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## CONSERVATION

### SITE CONDITION MONITORING

The *Sunday Herald* reported that Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) stated that 1,444 of Scotland's wildlife sites are in 'unfavourable condition.' More than 5,200 natural features in 1,800 wildlife sites are spread across Scotland and protected by law.

The biggest cause of damage, affecting more than 1,000 natural features, was invasive species such as bracken, gorse and rhododendron. Other major causes were over-grazing by deer and sheep, particularly on upland areas (affecting 866 natural features), recreational disturbance from vehicles and walkers (430 sites) and agricultural operations including the use of pesticides and fertilisers (239 sites). Other pressures cited by SNH include water pollution, forestry operations, game and fisheries management, wild fires, waste dumping, infrastructure developments, mineral extraction and military activities. Birds of prey and freshwater pearl mussels are also said to be victims of wildlife crime.

SNH stressed that 79% of natural features are in a favourable state, slightly more than last year.

### PENTLANDS PARK

Just over half of the 65 respondents to Christine's Grahame MSP's bid to steer a Private Members' Bill through the Scottish Parliament supported the plan to double the size of the Pentlands Regional Park [Jun 14]. However, it was claimed that up to £1m per year would be needed to maintain the new park if it were extended to the south, spreading into Lanarkshire and the Borders. Supporters said that the plan would protect the environment and minimise developments such as windfarms.

SNH, the Mountaineering Council for Scotland, the Quarry Action Group and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland support the plans. NFU Scotland opposed the bill because of funding issues in the current park, claiming that it has 'always been underfunded.' NFU Scotland said: "Land managers within the existing park boundaries have already seen an increase in the instances of sheep worrying, dog fouling, littering and damage to farmland caused by the public wandering off the designated tracks." Encouraging access on agricultural land can affect crops, lambing and ground-nesting birds.

Scottish Land & Estates said that there was 'no evidence to suggest a demand' for the extension.

Scottish Borders Council opposed the proposed extension.

### CORNCRAKES

RSPB Scotland said that corncrake surveys recorded 1,289 males in Scotland between May and July this year – the highest number since counts of the birds began over 45 years ago. Low numbers of corncrakes had been expected this year after the species declined by 23% in 2013. The highest concentrations were recorded on the Hebrides and Orkney. The biggest single island population was on Tiree, which had 396 calling males this year.

### PEATLAND RESTORATION

£130,000 has awarded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and SNH for peatland restoration on five sites owned by the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Work will be funded on Bankhead Moss, Cander

Moss, Carsegowan Moss, Longridge Moss and Red Moss of Netherley.

### CADDISFLY

*Molanna angustata*, a caddisfly not previously recorded in Scotland, has been found at the Insh Marshes RSPB reserve near Kingussie in the Cairngorms. It is known to be present in Wales and England as far north as the Lake District and Yorkshire.

### MONTROSE BASIN

70,153 pink-footed geese, a record number, have been recorded at SWT's Montrose Basin wildlife reserve after migration from Greenland and Iceland. On average 60,000 pink-footed geese descend on the basin each year, where they spend the winter months. Around 372,000 pink-footed geese, 90% of the world population, spend the winter in the UK.

A further survey, as part of the Icelandic Breeding Goose Census, recorded 78,970 birds at the same site, a week after the initial survey.

### RED KITE DEATH

The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* website reported that a dead red kite was found on a railway line in Inverness-shire in July. A post-mortem revealed it had been shot in the head. Police Scotland has not yet issued a press statement or appealed for information.

### HEN HARRIER PROJECT

The EU Hen Harrier LIFE+ Project is the first joint Scottish-English initiative for the species. It is a £1.8m, five-year programme to protect the future of the endangered bird of prey. In 2010, 505 of the 662 breeding hen harrier pairs in the UK were in Scotland. Most of the hen harriers' UK breeding population is found on Orkney, the Hebrides and parts of the western mainland. Between 2004 and 2010 Scotland's hen harrier population declined by 20%.

