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

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

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

WEBSITE: [www.scenes.org.uk](http://www.scenes.org.uk)

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

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

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ISSN 0955-226X

Printed by Printsmith Lochaber Ltd



## CONSERVATION

### SEA EAGLE ACTION PLAN

Scottish Farming Leader reported that NFU Scotland has submitted a Sea Eagle Action Plan to the minister for the environment, Paul Wheelhouse [Feb 14]. NFU Scotland said that there are in excess of 80 breeding pairs, plus an unspecified number of juvenile birds across the west coast in addition to a smaller number on the east coast. The financial and emotional toll placed on sheep farmers and crofters due to sea eagle predation of lambs has reached an 'intolerable and unsustainable' level. NFU Scotland said that, although the reintroduction of sea eagles has been successful from a conservation point of view, it has come at the cost of sheep farmers and crofters in some of the most economically fragile parts of Scotland. The 'meagre' budgets of management schemes have done little to reduce the impact of sea eagles on farming.

NFU Scotland recommends that Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) should, by May 2014, make a public statement acknowledging the impact of sea eagles on sheep farming. The action plan says that by June, SNH webpages and publications should be updated to reflect that statement, and in particular should acknowledge predation of live and healthy lambs, as well as other impacts. By October, SNH should establish stakeholder groups in the 'hotspot' areas of north Argyll (including Mull) and Skye & Lochaber. By February 2015, SNH should substantially increase the Sea Eagle Management Scheme budget and restructure it to be available to those affected by juvenile sea eagles; to use income foregone or minimising additional costs calculations for farmers and crofters with substantiated/comparable losses and increase payments for sheep management measures in areas where losses occur but are more difficult to substantiate.

By March, SNH should establish a quick reaction service with the most affected farmers and crofters, such as diversionary feeding around in-bye lambing areas. By April, a Sea Eagle Population Viability Analysis should be published. By September 2015, a long-term plan for the management of sea eagles in Scotland should be in place, and local projects, implementing the recommendations of the management plan, be operational by March 2017.

The action plan, and an analysis of the membership survey results, can be seen on: [www.nfus.org.uk](http://www.nfus.org.uk)

The *Badenoch & Strathspey Herald* reported that RSPB Scotland has confirmed that a pair of sea eagles has been sighted in its Abernethy Reserve in Strathspey, a new area for the birds. The female bird is a four year old from the east coast release project; the male is untagged. There are records of sea eagles at Loch Laggan and Strathspey in the 19th century, and in 1927. Local farmers, concerned about newborn lambs, held a meeting with SNH and RSPB Scotland.

### BEAVERS

The *BBC News* website reported that a YouGov poll, commissioned for the Scottish Beaver Trial, suggested that 60% of Scots back the reintroduction of beavers; 5% were opposed. The five-year trial reintroduction of the species at Knapdale in Argyll is due to end in May [Jan 14].

The Scottish Beaver Trial is a partnership led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland. It is hosted at Knapdale by Forestry Commission Scotland. The trial is the first formal reintroduction of a mammal to take place in the UK. In 2009/10, 16 Eurasian beavers were released in Knapdale in five distinct family groups. Five died and eight are missing but there are now 17 at Knapdale, eight born in Scotland.

Simon Jones, manager of the trial, said: "It is really positive to see majority support for the reintroduction of beavers to Scotland. Feedback from several business owners in the Argyll area has also been positive and suggests the trial has boosted visitor numbers. Monitoring the social and economic benefits of beavers to the local area was always one of the trial's major aims. We hope that any benefits will be lasting."

Bob Carruth of NFU Scotland, said: "As the Knapdale trial reaches the end of its five-year programme, we await with interest the results of this very controlled release within an area of native woodland and wetland in Argyll. Of more immediate concern is the unscheduled and uncontrolled release of beavers on Tayside and the significant impacts on agricultural land that have been observed. We recently facilitated a meeting between some of those in NFU Scotland involved in the Argyll trial and members from Tayside to discuss beaver reintroduction.

"We have been urging any of our members on Tayside affected by the beaver population there to respond to the ongoing survey and record any impact that the animals may be having. That will feed into the Scottish Government's decision-making process around the possible future reintroduction of the species."

Environment minister, Paul Wheelhouse, will make a final decision on the future of beavers in Scotland, based on advice from SNH. He said: "I have to keep an open mind at this stage because I haven't yet seen the evidence to be presented to me by SNH. But clearly, this is a species which was present in Scotland for many, many years before it was eradicated by man. We have an important opportunity to evaluate what the impact would be of reintroducing a species that has had a history in this country. But although it may not be a completely new species to Scotland, we do have to understand what its impacts are."

Drew McFarlane-Slack, of Scottish Land & Estates, said the Knapdale trial had produced some benefits for tourism in the area but that beaver numbers had not seen the hoped-for expansion. He said: "The experience of other EU countries suggests that the introduction of beaver would provide an additional unwarranted threat to our forestry, fishing and farming businesses."

He said that if ministers were planning to support an introduction, further trials should take place in more intensive farming and forestry areas before any decisions were made. He said that the Scottish Government would also need to create a compensation scheme for land managers.

The Knapdale beavers are to remain in place until the Scottish Government decides on their future; visitors will continue to be offered guided walks to see the beavers.

**GREEN BRIDGE**

A wildlife bridge across the A9, at Gelly near Luncarty in Perthshire, aims to make it safer for deer, red squirrels and pine martens to cross the road [Feb 14]. There is scrub vegetation covering half the width of the bridge, parallel to the vehicle lane which is bordered by a concrete grid filled with grass.

**MULL PINE MARTENS**

SNH commissioned a report, *Pine martens on the Isle of Mull. Assessing risks to native species*. It concludes that pine martens found on Mull are not native to the island and probably arrived there accidentally on timber boats about ten years ago [May 12]. The current pine marten population on Mull is not known with certainty but is thought to be between 20 and 30 animals, present in a wide area around Craignure. They are thought highly likely to establish and spread throughout the island.

Once restricted to remote areas of northwest Scotland following centuries of persecution, the pine marten has made a significant recovery and regained much of its former range due to conservation measures put in place to help it.

The report finds that pine marten impacts on Mull's native species are thought to be confined to some common bird species, although most of these will not be seriously affected. There could also be predation on game birds, reptiles and occasionally on a few species of conservation concern, such as wood warbler and hen harrier.

Andrew Campbell of SNH said: "Although a useful first step, the report confirms the limitations of our knowledge of this species' distribution on Mull and so, with the help of the local community, we'll actively monitor pine marten to get a better understanding. The information collected on the population size and distribution will allow us to identify appropriate management measures that people can take if necessary."

Although re-established in much of its former range in Scotland, the pine marten is still rare in the UK and is a legally protected species; removal of pine marten can only be permitted under licence. See: [www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned\\_reports/560.pdf](http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/560.pdf)

**DRUMCLOG BOG**

The *BBC News* website reported that SNH has awarded a £6,345 grant to QTS Group as part of an £11,000 project to restore a 75 acre peat bog in Drumclog, Lanarkshire. The bog had previously been drained by local farmers, making it a less attractive habitat for wild animals and plants.

**RING OUZELS**

RSPB Scotland has been conducting research into ring ouzels at Glen Clunie in Aberdeenshire, which suggests that the decline in numbers there is likely to have been caused by a drop in the survival of young birds in their first year. It is thought that the low survival rate could be influenced by a lack of suitable habitat. Ring ouzels are known to forage for invertebrates in short grass and a mix of grass and heather early in the summer, before switching their diet to blueberry and rowan berries later on. They also need access to deeper vegetation, such as heather, to hide their nests and newly-fledged young.

Creating suitable habitats at breeding grounds could help to attract the birds with safe nest sites and abundant foraging areas, as well as concealing young birds from predators.

The most recent survey found an estimated 3,520 breeding pairs of ring ouzel in Scotland in 2012, compared to 5,503 in 1999, when the first national survey of the birds was carried out.

