have been brought forward in the first place. It has wasted a huge amount of time, effort and money, with councillors, planning officials, local communities, environmentalists and SSE all involved in the process."

SSE said the decision to withdraw the applications was made because continued investment was no longer financially viable.

West Lothian: *The Sunday Herald* reported that communities around the 69 MW, 22 turbine Fauch Hill windfarm have negotiated a £13m community benefit from the Louis Dreyfus Group, thought to be the highest ever award by a developer. The community benefit would be £5,000/MW, and an additional £330,000 has been put into a fund to improve energy efficiency and boost broadband locally in compensation for disruption during construction. Dreyfus has agreed to let the community own one of the 3 MW turbines, and will lend the money to buy it on favourable terms. One conservative estimate says the turbine could net more than £4.5m over 25 years. If consented, the settlement and could have major implications for other Scottish communities with planned windfarms. The development was rejected by West Lothian Council in 2012, and it went to a public inquiry in 2013; a decision by Scottish ministers is being awaited. Dreyfus is planning a visitor centre at the windfarm, free parking and better access to the neighbouring Pentland Hills Regional Park.

Wester Ross: Coigach Community Development Company's application to build a single turbine on moorland near Achiltibuie has been approved by Highland Council [Nov 13]. The turbine would be sited within the Ben Mor Coigach estate owned by the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Objectors feared that the turbine would damage the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area and could affect tourism.

ABERDEEN OFFSHORE

A petition lodged by Trump International Golf Club Scotland and the Trump Organisation had asked the Court of Session in Edinburgh to rule that the Scottish Government's approval of the European Offshore Wind Deployment Centre (EOWDC) in Aberdeen Bay was unlawful and should be overturned [Nov 13]. Lawyers for Mr Trump sought judicial review of the Scottish Government's decision not to hold a public inquiry in relation to the windfarm application and of its decision to approve the project. Trump had claimed that the development would spoil the view from the new golf course at Menie in Aberdeenshire. However, judge Lord Doherty dismissed the petition. The Trump Organisation said that it would appeal the decision [see RECREATION & TOURISM]

CRUACHAN HYDRO

Scottish Power is to carry out a two-year feasibility study into the expansion of the Cruachan hydro electric power station in Argyll. The 440 MW pump storage hydro plant, one of only four in the UK, could generate up to 1,040 MW.

Proposals for an expansion of pump storage facilities have already been included in the draft National Planning Framework [Jan 14].

If approved, the project would become one of the UK's largest ever civil engineering projects. The plans would involve the construction of a second subterranean turbine hall beneath Ben Cruachan, the enlargement of the existing Cruachan dam above Loch Awe and a series of new tunnels.

First Minister Alex Salmond said: "The Scottish Government recognises the potential for future development at Cruachan and other similar

proposals for hydroelectric storage to contribute to a balanced mix of energy generation across Scotland. This could see hydro-power generate up to one-third of Scotland's entire generating capacity in the next decade."

LOCH KATRINE HYDRO

Scottish Water has abandoned plans for a hydro scheme at Allt a Choin on the north side of Loch Katrine in the Trossachs, together with the Arklet Transfer scheme on the other side of the loch. SSE was unable to provide a connection to the National Grid in the 'foreseeable future.'

MORVERN HYDRO

Morvern in Argyll has become the first community group in Scotland to invest £30,000 of community money into a run of the river hydro scheme on land managed by Forestry Commission Scotland. The 469 kW hydro scheme, on the Abhainn Shalachain, will start operating later this year. Both the Morvern Community Development Company and Morvern Community Trust have been responsible for the investment.

See: www.forestry.gov.uk/windhydro

OPENCAST COAL

RSPB Scotland said that a new independent body is needed to ensure that the opencast coal industry in Scotland is properly regulated [Jan 14]. RSPB Scotland said that previous regulation of the industry lacked a system of regular checks on sites and operators. It added that any new body could also play a role in regulating other types of development that have long-term environmental impacts, such as landfill sites or windfarms.

Aedán Smith, of RSPB Scotland, said: "A new independent compliance body, with the right expertise and resources, could be key to ensuring that the opencast coal industry is properly regulated in future and actually pays its clean-up costs for the damage it does to the environment. An over-sympathy for the industry to date in Scotland has led to a culture of light touch regulation, with local authorities getting too close for comfort to industry operators. A cautious approach to further extraction of coal in Scotland must be adopted, particularly in sensitive areas that are difficult to restore, like peatlands."

The Scottish Government has put forward a number of proposals for better regulation, including a plan for a new Independent Compliance Unit to support local authorities in monitoring opencast coal mines and ensuring that the terms of their planning permission are adhered to.

A public consultation exercise on the plans concluded at the end of this month. The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), in its response to the Scottish Government's *Consultation on Opencast Coal Restoration and Effective Regulation*, called for the damage caused by opencast coal mining to be paid for by the companies that make profit from coal mining, and not by local communities and the taxpayer. SWT called for better financial regulation to ensure that mining companies pay the full cost of the environmental restoration work. Bruce Wilson said: "SWT wants to see cast-iron guarantees so that taxpayers will not have bear the burden for the environmental clean-up of opencast coal extraction. It is clear that the 'polluter pays principle' should be applied to coal companies so that local communities and wildlife don't have to put up with natural habitats being trashed and dealing with contaminated land and water. Unfortunately, there have been some recent cases that in all honesty are truly shocking. The proper safeguards have not been in place to ensure that the environmental damage caused by coal mining is paid for by the mining

companies. Internationally important blanket bog has been damaged and this provides habitat for species such as golden plover, short-eared owl and merlin. These habitats will now not be restored as per restoration agreements. The Scottish Wildlife Trust wants to see robust, transparent safeguards put in place in the future to put the cost of cleaning up damage on those that profit from it."