The project will include monitoring at nests and key winter roosts, funding a national hen harrier survey in 2016, satellite tagging, habitat management, investigations work by two new RSPB investigation officers and community engagement. The programme aims to work constructively with landowners and the shooting community.

The project will focus on seven Special Protection Areas designated for breeding hen harriers, of which five are in Scotland. These are Glen Tanar, Forest of Clunie, Muirkirk & North Lowther Upland, Langholm-Newcastleton Hills and Glenn App & Galloway Moors.

### SQUIRRELPOX

A study on the spread of the squirrelpox virus was commissioned by SNH and carried out by Professor Andy White of Heriot-Watt University and ecological consultant Dr Peter Lurz.

Professor White said: "Our work showed that it will be challenging to contain the squirrelpox virus in southern Scotland, where there is abundant woodland suited to grey squirrels. Without grey squirrel control, the virus will likely continue to spread across all areas where grey squirrels exist. Importantly, however, our research found that the virus is unlikely to spread through areas that only have red squirrel populations, which is great news for the red

squirrels of the Highlands, parts of Tayside, Argyll, Moray and Aberdeenshire. The key will be to remain vigilant for grey squirrels trying to colonise these areas."

The report also included a preliminary study on how best to defend populations of native squirrels in 'Red Squirrel Stronghold' sites, when squirrelpox is present in the surrounding area. There are 18 stronghold sites across Scotland, plus the Isle of Arran. These sites, identified by Forestry Commission Scotland, total approximately 100,000 hectares and are a mixture of public and private forests. The Fleet Basin in Dumfries & Galloway, an area dominated by Sitka spruce habitats, was used as an example in the mathematical modelling study. Professor White said: "Although red squirrel populations may experience occasional squirrelpox disease outbreaks that lead to localised population crashes, squirrelpox will 'burn-out' rapidly and some reds will avoid infection. The red squirrel populations will then return to pre-infection densities provided grey squirrels are kept at very low levels in these forests through on-going control."

SNH intends to use the results of the study to shape its policy on encouraging the red squirrel.

See: <http://bit.ly/10qzC7I>

• Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (SSRS) fears that traffic generated by the Carlton Rock development planned for Hazlehead Park in Aberdeen would lead to more of the animals being killed on the roads. SSRS has been working with Aberdeen City Council for five years to increase the red squirrel population in this area.

#### WESTERN ISLES DESIGNATIONS

*The West Highland Free Press* reported that Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has called on the Scottish Government for a ten-year moratorium on environmental designations in the Western Isles. In a letter to Richard Lochhead, it said that the Western Isles has significantly more land under designation than any other part of Scotland and believes that this proliferation of protected areas is having a detrimental effect on the local economy.

Alasdair MacLeod, of the local authority, said: "With the introduction of Marine Protected Areas and the potential for new marine Special Protection Areas we can see the potential for our seas around the Hebrides to become overly designated in the way that our land has ... Over the past period the comhairle has adopted a policy position of only supporting new designations if it could be clearly demonstrated that they had no potential to adversely impact on economic activity and if it were supported by local communities."

The letter was also sent to the European Commission.



## FARMING

#### GOOSE CULLS

Culling of greylag geese will be undertaken on Lewis and Harris next year [Jan 14]. It is estimated that there are 6,000 to 7,000 resident geese on Lewis and Harris and that to maintain the population at that level there needs to be a 30% reduction in numbers. The Lewis & Harris Greylag Goose Management Group has set a target of bringing the numbers down to under 3,000 over next three years. It is hoped that licences will be issued for the local sale of goose meat, as already takes place in Orkney and Uist.

• *The Illeach* reported that Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is developing a new management strategy, led by the Islay Sustainable Goose

Project manager, to control barnacle and white-fronted geese on Islay [Apr 14]. The plan aims for a 30% cut in numbers which will reduce the crop damage caused by barnacle geese and improve the habitat for white-fronted geese. The true cost of the schemes, including inflation, over the next 15 years, is estimated at £30-£41m.