**WADERS**

The *BBC News* website reported that the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) is asking its members to record the number of wading birds seen. This data will then be used to help target conservation efforts towards specific areas. The wading bird population has dropped dramatically in Scotland with the numbers of some species falling by more than 50%.

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust said its research showed wading birds breed up to three times more successfully on moors that are looked after by gamekeepers. Despite this, the population of wading birds has dropped dramatically in Scotland with 56% of curlew and lapwing populations decreasing in 17 years and with golden plover numbers decreasing by 18%.

Alex Hogg of SGA said: "What we are asking grouse keepers to do is to help us build a detailed map of breeding waders on their ground and create a baseline for future years. Whilst the principal aim here is to help wading birds, we also hope an off-shoot of this project is that it encourages gamekeepers to get into the habit of noting the wildlife on their ground so we can establish an accurate picture of biodiversity on managed moorland."

**BLACK GROUSE**

The Woodland Trust Scotland said that the number of male black grouse recorded on its Glen Finglas estate rose by 50% between 2009 and 2013. Competition on the two existing leks, where the male birds display, has led them to establish a third.

**FARMING****CAP REFORM**

The European Union has decided that Scotland will not have the option of a higher rate of coupled support in the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP); the move is not permitted under EU regulations. Scottish proposals were to use the UK's flexibility to offer up to 13% coupled support [Feb 14].

Richard Lochhead, the agriculture minister, said: "We're told we can't have higher coupled support because of regionalisation but the convergence uplift, which was earned by Scotland's hard-working farmers, has gone across the whole Member State. Having one rule for coupling and another for the convergence uplift might suit the UK government, but they cannot and should not have it both ways. Although Scotland deserves both the €223m convergence uplift and the ability to use more than 8% of our budget for coupled support, if we are not getting the latter we must be given the former."

• Finlay Matheson, of the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF), said: "At this time when our agriculture policy is being reformed, no one can have failed to have noted the, largely justifiable, claims made for why public money should be given to farmers, but when the assertion is made that a larger share should be paid to holdings on more productive land the SCF questions what criteria are used to measure the worth of land and those who care for it. Scottish Government and those representing the big agri-businesses argue that they deem support for 'activity' as paramount. They use the word 'activity' because they can't use the word 'production' – to do so would mean they were calling for production linked subsidies which would be against World Trade Organisation rules.

"Whilst no one wants to see payments going to those who are not farming, 'slipper farmers', there

are lots of different types of farming across Scotland and a large proportion of it is extensive livestock production on fragile land. Stocking rates on this land have to be low for environmental benefit but it is being suggested this type of land is under-active. Extensive livestock systems – predominant in the north and west highlands and islands – are often designated High Nature Value and deliver a range of public goods. These areas of natural constraint are as worthy, if not more so, of public support as land which is naturally more 'productive' but provides fewer other outputs.

"SCF is concerned that the Scottish Government, in allocating direct payments, is in danger of focusing too much on recompensing higher levels of 'activity' and not enough on rewarding the many public goods and gains that extensive systems deliver. As well as highly-prized livestock and crops, outputs include the maintenance of attractive landscapes and wildlife habitats on which other economic activities such as tourism depend. People from all over Scotland and the world come to visit crofting areas to see landscapes that are maintained by crofting families. Scottish Government has to broaden its appreciation of what different land management systems offer. The current fixation on 'activity' and 'slipper farmers' isn't helpful to creating a more equitable and sustainable agriculture policy for Scotland."

**GEESE**

*The Illeach* reported that NFU Scotland held a seminar, The Sustainable Management of Wild Geese, on Islay. It focussed on producing a long term management plan for wild geese on Islay and elsewhere in Scotland [Feb 14]. Scaring methods, how to measure the impact of geese and the economic losses on agricultural land, options for practical management and collaborative adaptive management of wild geese were discussed [see POLITICS below].

**NVZ**

A consultation on proposals to revise the areas where farmers have to comply with the Nitrates Action Programme has been opened by the Scottish Government. Areas most at risk of surface water and groundwater being polluted through nitrates are designated as Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs).

The proposals are based on the outcome of the review into NVZs [May 13]. They include reducing the area currently designated as NVZs in Scotland by 24% by removing areas affecting 35 groundwater bodies across the four NVZs; designating one new area, centred on Finavon, on the edge of the existing Strathmore/Fife area and proposing one new NVZ area around Piltanton Burn in the Stranraer Lowland. Any changes at Finavon and Piltanton are not proposed to take effect until autumn 2015.

Allan Bowie of NFU Scotland said: "After years of lobbying for a more proportionate approach to NVZ designation, NFU Scotland welcomes the Scottish Government's proposal to lift a significant number of Scottish farmers out of NVZ restrictions. We have always argued robust, scientific evidence must be the defining element in NVZ designation. The new methodology is more robust and is to be welcomed."

The Scottish Government must, under the EU guidelines, review and revise the NVZ designated areas at least once every four years. The review panel consisted of the Scottish Government, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, NFUS, Scottish Natural Heritage and Scotland's Rural College (SRUC). 14.2% of Scotland is currently designated as NVZ in four areas: Moray, Aberdeenshire, Banff & Buchan; Strathmore & Fife; Lothian & Borders and Lower Nithsdale. The consultation closes on 8 June. See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/04/4062](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/04/4062)

**LEATHERJACKETS**

*The Herald* reported that Professor Davy McCracken, of SRUC, led a leatherjacket survey in west and central Scotland and found the highest number of larvae recorded in 39 years. The problem applies far more widely across the country than in previous years. One field had 13.6 million grubs *per* hectare, the highest density ever found in one field. The grubs of crane flies or daddy longlegs, leatherjackets, live in the soil and eat the roots of grasses and other plants.

Over 90% of the fields sampled contained more than 0.6 million grubs *per* hectare; if left untreated, it is likely to result in severe damage to any cereals subsequently sown into that field in the spring. Nearly 60% of the fields had populations of over two million *per* hectare. An untreated field with over one million grubs *per* hectare is likely to show reduced grass growth, while at over two million *per* hectare an untreated field will show severe and visible damage to the sward.

SAC Consulting recommends that pre-ploughing insecticide treatments when the field is still under grass are more effective than those applied once any damage is under way in the spring-sown crop.

The survey has been carried out for 14 years and is part funded by the Scottish Government.

**WOODLAND****ABERNETHY**

RSPB Scotland plans to expand the largest single remnant of ancient Caledonian pine forest at Abernethy, near Grantown-on-Spey, to its natural altitude limit within 200 years. It will almost double the total size of the woodland, joining it up with the fragmented surrounding remnants, and increasing biodiversity.

RSPB said that managing and reducing the grazing pressure on the reserve from deer over 25 years has already enabled Scots pine to expand by self-seeded natural regeneration, with more than 2,000 acres of new pine saplings now established.

RSPB Scotland will plant close to 100,000 trees at the reserve over the next ten years, including birch, aspen, two species of willow and alders.

The recovery of broadleaves has been shown to be extremely slow and localised compared to the pine element at Abernethy. Few broadleaves remain to provide the vital seed source, and of those that do are highly immobile and restricted.

Giles Brockman of Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland, said: "The regeneration of the native woodland on the National Forest Estate, in Queen's Forest at Glenmore Forest Park, is steadily making its way up and over the mountains from the south west of the Ryvoan Pass, so we'll see the two forests continue to join up. The Abernethy project will give a great boost to the native woodland from the north east, so will see the two forests join up over the next 200 years."