- Hargreaves Services, which bought five opencast coal sites in Ayrshire, Fife and Dumfries & Galloway after the collapse of ATH Resources in 2012, has reported profits of £8.2m following the sale of 400,000 tonnes of coal from its Scottish mines in the six months to 30 November. Malcolm Spaven, of the Scottish Opencast Communities Alliance, said that Hargreaves should now spend more money on the full restoration of its sites, and not scale back agreed restoration schemes [Jan 14].

CARBON CAPTURE

The *BBC News* website reported that the UK Government has awarded funding to help with design costs for a planned carbon capture and storage (CCS) plant at Peterhead in Aberdeenshire [Sep 12]. The Peterhead scheme would see greenhouse gas emissions captured and transported to the Shell-operated Goldeneye gas field.

It is one of two preferred bidders in a £1bn competition to encourage the development of CCS technology; Grangemouth was unsuccessful.

Peterhead is sharing the funding with the White Rose project at the coal-fired Drax power station in North Yorkshire. The UK Government investment will enable the proposals for both power plants to be developed, with a final decision expected in 2015.

- The *Press & Journal* reported that a UK government study said that CO₂ stored in spent gas and oil wells could lead to fault lines opening in the seabed and the potential release of 2.7m tonnes of CO₂. The report concluded that the risk of carbon injection fracturing the seabed are extremely low but acknowledges that 'there are few proven technical options for remediating leakage from a fault.'

NUCLEAR POWER

Professor Colin McInnes, of the University of Strathclyde, wrote in the Comment column of *The Herald* that the Hunterston and Torness nuclear power reactors are the largest electricity generators in Scotland; the output from Torness alone (9 TWh) exceeds the combined output of every renewable, intermittent, generator in Scotland (8.3 TWh). Scotland's electricity generation is already 100% low carbon, despite the arbitrary Scottish Government target of generating the equivalent of 100% of electrical energy consumption from renewables by 2020. In 2012, Scotland's electrical energy consumption was 30.8 TWh, whilst production from nuclear plants was 17 TWh; wind, solar and wave production was 8.3 TWh; hydro 4.8 TWh and other renewables 1.6 TWh. Output from low carbon sources therefore exceeded domestic consumption.

RECREATION & TOURISM

MENIE ESTATE

Trump International has now withdrawn a planning application for a second golf course, hotel and housing at Menie in Aberdeenshire [see ENERGY above]. He said that he will not invest a 'penny more' in developing his golf resort now that he has lost his petition at the Court of

Session against the windfarm demonstrator project in Aberdeen Bay. Donald Trump Junior said: "The golf course is safe. It is part of the Trump portfolio. But we will not be investing in the other parts of the project. How could we spend any more capital when we are faced with this environment?"

The *Press & Journal* reported that Trump may now sell part of the site to another developer for housing.

Martin Ford, former Aberdeenshire councillor, said that the only reward may yet be 'just another 18 hole golf course.' He said: "I do not ever expect to see the golf resort that Mr Trump planned for Menie. There is no doubt that a large golf resort would have created economic activity and employment. So the northeast of Scotland could have the worst of all possible worlds. We have lost our very important Site of Special Scientific Interest."

Dr Maggie Keegan, of the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), said: "The Menie Links coastline hosts a rich assemblage of specially adapted plants and other wildlife, including a diverse breeding bird community and otters. Indeed the highly sensitive and dynamic dune system is recognised as one of the top five dune habitats in the whole of the UK. During the passage of the first planning application, the SWT failed to convince the Scottish Government that a nationally important site should be protected from development, which has led to a third of this important site being destroyed to be replaced by tarmac, bulldozed sand dunes and grass. So it comes as an enormous relief that the rest of this unique and beautiful habitat will now be saved from development."

Aedán Smith, of RSPB Scotland, said that if the Trump Organisation were to abandon its plans for full investment, it would be 'incredibly frustrating.' He said that RSPB Scotland and many others had strongly opposed the development because of the environmental damage it would cause, but were overruled by the Scottish Government which considered that the economic and social advantages of the project would outweigh the harm caused to the environment.

Sarah Malone, of Trump International Golf Links Scotland, said: "Everyone taking decisions in government is failing to understand they will not get both projects. It is either one or the other. It is either 30 jobs generated by EOWDC or 4,000 created by the Trump development."

SCOTTISH SCENIC ROUTES

The Scottish Government has announced an additional £500,000 funding to support the further roll-out of Scottish Scenic Routes Initiative pilot projects, bringing the total investment from the government for the project to £1m [Jun 13]. This will involve additional viewpoint sites within the Cairngorms National Park and along the Caledonian Canal.

NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS

SNH

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has appointed Ian Ross OBE as chairman of the board, taking over from 1 March from Andrew Thin.

SLE

Lord David Johnstone has been announced as the next chairman of Scottish Land & Estates (SLE), succeeding Luke Borwick.

SWT

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) has announced that Robin Harper, the former MSP, will take up the post of chairman in September.



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