• The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, in partnership with SNH, is studying the wintering behaviour of Islay Greenland white-front geese over two years. 5,800 winter on Islay, 25% of the world population; the population has declined by 60% in the past 15 years. The study also looked at geese reactions to different types of scaring.

#### GREENING

Greening is a new environmental component of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) that comes into effect in 2015 [Sep 14]. An open letter on greening has been issued by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs & the Environment, Richard Lochhead. He wrote: "The Scottish Government has consulted extensively with farming and environmental organisations. As a consequence, farmers have received a number of measures that they specifically asked for in the new CAP, including options for meeting their greening requirements. For example, farmers were keen that Nitrogen Fixing Crops (NFC), like peas and beans, could count as Ecological Focus Areas (EFA), which are mandatory for most arable farmers ... If a farmer decides not to count their NFCs as EFA, the management conditions will not apply and they can meet their EFA requirement through other features, such as fallow, buffer strips, catch crops or field margins, including hedges and ditches.

"Only 26% of businesses in Scotland need to comply with the EFA requirements. Of those, only 11% grow NFC and for less than a tenth of those – fewer than 40 businesses – this greening measure may not be an attractive option as it's not compatible with growing at least one commercially viable NFC.

"We – like other administrations – are still lacking crucial clarity from Europe on a number of aspects of the detailed interpretation of the regulations. With greening accounting for about a third of the direct farm budget, it is imperative we get the implementation rules right to avoid the risk of farmers facing an unknown level of disallowance further down the line."

*The Herald* reported that further clarification included:

• Under cross compliance, or Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GEAC) requirements in Scotland, farmers must not plough or apply fertiliser or pesticides (except for spot-treatment for injurious weeds) within two metres of the centre line of a hedge or the top of the bank of a watercourse/water body. The Scottish Government has clarified the new GAEC rules on cultivation next to hedges will only come into force for crops sown after 1 January 2015

• A mandatory European one-month extension to the no-cutting period for hedges during the bird nesting season, which will now run from 1 March 1 to 31 August

• A European requirement that farmers must not burn stubble except for plant health purposes – a practice that is no longer common in Scotland

• A significant reduction in the number of new cross compliance requirements from Europe. As a result, the overall number of Scottish GAEC requirements will reduce from 21 to seven

• Fallow for EFA purposes must be set aside between 15 January to 15 July

• Spring cereal crop undersown with grass will count under the Catch Crops category of EFAs

– an important point for many livestock producers with some arable area

• The requirement to grow more than one NFC if it is to count as EFA will apply from 2016.

The Scottish Government will also commission independent research into farming and the environment, with a short-term scientific study and longer-term monitoring to look at the wider environmental impacts of CAP 'greening' policies. The Scottish Government will spend approximately £125m on greening each year for the next five years.

Mr Lochhead said: "The new CAP will deliver more environmental benefits than ever before. The new greening measures will provide more habitat for terrestrial bird populations and more food for pollinators like bees which help sustain arable crops like oil seed rape, and contribute tens of millions of pounds every year to the Scottish economy."

Vicki Swales, of RSPB Scotland, said: "Let's be clear; farmers have a wide range of options to meet the greening requirements and, in return for doing so, will receive a substantial payment from the taxpayer. Mr Lochhead has been more than fair in recognising farmers' concerns whilst also trying to help the environment."

#### JUNE AGRICULTURAL CENSUS

Scotland's chief statistician has released the latest results from the *June 2014 Agricultural Census*.

The area of cereals increased with a noticeable move back to winter-planted crops enabled by better weather. Wheat was up 22,000 hectares, offset by falls of 12,000 hectares in barley and 7,000 hectares in oats, both of which are generally spring-planted. The areas planted with oilseed rape, and vegetables for human consumption, also saw increases. There was however another fall in the area of potatoes, though the more valuable seed potato crop increased slightly.