Basil Dunlop, a Highland councillor and forestry consultant, wrote on the letters page of *The Herald*: "It is time that both the RSPB and Woodland Trust began to respect the Old Caledonian Pinewoods (OCPs), to accept that this woodland should be replenished by natural regeneration as it has been since the last Ice Age. Planting trees in this location is landscape gardening on a massive scale, not conserving our natural heritage. There is plenty of bare land elsewhere. The RSPB raised more than £1m to purchase Abernethy in the 1980s with a commitment to natural regeneration, not planting. It agreed to support the process of natural evolution. Its own surveys show the

forest is expanding naturally, with no need for intervention except grazing control. There is ample regeneration, even of broadleaved species which are inhibited by adverse soil conditions and browsing. Why plant? I hope it is not to raise finance; nature can do it better at a fraction of the cost.

"Such drastic intervention is claimed necessary to connect the Abernethy and Glenmore OCPs, but they are already joined through the magnificent Pass of Ryvoan. It is also said that it will speed up the natural spread of trees, but this is sheer impatience. Shame on the statutory authorities – Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), FC Scotland, and the Cairngorms National Park Authority – which did not object to this proposal, despite it being contrary to their stated policies on the primacy of nature in such direct descendents of the ancient boreal forest. If a conservation body such as RSPB cannot respect natural evolution and resist intervention in a designated nature reserve, what hope is there for the rest of our ancient forest heritage? One cannot restore a natural forest by unnatural intervention."

Adam Watson Featherstone, of Trees for Life, wrote in a letter to *The Herald*: "This is an important and much-needed step towards restoring the full biological diversity of these iconic woodlands. They have lost much of their broadleaved trees such as rowan, aspen and willows, which died off (being shorter-lived than the Scots pine) and then were unable to regenerate because of their greater palatability to large herbivores such as red deer. The disappearance of these trees has led to the loss of specialist species that depend on them, so that the aspen hoverfly, for instance, has become very rare and endangered in Scotland. Although good regeneration of Scots pine is now occurring in at least some of the Caledonian pinewoods, this is not the case for the more palatable broadleaved trees, which is why planting is important and necessary.

"It appears that tree planting has gained a bad name in some quarters, perhaps due to past commercial forestry practices that have resulted in the linear, single-species phalanxes of non-native conifers that are visible in plantations today. This is unfortunate, as it's a far cry from the tree planting carried out by organisations such as the RSPB and Trees for Life. We seek to replicate nature, with an irregular, variedly spaced distribution of trees, grown from seed collected from a wide range of local trees, mimicking how the trees would recover by themselves, if the current over-abundance of herbivores were not preventing that.

"I would agree with critics that some of the new native woodland schemes funded by the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP), which have used intensive forestry techniques such as machine mounding to create a linear, regular appearance to the planted woodlands, are not compatible with, or appropriate for, the ecological restoration of natural forests. I hope that the upcoming revision to the SRDP scheme will apply much tighter guidelines to correct this.

"However, in areas such as the western part of Glen Affric, where Trees for Life planted trees 23 years ago, it is already impossible to distinguish between those which regenerated naturally and those which were planted, because of their irregular, varied distribution. That visual appearance of the forest is important to us humans, and it is what contributes to the distinctiveness of the Caledonian Forest.

"It is not so important to wildlife though, and our iconic and important forest fauna, such as the red squirrel, Scottish crossbill and narrow-headed wood ant will not discriminate between areas

where trees have been planted by organisations such as the RSPB and Trees for Life and those which have regenerated naturally."

Dave Morris, of Ramblers Scotland, responded: "Alan Watson Featherstone of Trees for Life asks us to accept that the expansion of Old Caledonian Pinewood in places like Glen Affric can be achieved through a combination of natural regeneration and planting and, in 20 or so years' time, none of us will know the difference. This is equivalent to inviting us into an art gallery and indicating that unfortunately all the original paintings have now been removed, but it doesn't matter as he has replaced them all with good quality prints and we will not notice the difference.

"It is time for Trees for Life to accept that what it is doing in Glen Affric by planting is destroying an ancient woodland, naturally seeded from generation to generation, since the last Ice Age. If it wants to plant native pinewood species it can do this on other land which it owns well away from Glen Affric. It should leave Glen Affric to other land managers who should follow the excellent example being set by one of those managers, FC Scotland, which is securing plentiful natural regeneration by control of red deer, without any need for fencing and planting.

"Mr Featherstone also needs to understand that collecting seeds, raising them in a nursery and choosing where to plant is an artificial process which overrides the normal pressures of natural selection and is inappropriate in the Old Caledonian Pinewoods. Here we need to allow nature to determine the future structure, composition and speed of establishment of new woodland. Control of grazing is the only management action needed to achieve this. Furthermore, allowing woodland re-establishment to take place through the full range of natural selection processes ensures that the new woodland has the maximum levels of genetic diversity matched to the widest range of environmental conditions. This is very important in an age when we need access to high levels of genetic diversity in trying to combat the ever increasing disease problems facing our commercial woodlands.

"I agree with his call for a revision of the financial support provided by FC Scotland to private owners of native woodlands. There is far too much emphasis in existing schemes in support of planting rather than natural regeneration. Perhaps it would be better to route such public funding support through SNH in the future, rather than FC Scotland, as the primary objectives in Old Caledonian forest management are more geared towards conservation and public enjoyment rather than commercial forestry.

"We appreciate that the present system encourages organisations like Trees for Life to seek funding for planting from FC Scotland, grant-awarding bodies, their members and the wider public. This must stop before any more Old Caledonian Pinewood is damaged by such inappropriate techniques. Establishing new native pinewood habitat is a good objective, providing it is done well away from the ancient woodlands where the primary objective should be their extension up to their natural altitudinal tree lines through natural regeneration. This is what the money should be spent on, not wasted on planting in places where nature can do the job for us."

*The Herald* reported that Dr Adam Watson said: "SNH and FC Scotland are statutory guardians of Caledonian woods. Regulations stipulate natural regeneration, which has continued for millennia, free. Expensive human interference by collecting and growing seeds involves unnatural selection, so that planted trees differ from original natural populations. The RSPB assert that planting is

needed because broadleaved trees are scarce. This belies profound ignorance of Caledonian woods and their north-European counterparts. These species are scarce because the less acidic soils that favour them are scarce. We should respect nature, not think arrogantly we know better."

He said that SNH's consent to RSPB Scotland planting involved local staff who lacked recognised pinewood expertise and did not consult SNH's senior scientists. He claimed that by consenting, FC Scotland also broke the regulations. He said: "SNH and FC Scotland knew this last autumn but divulged nothing publicly. SNH, FC Scotland and the Cairngorm National Park Authority neglected their duty. This requires public inquiry; withdrawal of consent to plant; and removal of trees planted so far."

However, FC Scotland said that the proposed planting was the subject of a detailed planning and consultation process and is mainly comprised of poorly-represented broadleaf trees found locally.

The Herald reported that independent ecologist Dr James Fenton is concerned about the Abernethy proposals. He said: "Is the RSPB's action not actually damaging the Scottishness of our hills, and going against the long-term natural successional trends? Is this transformation not destroying their natural characteristics, forcing them to fit in with a prescriptive vision – the opposite of being wild?"

An SNH spokesman said: "There is no regulation stipulating natural regeneration in Old Caledonian Pinewoods. Planting is in fact an important tool in woodland expansion. These RSPB proposals, which we fully support, have been through very thorough assessment. This is a valuable long-term plan which will greatly enhance native species and local biodiversity."

**UPPER ROTHIEMURCHUS**

The Grants of Rothiemurchus have sold the Upper Rothiemurchus Forest, near Aviemore, to FC Scotland for over £7m. The 5,700 acre forest has been in the family's ownership since 1540. The Caledonian pine forest comprises about a quarter of the Rothiemurchus Estate, and includes Loch an Eilean. Johnnie Grant said: "Over the last 20 years, FC Scotland has been of great help to us in our enhancement of the biodiversity of the forest. We are particularly proud of the natural regeneration, the habitat it provides for many endangered species."



**FISHFARMING & FISHERIES**

**WESTER ROSS FISHFARMS**

The Salmon & Trout Association (STA) Scotland has called for one of the two fishfarms at Ardesie in Little Loch Broom, Wester Ross, to be closed and the second to undergo a thorough Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) after it emerged that neither farm appears to have planning permission. They are both operated by Wester Ross Fisheries.

Councils have had full planning responsibility since April 2007. In 2009, Marine Scotland recommended planning permission should be withheld following an audit. STA Scotland said that this was because the two fishfarms had a poor record of sea-lice control. However, the Highland Council was not told of the assessment.

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "In 2009 Marine Scotland commissioned an audit of an EIA. This assessment was completed to inform Scottish ministers how any potential application should be treated, as no application was received for either of these sites this was not taken further.

The assessment identified deficiencies and concluded that it was not comprehensive enough for ministers to consider the farms through the audit process. Should a planning application be received, it will be assessed for eligibility at that time."

**ORKNEY FISHFARM**

The Herald reported that Orkney Islands Council refused permission for a Scottish Sea Farms fishfarm in Gairsay Sound between the island of Wyre and the north east of the Orkney mainland. The council is now looking again at the proposal following legal advice that councillors took their decision based on the 2004 Local Plan which specifically related to land-based, not marine, fishfarm developments. The council's planning jurisdiction for sea-based fishfarms came into effect in 2007.

Fishermen objected to the application because of the impact on the grounds of scallop divers and creel fishermen. They said that the council's decision to look again at the application is 'unprecedented.'

**SALMON & SEA TROUT CATCHES**

The provisional salmon and sea trout fishery statistics for the 2013 season have been published by Scotland's chief statistician.

The total reported rod catch for salmon (retained and released) for 2013 is 66,387. It is the lowest reported catch since 2003 and is 74% of the previous five year average.

The proportion of the rod catch accounted for by catch and release is the highest reported since these figures were first recorded in 1994. In 2013, 92% of rod caught spring salmon was released, as was 80% of the annual rod catch.

Catch and effort for both fixed engine and net & coble fisheries remain at historically low levels. Reported catch in each fishery was 16,732 and 7,579; 7% and 3% of the maximum reported in the respective time series.

The total reported rod catch of sea trout (retained and released) for 2013 is 15,824. Catches have declined over much of the period since 1952, when records began, and the 2013 catch is the lowest in the time series. The proportion of the rod catch accounted for by catch and release in 2013 is 77%, the highest reported since these figures were first recorded in 1994.

Catch and effort for both fixed engine and net & coble fisheries remain at historically low levels. Reported catch in each fishery was 2,681 and 3,433; 4% and 2% of the maximum reported in the respective time series.

See: *Marine Scotland Science Report 03/14 Status of Scottish Salmon and Sea Trout Stocks 2013*; [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/Publications/publicationslatest/Science/MSSR](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/Publications/publicationslatest/Science/MSSR); [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/science/Publications/stats/SalmonSeaTroutCatches](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/science/Publications/stats/SalmonSeaTroutCatches)

**YTHAN ESTUARY**

The BBC News website reported that the Scottish Wild Salmon Company has withdrawn its application to Marine Scotland to cull seals on the Ythan estuary in Aberdeenshire [Mar 14]. The company planned to install nets around the foreshore and lower estuary to catch salmon as they enter and leave the river. However, parent company Usan Salmon Fisheries has now decided not to exercise its recently acquired rights to net in the estuary and has made clear it does not intend to acquire any further netting rights in Scotland. The company is, however, continuing with plans to exercise angling rights.

- The Scottish Wild Salmon Company is to stop culling seals following protests by Sea Shepherd at Gardenstown harbour in Grampian.

The company said that it is to remove firearms from its operations, using only acoustic devices to drive seals away from nets.

**FISH LANDINGS**

The Scottish Government's chief statistician reported that the total value of 366,400 tonnes of fish and shellfish landed by Scottish boats dropped by 8% to £429m. A 10% drop in the volume of shellfish landed was partly responsible for the overall fall in value; lobster and langoustine catches were affected by lower North Sea stocks. Fishermen's leaders also pointed to the increased catches of white fish by Icelandic and Norwegian boats as having an impact on the market.

Overall, mackerel was the most valuable stock, accounting for 29% of the total value of Scottish landings at 134,000 tonnes, an increase of 13% but 4% lower in value.



**MARINE**

**PLANKTON BLOOMS**

A report commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), *Seasonal shelf-sea front mapping using satellite ocean colour to support development of the Scottish MPA network*, shows phytoplankton blooms and plumes of sediment off the Scottish coast, which provide food and nutrients for basking shark as well as smaller fish which provide prey for seals and seabirds.

Researchers processed more than 6,000 scenes taken by the European Space Agency's Envisat satellite from 2009 to 2011 from along the coasts of Aberdeen to the Firth of Forth, Fair Isle, Tiree, the Galloway peninsula and the Clyde as well as off the Uists in the Western Isles. See: [www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned\\_reports/538.pdf](http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/538.pdf)

**MARINE LITTER**

The BBC News website reported that Fishing for Litter, a scheme which has removed more than 700 tonnes of litter from the seas around Scotland, is looking for funding to allow it continue. The third phase of the litter project has now finished. Fishermen have been bringing back to shore any rubbish caught in their nets for ten years.

**EMERGENCY TUGS**

Two ships got into difficulties in two separate incidents off the Hebrides, a bulk carrier and a 53,000 tonne vessel. The government-chartered tug, *MV Herakles*, was not mobilised from her station in Orkney for either incident [Feb 13]. Angus Campbell, leader of the Western Isles Council, said that the absence of emergency tug cover in the west coast concerned coastguards. He said: "The time delay in the boat arriving from that distance away, in addition to the severe weather, highlights how vulnerable the west coast is. We would call on the UK government to reconsider the provision of a second tug based in the western waters of Scotland to reduce the risk for mariners and the environment in what is a major shipping area."

**GABIONS**

The Herald reported that football manager, Ally McCoist, and a neighbour built a breakwater at his second home on the Cowal peninsula in Argyll. He constructed the 'tidal breakwater built with gabion baskets and bollards constructed on a slipway' to prevent tidal damage and erosion to a seawall and access road to their properties. However, he submitted a retrospective planning application which was refused by Argyll & Bute Council.

An appeal to the Scottish Government failed. The reporter said: "Whilst the purpose of erecting the breakwater close to the coastal settlement is understood, it is an unsightly engineering solution



that appears out of character in such a natural beach environment within this area of panoramic quality. The open texture of the gabion baskets has trapped debris and seaweed within the structure, while, since the recent storms, large areas of seaweed have accumulated within the enclosed walls, all of which makes the breakwater appear unsightly and detrimental to the outlook over the loch."

The Ministry of Defence objected saying that secret hydrophones, required for national defence, in the area could be disturbed. Quinetiq has expressed concerns about potential new moorings and increased leisure activity affecting the equipment. Planning officials said that the 'artificial harbour' created an air of exclusivity and denied public access to the beach. Councillors have issued an enforcement notice for removal of the breakwater.



**POLITICS & PARLIAMENT**

**GEESE**

The *BBC News* website reported that Holyrood's rural affairs committee is gathering evidence on reports that increased numbers of geese are harming grazing land in parts of Scotland [see FARMING]. The Scottish Crofting Federation and NFU Scotland have been calling for greater controls on the numbers. Committee convener Rob Gibson MSP said: "The problem of growing geese numbers is far more widespread than in the crofting areas. I have seen for myself how grass and seeded crops are being ruined on a monumental scale."

**CO-OP BUYOUT**

A public meeting has been held in Blairgowrie in Perthshire to explore the possibility of purchasing the 850 acre Rosemount Farm, one of five Scottish farms being sold by the Co-operative Group. The Co-op currently wants one purchaser for all the farms across the UK.

*The Herald* reported that environment minister, Richard Lochhead, said: "I am aware of the proposals for a community buyout of the Rosemount Farm near Blairgowrie and have relayed these to the Co-operative Group's director of farm business. His initial response was that they plan to sell the whole farm business as a going concern as they think that detaching any part would have an impact on the value of the business. However, I have a great deal of sympathy for the aims and objectives of people who believe we should diversify the ownership of agricultural land."