Livestock numbers saw some areas of recovery, with increases in sheep, pigs and poultry. Sheep numbers were up 2% to 6.7 million, due to 165,000 more lambs being born in the better weather of 2014. However breeding ewes were down 12,000, having fallen every year since 1998. Pig numbers also saw a small increase in 2014 of 8,000 (3%) after large decreases in the past few years. Poultry saw an increase of 560,000 (4%), to 14.7 million, though this is within the normal fluctuations of poultry numbers.

The total number of cattle fell slightly by 4,000 to 1.79 million. Within this, the number of dairy cattle increased 3% to 274,000, but the number of beef cattle fell 2% to 713,000 and the number of calves fell by 0.8% to 526,600.

There were an estimated 4,412 active bee hives and an estimated 67 hectares of land was used for growing blueberries. The area growing strawberries remained unchanged at about 913 hectares, but raspberries continued to decline, dropping 46 hectares (13%) to 317 hectares. About 79% of the area of Scotland is agricultural land, in 52,277 agricultural holdings. See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/10/6277](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/10/6277)

#### CEREAL HARVEST

Scotland's chief statistician has also released the latest provisional estimates of the Scottish cereal and oilseed rape harvest. Scotland's 2014 cereal harvest is estimated to be the largest in 20 years, with favourable conditions expected to produce more than three million tonnes of cereals. In total, around 3.3 million tonnes of cereals are expected this year, due to an anticipated 15% improvement in overall cereal yields over the last year. The total area of land sown has increased by 461,000 hectares. Overall yields are expected to average around 7.1 tonnes per hectare; ranging from 6.4 for spring barley

to 8.6 for wheat. Oilseed rape yields are expected to average around 4.1 tonnes per hectare.

Harvesting began early and progressed quickly, with more consistency in yields across the country. There is some disparity between the north and south of the country, after the remnants of Hurricane Bertha hit the north which will impact on ground conditions for winter crops.

Wheat and winter barley have seen the largest estimated rises in production, both increasing by around 45%. Around a million tonnes of wheat and around 400,000 tonnes of winter barley are expected. Spring barley production is stable, despite a fall in grown areas, at around 1.7 million tonnes. Oats is the only major cereal crop to see reduced production; down 7% to 170,000 tonnes, which was expected following an 80% increase in 2013 when oats replaced wheat and oilseed rape crops in part of the country.

See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/10/7243](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/10/7243)

**ENVIRONMENT & FARMING**

The Herald reported that NFU Scotland has asked Scottish politicians to consider a new forum to debate environmental matters that have implications for the farming and crofting sectors. NFU Scotland said that the recent joint approach between it and SNH on sea eagle management and the progress on goose projects on both Islay and Orkney involving Scottish Government, SNH and local farmers and crofters are positive developments. Solutions can be found before areas of conflict between conservation and land management interests escalate.

**CROFTING CENSUS**

The Crofting Commission is sending the Crofting Census to over 12,000 crofters, tenants and owner-occupiers on Scotland's 18,000 crofts. The commission says that it will help to establish a clear picture of the current state of crofting, enabling it to advise Scottish ministers, the Scottish Parliament and other agencies on the value of crofting and its contribution to life in Scotland. The commission is promoting self-regulation and says that the census will allow crofters to better understand their responsibilities in fulfilling their duties.

**PESTICIDE USE**

Scotland's chief statistician published four reports in relation to pesticide usage in Scotland. 92% of vegetable crops were treated with pesticides. 4% of grassland and 74% of fodder crops were treated with pesticides. The protected edible report includes all edible crops, except soft fruit, which are permanently protected by glass or polytunnel. Overall, 39% of the crop was treated with pesticides. Rodenticides were used on 72% of grassland and fodder farms.