Rosemount has been valued from £6m to £16m, according to local sources, dwarfing other community buyouts to date. The other Co-op farms in Scotland are at Monymusk in Aberdeenshire, Duns in Berwickshire and at Carnoustie and Longforgan near Dundee.

**SEA EAGLES & LAMBS**

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that a cross-party group of MSPs at Holyrood heard a first hand account of significant lamb losses due to sea eagle predation by Gairloch crofter Willie Fraser [Feb 14]. Jamie McGrigor MSP said: "As a result of losses of lambs, some crofters are reducing the number of sheep they keep or giving up on keeping sheep altogether. He reported on a healthy lamb weighing 20kg recently being taken by a sea eagle and ewes being attacked by sea eagles. Some of these ewes later died from septicemia from the wounds inflicted by the sea eagles' talons. Crofters accept that foxes also predate on lambs but they can take action against fox predation.

"As well as the animal welfare issue in terms of crofters being unable to protect their livestock from sea eagle predation, it was pointed out at the meeting that some lamb losses are becoming so great that they are preventing the traditional pattern of ewe lambs being replaced from within hefted sheep flocks ... it seems desperately unfair that crofters have no means of defending their livestock which is the principal aim of any person involved in shepherding but it is quite clearly the result of a reintroduction of a species being taken forward without proper impact surveys being completed first."

Crofters complained that SNH had not ensured that there were adequate wild food sources to support the sea eagle reintroduction [see CONSERVATION].

**RAPTOR PERSECUTION**

Liam McArthur MSP has submitted a series of parliamentary questions about the most recent Leadhills case [see GENERAL ENVIRONMENT], and more generally about the effectiveness of current enforcement measures to deal with raptor persecution. Claire Baker MSP has also lodged questions in parliament concerning the illegal killing of birds of prey and the consultation on the powers of the Scottish SPCA. She asked whether the parliament will conduct a review of the licensing and other arrangements for regulating game bird shooting in other countries, with a view to implementing stronger management and regulation



**GENERAL ENVIRONMENT**

**RAPTOR POISONING**

A total of 16 red kites and six buzzards have now been retrieved from a small area near Conon Bridge in Easter Ross [Mar 14].

The dead raptors include both breeding adults and juvenile birds. Tests have confirmed that twelve were poisoned (nine red kites and three buzzards) and post-mortems are ongoing on the other bodies.

RSPB Scotland said that the impact of these deaths on the already-struggling Black Isle red kite population would be significant.

Ian Ross, chairman of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), said: "This case is the subject of an ongoing police investigation. But I would like to state that we in SNH condemn any form of wildlife crime and the growing catalogue of suspected cases is shocking, grim and distressing. Nature-based tourism is worth £1.4 billion a year to Scotland's economy. It's clear that acts like this detract from that value and diminish Scotland's appeal as a major wildlife tourism destination. They can also damage the local economy as many locals and visitors are keen to see these magnificent birds in the wider countryside. And, of course, it causes an appalling level of natural heritage and wildlife damage."

RSPB Scotland offered a reward of £5,000 and an anonymous donor doubled that; it is offered to anyone who provides information leading to a successful conviction. A group of Moray Firth landowners and farmers have donated a further £12,000.

Duncan Orr-Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, said: "Our staff have been inundated with calls from concerned members of the public voicing their personal anger and frustration about this appalling incident and calling for firm action by the authorities against the perpetrators. Many have said they would like to contribute financially to the reward already on offer. We urge anyone

with information to contact Police Scotland as soon as possible."

The *BBC News* website reported that several of the dead birds were found in the vicinity of land farmed by Ewan MacDonald. Mr MacDonald said that he and the local farming community had nothing to hide. He called for an action group to be set up to investigate the killings and for more resources to be directed at the investigation.

He said that the reputation of the local farming community, which has actively encouraged the reintroduction of red kites in the area, is being tarnished. Mr MacDonald said that the investigation should focus on establishing where the poison is, who had put it there and why it was killing so many birds of prey. He was puzzled as to why no other animals appeared to have been killed by the poison and argued that there could be an innocent explanation for the deaths, such as a virus, or somebody feeding meat to birds of prey which they do not realise has been contaminated.

He said that red kites were a common sight over his land: "They hover over the lambing field because they like picking up the remains of the afterbirth of lambs. They do no harm at all to the lambing field whatsoever. Our men love seeing them and we are very fond of them. It is only in the last 20 years that the population has built up quite dramatically. We are absolutely devastated by what has happened over the past two or three weeks".

Police Scotland has not revealed what poison was responsible for the deaths. An article in *The Guardian* reported that a combination of poisons had been used, and also referred to 'baits' being used.

The *BBC News* website reported that Duncan Orr-Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, wrote in *Holyrood* magazine that the persecution of birds of prey on Scotland's grouse moors has returned to levels last seen in the Victorian era.

Douglas McAdam, of Scottish Land & Estates, said: "For Mr Orr-Ewing to suggest that wildlife crime is returning to Victorian levels is both irresponsible and untrue. He ought to know better. Official statistics in recent years have seen, overall, a downward trend in raptor persecution - even at some points demonstrating record low levels of poisoning incidents. It is very disappointing that the RSPB, with whom we would like to work constructively, stoop to making such wild and misleading accusations."

Mr Orr-Ewing responded: "We have seen major intensification of management practices on many grouse moors in the central and eastern Highlands and Southern Uplands of Scotland. This moorland management places emphasis on increasing the numbers of gamekeepers, to undertake high levels of predator control, more frequent and extensive heather burning, veterinary medication of red grouse, and the killing of mountain hares and deer, ostensibly to prevent tick-borne grouse diseases. It would be far more appropriate to describe this activity as 'grouse farming', with monocultures of heather habitat producing unnaturally high grouse shooting bags. Indeed, we do not believe that is possible, whilst continuing to operate within the bounds of the law."

Dr Adam Smith, director of the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust in Scotland, said: "In the early Victorian period there were very few birds of prey left in Scotland and that is certainly not the situation today. For example, the data we do have from the Victorian era suggests very clearly that the hen harrier had been driven back to Orkney and the Outer Hebrides. It was not found anywhere on estates in the Scottish mainland up to at least the 1930s.

"Today, we are pleased there are more than 400 breeding pairs in Scotland. For a variety of

reasons they may not be distributed right across the habitats which are suitable for them, but their national recovery is clear, so I find the RSPB's suggestion very difficult to sustain. Neither do the numbers of grouse being shot stand up to scrutiny as being at Victorian levels. Our records going back to the 1900s show how the numbers of birds shot per unit area have fallen by over half, never fully recovering from the sharp decline during the second war."

Professor Des Thompson, of SNH, said: "We understand Duncan Orr-Ewing's concerns; however, we feel changes need to be supported by hard evidence. There is now much more forest cover for predators such as crows and foxes, which means that levels of predator control are very high on some moors managed for grouse. These and related matters will be examined by a newly-formed SNH group. We will use the evidence gathered by the group to inform the Scottish Government's Land Use Strategy and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, and as a contribution to the work of the Moorland Forum. If people suspect any illegal persecution of raptors or other wildlife associated with any moorland management, we urge them to contact Police Scotland. We must do our best to stamp out wildlife crime."

- RSPB Scotland organised a 'dignified and silent public show of outrage' in Inverness to let the Scottish Government know that action is urgently required to prevent the criminal persecution of raptors from happening again.

RSPB Scotland has set up an on-line donation page where people can contribute towards the 'reward for information' fund. If the reward is unclaimed, the funds will be used directly for contributing towards the RSPB's Investigation Unit. See: [www.justgiving.com/wildlifecrimescotland](http://www.justgiving.com/wildlifecrimescotland)

- The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog reported that a peregrine falcon was discovered in February in suspicious circumstances, close to the boundary of Leadhills Estate in South Lanarkshire. RSPB Scotland retrieved the corpse. The post-mortem and toxicology analysis at Science & Advice for Scottish Agriculture showed that the raptor had been poisoned. 44 other known reported incidents of raptor persecution have occurred in the Leadhills area between 2003-2013 [Jun 13].

- An un-named man has been arrested and reported to the Procurator Fiscal following an investigation into an alleged attempt to trap birds of prey on Deeside in Aberdeenshire. The Crown Office & Fiscal Service has six months in which to decide whether there's sufficient evidence to prosecute.

- *The Courier* reported that Police Scotland has launched an investigation after the discovery of a dead peregrine at Cambusbarron Quarry, near Stirling. The four year old raptor was 'illegally killed' although the cause of death has not yet been reported.

- *Wildlife Crime – A guide to the use of forensic and specialist techniques in the investigation of wildlife crime* has been produced by the Forensic Working Group as part of the work of the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime. See: [www.pawfwg.org](http://www.pawfwg.org)

#### SEA EAGLE DISAPPEARANCE

The *BBC News* website reported that the first sea eagle chick to fledge in East Scotland for over 200 years has 'disappeared' in the Cairngorms National Park [Aug 13]. He had been fitted with a satellite tag before he fledged, allowing researchers to monitor his movements. In mid-April, the signal from his transmitter stopped. The last signal came from the North Glenbuchat Estate in Strathdon, a well-known grouse moor. Police Scotland is investigating.

*The Herald* reported that Ian Thomson, RSPB Scotland's head of investigations, said: "The disappearance of this white tailed eagle is very depressing, and particularly so since it joins a list of other satellite-tagged eagles that have vanished on the grouse moors of upper Donside in the last few years."

#### GREEN BELT

Gladman Developments plan to build on green belt land near Waterfoot in East Renfrew. A council spokeswoman said: "The plan will go forward to the Scottish Government for examination. The council will continue to defend the position that this site be retained as green belt."

#### RIVER CLYDE POLLUTION

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) investigated a pollution incident in the River Clyde. A large expanse of foam appeared from an overflow pipe located near the Tradeston Bridge, known locally as the Squiggly Bridge. The foam stretched from the Broomielaw in the city centre to the Clyde Arc, the 'Squinty Bridge.'

It was determined that the foam was the result of an illegal discharge of detergent into the sewer network.

- Derek Davidson, of 1st Loo, pled guilty to discharging a quantity of raw human sewage into the Middleton Burn, which leads into the Tay, in the village of Dalguise, Perthshire. Mr Davidson was ordered to carry out 100 hours unpaid work in the community.

- Scottish Water was fined £6,000 at Stirling Sheriff Court for causing untreated sewage to enter the Dragon Burn in Doune, a tributary of the River Teith.

- Scottish Water and SEPA were called in after oil slicks were seen on the surface of the Dighty Burn near Panmuirefield in Dundee. Booms were set up to soak up the oil, which was flowing from a drain near the Baldovie industrial estate. The Dighty Burn runs through Angus to Dundee and out into the Tay near Monifieth, and is important for aquatic wildlife.

#### AIR POLLUTION

A Health Protection Scotland briefing paper outlined the estimated number of deaths which could be attributed to long-term exposure to particulate material pollution (PM), and the levels of PM, in each of Scotland's 32 local authority areas. Sources of PM in the atmosphere can be either natural, such as sea salt and agricultural dust, or man-made such as motor vehicle and industrial emissions. High levels of air pollution can increase the risk to people with respiratory conditions.

The statistics showed an estimated 2,094 deaths of people over the age of 25 in Scotland could be attributed to PM in 2010. This figure represented 3.9% of the total number of deaths of people over 25. There were 306 deaths in Glasgow and 205 in Edinburgh. There were just six in each of Orkney and Shetland. The report said that the mean level of PM was 6.8 in Scotland; PM levels were higher in urban areas, with Edinburgh worst at 8.6, followed by Glasgow at 8.3 and Falkirk and North Lanarkshire at 7.5. The Western Isles had the lowest PM levels at 4.2, with Highland at 4.3, Moray and Orkney at 4.7 and Shetland at 4.8.

See: [www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/news/newsdetailtemp.aspx?id=629](http://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/news/newsdetailtemp.aspx?id=629)

- *The Sunday Herald* reported that the University of the West of Scotland and Imperial College, London carried out a pilot study on marathon runners and cyclists in Glasgow, which indicated that performance could be affected by breathing in elevated levels of toxic particles from vehicle exhausts within the city. There could be a

measurable link between pollution exposure and levels of oxygen in the blood. Monitoring has shown that Glasgow streets have already breached air-quality standards in the first three months of this year. Nitrogen dioxide and tiny sooty particles have been exceeded 17 times at four sites; Rutherglen, Hope Street, Dumbarton Road and Byres Road. Glasgow City Council said that it had produced an air-quality action plan.

#### WILD LAND

The minister for Local Government & Planning, Derek Mackay MSP, has written to the John Muir Trust (JMT) in response to a letter from JMT about wild land and the proposed National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3). In his response, the minister says that Scottish ministers will finalise NPF3 and Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) taking into account advice from SNH following the recent consultation on the map of core areas of wild land, and also the findings of the four Scottish Parliament committees which have been considering NPF3 [Mar 14]. The minister said: 'I can assure you that the final version of both documents will reflect its [wild land's] importance as an environmental asset of national significance.'

- Alex Hogg, of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA), addressed students at Edinburgh University about wild land as a concept and policy issue in Scotland [Mar 14]. Mr Hogg said: "Wild land in Scotland is a misconception. SNH, for example, would have gained respect if they had called their consultation 'managed wild land' as everywhere is managed by man, to some degree or another." He highlighted the importance of private investment by landowners in the rural economy: "This is a win-win situation and even more so when it comes to stopping large tracts of land from becoming fragmented and our precious wildlife suffering because of it. We touched upon the sheer number of people accessing our Scottish hills and making it very difficult for the thing they were coming to experience – the wildlife – to co-exist. Should some of our mountains be closed down, periodically, to allow some recovery? Some leading ecologists believe so. Should some glens be restricted to organised vehicular access only to give our wildlife peace, as happens in South Africa?"

Community Land Scotland (CLS) urged SNH to acknowledge that, until relatively recently, people used to live on what is now seen as wild land and the present human 'deserts' are man-made [Jan 14]. CLS said that any resulting map should be overlaid by one that records those who were cleared.

#### AN CAMAS MÒR

*The Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that house builders Springfield Properties have withdrawn from the project to build a new community, An Camas Mòr, on the Rothiemurchus Estate near Aviemore. It is hoped that work will start on the project, with a new partner, in spring 2015.

Gus Jones, of the Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group (BSCG), said: "We continue to have very serious concerns about the potential impacts posed by a development of this scale in such a sensitive location in a National Park. The whole development site lies within the Cairngorm Mountains National Scenic Area and supports ancient woodland and threatened and sensitive species and habitats.

"In our view there are major implications for nearby designated sites that support some of Scotland's and Europe's most endangered wildlife ... Some have attempted to justify An Camas Mòr on the grounds that it will take pressure off other areas. However, we do not consider this is realistic, especially as the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) is proposing new housing in almost every community in the park."

**CAIRNGORMS HOUSING**

The *Sunday Herald* reported that a study published in *Wildlife Biology* of three woodlands in the Cairngorms area which shows that capercaillie are very vulnerable to human disturbance. The birds stayed hundreds of metres away from places where people entered the woodlands, and at least 70 metres from tracks through the woods. Capercaillie avoid much larger areas where dogs often stray from tracks, and in the most disturbed woods retreat to centres of trackless boggy ground for refuge.

Dr Robert Moss, the lead author of the study, said: "The bird needs better refuges from disturbance, including fewer woodland tracks, a culture that encourages people and dogs to stay on tracks, careful management of off-track activities such as snowshoeing and orienteering, and rewetting ground previously drained for forestry. It would be nice if the conflicted national park could be persuaded to take the advice of its own ecologists seriously, but that is probably too much to ask."

Four-fifths of the UK's population of capercaillie live in the national park, but it has been identified by the CNPA as a species in need of 'urgent conservation action' over the next five years.

Dr Gus Jones, of BSCG, said that proposed housing developments in the national park will disturb capercaillie and damage its habitat.

Grant Moir, of CNPA, said that a management framework was being developed for capercaillie to address the issues highlighted by Dr Moss. He said: "The Cairngorms are, of course, also highly valued for their outdoor recreation opportunities in an economy driven by tourism, and we have a long-term need to provide the right kind of housing in the right place. Dr Moss's work is already informing the way we are tackling this through habitat enhancement and managing the impacts of human disturbance."

**GREENHOUSE GASES**

Scotland's chief statistician has released the latest estimates of emissions and removals of greenhouse gases from Scotland's atmosphere due to Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF). The figures show that Scotland's LULUCF activities are a net remover, or 'sink', of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. This means that overall these activities result in more greenhouse gases being removed from the atmosphere than released. The size of the Scottish sink has increased by more than five-fold between 1990 and 2012. In 2012, LULUCF net emissions were -5.7 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (Mt CO<sub>2</sub>e).

Of the land types examined in the report, forest land removes the greatest amount of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, the sink increasing by over 30% between 1990 and 2005. Over the last 40 years the rate of afforestation has decreased. Combined with conifer plantations established in the mid-20th century reaching their planned rotation age now being felled and replanted, this has resulted in the size of this annual sink remaining relatively constant. Wood products produced as a result of these felling operations have resulted in an increase in the sink reported by the harvested wood products category.

The report also examines the emissions and removals from cropland, grassland, wetlands and settlements. Of these, cropland is the largest producer of greenhouse gases in Scotland, though emissions have reduced by 30% since 1999. While most of the emissions and removals relate to carbon dioxide, in 2012 there were over 300,000 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e of nitrous oxide emissions and nearly 30,000 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e of methane emissions.

The report was produced by the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology. See: [www.naei.defra.gov.uk/reports/reports?report\\_id=788](http://www.naei.defra.gov.uk/reports/reports?report_id=788)

**COMMUNITY LAND**

Community Land Scotland (CLS) has published an independent study, funded by the Carnegie UK Trust and Highlands & Islands Enterprise, examining the progress made by 12 of the 24 CLS members who took over their land. Local communities which took over their land in the last two decades have out-performed the private landlords they replaced, increasing the value of their estates by almost 250%.

CLS has found direct employment is up 368% and the value to local economies is up 434% to £2.5m annually. £34m new investment has been delivered and £25m more is planned. 21 visitor facilities have been upgraded or built. Overall, the capital value of the 12 estates has increased 244% from £17.22m to £59.34m.

11 communities showed an overall population increase from 7,970 to 8,195. Only two out of the 11 areas, Bhaltois and Galson on Lewis, experienced a population decrease. The report said that the most significant gains have generally been experienced in those communities which have a population of less than 250 such as Gigha (an increase of 55 or 57%), Eigg (increase of 31 or 47%), Knoydart (increase of 53 or 85%) and Borve and Annishadder, Skye (increase of 42 or 43%).

The report challenges the notion that community ownership is all about public subsidy: "Private enterprise has flourished on community owned estates with the six CLS members ... showing a 123% increase in private businesses operating in their area up from 83 businesses to 185 businesses."

David Cameron, of Community Land Scotland, said: "The study completely destroys a myth that communities can only survive by the supposed largesse of private landowners with deep pockets and shows the further economic potential for rural communities if more community ownership can be delivered."

He said the total value of the assets in community ownership was growing and 'showing the great public value community land ownership can yield.'

Sarah Jane Laing, of Scottish Land & Estates (SLE), said: "Community ownership has been successful in a number of circumstances and should be encouraged where there is a willing seller, funds and resources available and a business plan that will take a landholding forward. The report implies that the gains of private ownership only accrue to the private owner. This is not the case Scotland-wide as research has shown clearly that private estates deliver a wide range of benefits to local communities."

**ESTATE STUDY**

A study conducted for SLE of 277 estates found that the revenue of the organisation's private estate membership, which represents approximately 65% of Scotland's private estates, contributes £471m or £207 per hectare to Scotland's output. An estimated 8,114 full-time jobs are linked to Scottish Land & Estates members' estates alone, more than 2,000 of which are tourism-related, with 1,563 farm tenancies.

Luke Borwick, of SLE, said: "This study clearly demonstrates the very substantial contribution made by estates. They are part of the fabric of rural Scotland and estate owners want to play their part in ensuring that rural Scotland is a thriving and vibrant place to live and work. We hope this study will show that landowners are part of the solution rather than the problem."

The study brings much needed hard evidence to a debate about land ownership that is frequently not evidence-based."

The surveyed estates totalled three million acres. The dominant land use was managed moorland, with almost a million acres, followed by rough grazing at almost half a million acres, unmanaged moorland (240,000 acres), commercial forestry (210,000 acres) and native woodland (100,000 acres). Some 69 estates have been in the same ownership for between 100 and 500 years, and 11 for more than 500 years. Many of the estates that had been in the same ownership for several generations were vested in trusts. The report said: "These trusts have often been set up to enable inter-generational succession and as part of tax planning exercises responding to the various taxation regimes that have been in place over time."

Peter Peacock, of Community Land Scotland, said: "It is particularly striking to see ownership in so few hands and those same hands for sometimes centuries. It demonstrates just what a monopoly a few people have over land in Scotland." He said that it was disappointing that the brief for the study did not also ask about the range of tax benefits trust status brought to landowners, contributing to growing wealth from rising land values. He said: "Much land is now marketed principally on its potential for huge financial returns to the owners."

Professor Jim Hunter said all the report showed was that owning land offered economic opportunities. He said: "Everyone knows that. And that's why so many of us believe that it's little short of criminally wrong that just 432 big land owners own half of Scotland. Far, far more of our farmers and far, far more of our communities should have the opportunity to engage in activities now monopolised by a tiny, wholly unrepresentative and often absentee minority."

**ENERGY****ISLAND RENEWABLES**

An independent report, prepared by Xero Energy and commissioned jointly by the UK and Scottish Governments, has been published. It highlights a series of actions to help deliver electricity grid connections necessary to unlock the renewable energy potential of the Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland Islands. Both governments recognise the significant contribution that renewable energy generation on the Scottish islands could make to both Scotland's and the United Kingdom's 2020 renewable energy targets and the governments' longer-term climate change ambitions.

The report will now be considered by the inter-governmental Scottish Islands Renewables Group.

Energy minister Fergus Ewing said: "The three island groups share significant challenges in getting grid connections off the drawing board in time to access support within the timeframe of the first Electricity Market Reform Delivery due to long lead-times and high costs for sub-sea connections – typically, upwards of four years to achieve approval and to build."

See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Business-Industry/Energy/Infrastructure/Grid-Connections/XeroReport](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Business-Industry/Energy/Infrastructure/Grid-Connections/XeroReport)

**ONSHORE WIND**

The *Herald* reported that Renewables UK has published figures which show that Scotland has 2,315 of the UK's 4,250 onshore wind turbines, around 54%. Another 405 turbines are under construction, and local authorities and the Scottish Government have already given consent to a further 1,162 turbines in Scotland. The latest total for operational renewable energy in Scotland is 285 MW, an increase of 40% on 2013.

**COMMUNITY BENEFIT**

The Scottish Government has announced the adoption of a set of principles, *Good Practice Principles for Community Benefit from Onshore Renewable Developments*, designed to maximise community benefit from onshore renewable energy developments.

The key principle is the promotion of a national community benefits package rate equivalent to at least £5,000 per megawatt per year, index linked to inflation for the operational lifetime of the development. The guidance has drawn mainly on experience from the onshore wind sector but the Scottish Government would like to see community benefits promoted across all renewable technologies.

Another key component of the guidance encourages renewable energy developers to submit information on potential community benefits as early in the development process as possible. This is considered a vital step in allowing time for the community to consider properly and to develop ideas for implementation of the community benefit package.

The government will also work in partnership with Scottish Renewables to set up a short-term industry working group to develop guidance to encourage community investment in commercial renewables schemes.

See: [www.localenergyscotland.org/goodpractice](http://www.localenergyscotland.org/goodpractice)

**WINDFARM UPDATES**

**Argyll:** RES' 11 turbine Freasdail windfarm near Whitehouse on the Kintyre peninsula has been approved after a Scottish Government reporter overturned the local council's decision to turn down the project. The community council had objected to the application.

Neil Martin, of RES, said: "Freasdail Wind Farm is located within a Proposed Area of Search for wind turbines. We have sensitively designed the project and demonstrated that the windfarm would have no significant effects on local people, the local environment or local wildlife."

**Scottish Borders:** The *BBC News* website reported that a 40m high wind turbine at Primsidhill near Yetholm has been rejected by the council. The planning authority's detailed report said that views affected by the turbine would include the popular tourist walks at the neighbouring St Cuthbert's Way and Cheviot foothills.

**ISLAY ARRAY**

Following SSE Renewables's announcement that it will not be investing further in the Islay Array offshore windfarm [March 14], DP Marine Energy Ireland has applied to Scottish ministers to construct and operate a 30 MW tidal array off Islay.

Representations are to be made by 17 May to: *Marine Scotland Licensing Operations Team, Marine Laboratory, PO Box 101, 375 Victoria Road, Aberdeen AB11 9DB; email: DPME@scotland.gsi.gov.uk*

**BEATRICE OFFSHORE**

The Beatrice offshore windfarm, in the Outer Moray Firth, has been given UK government approval. The windfarm, a partnership between SSE Renewables and Repsol Nuevas Energias UK, will be given one of the UK government's Contracts for Difference, which effectively guarantee prices for renewable energy suppliers. The contract is one of the first eight awarded under the government's energy market reforms.

The investment contracts for the successful projects are expected to obtain parliamentary approval in May 2014, when they would then take legal effect.

A neighbouring development is being pursued by Moray Offshore Renewables Limited, which is also expected to apply for a contract later this year. Both projects have been given planning permission by the Scottish Government [Mar 14]. If both go ahead they would represent the world's third largest offshore windfarm, with up to 326 turbines.

**TIDAL ENERGY**

SSE Renewables has transferred its lease of the Westray South area of seabed in Orkney to DP Energy. It had planned to develop a tidal energy project there. SSE Renewables is currently reviewing its involvement in three other marine energy projects in Orkney.

**OPENCAST COAL**

At a meeting of the Scottish Open Cast Mining Taskforce, the energy minister, Fergus Ewing, renewed calls for the UK government to ensure that £15m coal levies raised from coal produced in Scotland be reinvested to restore opencast sites in Scotland [Sep 13].

**SOLAR POWER**

*The Sunday Herald* reported that Glasgow City Council, together with Strathclyde University, is to identify sites for solar farms on 550 hectares of vacant or derelict land owned by the council across the city. The City of Edinburgh Council is studying the installation of solar farms in disused quarries and on pit bings. 16 major solar electricity projects have won planning approval elsewhere in Scotland in the last two years; Scotland already has 116 MW of solar capacity from more than 31,000 (mainly domestic) installations. 22% more solar power was installed in Scotland in 2013 than in the previous 12 months.

Councillor Alastair Watson said: "Glasgow may not be the sunniest city in the world ... We aim to become one of the most sustainable and resilient cities in Europe and are exploring the potential of a range of technologies which will help us cut emissions and secure energy supplies."

Glasgow's ambition, as part of its £24m Future City project, is to transform itself into a more sustainable city over the next 20 years. This will include cutting carbon emissions, encouraging renewable energy projects and increasing access to affordable energy.

Preliminary studies have also identified more than 27,000 rooftops in Glasgow as being potentially suitable for solar panels.

The UK Department of Energy & Climate Change in London said that 16 major solar electricity projects have won planning approval in Scotland since 2011, with a combined capacity of more than 5 MW.

**RECREATION & TOURISM**

**MULL ROUTE**

A long distance walking trail across Mull has been proposed by the Mull & Iona Community Trust, to link the Craignure ferry terminal on the Sound of Mull to Fionnphort on the Ross of Mull, the Iona ferry terminal. It would also be part of a longer pilgrimage route between St Andrews and Iona. A report by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) estimates that the route could attract around 10,000 part-way walkers, 2,500 full-length walkers and 1,000 cyclists each year, generating additional income of more than £900,000 a year.

The proposed route would connect with the Oban to Fort William section of the National Cycle Network, and the proposed Tyndrum

to Oban path, which in turn will link to the West Highland Way.

**BLA BHEINN**

The Bla Bheinn project on Skye has been awarded £24,000 for path repairs in a worldwide online poll organised by the European Outdoor Conservation Association. The John Muir Trust is now launching a £50,000 path restoration project on the mountain, having already secured match funding.

**LOCH LOMOND**

*The Herald* reported that the Friends of Loch Lomond & the Trossachs said that litter in the A82 laybys is ruining views of the loch [Mar 14]. The group had spent money opening up views of Loch Lomond from the road. James Fraser, the group's chairman, said: "I was shocked to see the dreadful condition of a number of lay-bys at lochside beauty spots, which are currently a very poor advert for the National Park and Scotland's aspirations to be a world-class tourist destination. Extensive amounts of litter are strewn all over the lay-bys and surrounding areas. In what is supposed to be a special year for Scotland welcoming millions of visitors from around the world, it is clear effective management of what should be a high-quality tourist route and visitor journey experience alongside the bonnie banks is low down [on the] list of priorities."

Argyll & Bute Council has responsibility for litter clearance along the A82. A spokesman said that litter was cleared on a weekly basis, all year round. He added: "It is a priority as the lay-bys are highly visible. However, we appeal to the public to take litter home with them."

Friends of Loch Lomond & the Trossachs is lobbying for a comprehensive tourist route action plan to be drawn up and implemented for the A82 corridor between Balloch and Tarbet on Loch Lomondside. It claims that the visitor experience falls well short of what is needed for what is considered one of the country's most beautiful places.

**JOHN MUIR TRAIL**

The John Muir Trail, a new 134 mile walking and cycling trail running from Helensburgh to Dunbar, has been officially opened.

**CAIRNGORM MOUNTAIN**

Natural Retreats UK is to take over the running of Cairngorm Mountain on 1 June, on a 25 year lease from Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE). A new day lodge, new skiing nursery slope, a permanent artificial snow slope, an education area and an indoor climbing wall are planned. HIE continues to own Cairngorm Estate, including the funicular and associated infrastructure on the mountain.

**NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS**

**BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION**

The Bog Squad, managed by Butterfly Conservation Scotland, has been officially launched. The squad is a volunteer task force, created to carry out rehabilitation works on damaged peat bogs across the Scottish Central Belt, with funding from Scottish Natural Heritage's Peatland Action project. Sara Green is the project officer. Contact: *email: sgreen@butterfly-conservation.org; telephone: 07787 98 97 93*

See: <http://butterfly-conservation.org/bog-squad.html>; [www.snh.gov.uk/climate-change/what-snh-is-doing/peatland-action](http://www.snh.gov.uk/climate-change/what-snh-is-doing/peatland-action)

**SSPCA**

The Scottish SPCA released 2,795 wild animals back into the wild in 2013, an 18% rise since 2011. A £3.5m centre at Fishcross, near Alloa in Clackmannanshire, opened in 2012.