Outdoor Vegetable Crops 2013 [www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/01119](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/01119); Grassland and Fodder Crops 2013 [www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/01120](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/01120); Protected Edible Crops 2013 (Summary Report) [www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/01121](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/01121) & Rodenticide Use on Grassland and Fodder Farms 2013 [www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/01121](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/01121)

 **WOODLANDS**

**NATIVE WOODLAND SURVEY**

An interactive tool has been published which summarises complex data derived from Forestry Commission Scotland's eight-year Native Woodland Survey of Scotland. It was developed in partnership with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency with support from the European LIFE+ Programme. The survey is

thought to be the most comprehensive habitat survey ever carried out in the UK and, possibly, the first example of its kind in Europe. See: [bit.ly/1pboQwX](http://bit.ly/1pboQwX)

 **FISHFARMING & FISHERIES**

**FARMED FISH PRODUCTION**

Marine Scotland Science has published the *Scottish Fish Farm Production Survey 2013 Report*, detailing statistics on the employment and production from Scottish fishfarms. Some statistics are given for the 21 year period 1993-2013.

The production of Atlantic salmon increased by 1,011 tonnes (0.6%) in 2013 to 163,234 tonnes. This is the highest recorded production since 2003. The production tonnage of rainbow trout decreased by 1% in 2013 to 5,611 tonnes. Brown trout/sea trout production increased by two tonnes to 44 tonnes in 2013. 21 companies are actively involved in Atlantic salmon production, farming 257 active sites. Aquaculture employs about 2,000 people directly across Scotland.

See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/marine/fish-shellfish/FH1/surveys](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/marine/fish-shellfish/FH1/surveys)

**FISHFARM APPLICATIONS**

The West Highland Free Press reported that Marine Harvest has submitted plans to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to redevelop salmon farming operations in Loch Erisort on Lewis, following a takeover of Lewis Salmon. Marine Harvest is to abandon the organic label and use more chemicals to treat sea-lice, as well as adding additional cages. The company is hoping to use wrasse as a biological tool for sea-lice control on its island farms; trials in mainland lochs have been successful.

- Hjaltdland Seafarms have applied to establish a ten cage fishfarm near Taskavaig on Loch Eishort, Skye.

**WILD SALMON & SEA TROUT CATCHES**

The Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA)'s new fishing campaign section said that catches of wild salmon and sea trout have dropped alarmingly. The new group will now ensure that the government hears the urgent concerns of ghillies, boatmen, bailiffs and anglers. The industry is worth £113m and sustains 2,800 jobs.

The SGA group said that a record 92% of all spring salmon were returned to the rivers by anglers through voluntary catch-and-release initiatives in 2013, helping to preserve fragile stocks. However, no such restrictions have been extended to, or embraced by, netmen. The group called on ministers to adopt a quota system for wild salmon.

The Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland said that the reduction in salmon was associated with the low water conditions in Scotland's rivers in the last two years. This indicated the salmon were staying out at sea rather than being reduced by netting activities, which had recorded average catches.

**WILD FISHERIES REVIEW**

An independent panel was asked by the Scottish Government to look at ways of modernising the management of Scotland's wild fisheries [Feb 14]. The report contains 53 recommendations for change which include:

- The creation of a multi-species fishery management system which is founded on evidence-based decision making and recognises the public value of Scotland's wild fishery resources

- Locally empowered delivery through a network of Fishery Management Organisations (FMO)s in line with agreed local plans. The FMOs could be formed out of existing district salmon fisheries boards and fisheries trusts

- Creation of a National Wild Fisheries Unit within Scottish Government with a responsibility to provide strategic leadership and co-ordination through development of a national wild fisheries strategy and a research and data strategy

- A ban on the killing of wild salmon except under licence. Anglers and netters alike would have to apply and pay for a licence saying how many fish they want to kill and retain in the coming year. A scientific assessment would then be made as to whether the figure was sustainable. Any ban would be likely to exempt the catch and release already widely employed by many anglers

- A review of the salmon levy to widen it in line with all-species management and introduce greater flexibility in deployment

- Better promotion of angling as a sport, tourism and social activity, with particular focus on access for young people

The report notes that salmon fishing has previously been the principal driver of policy but suggests the new system takes an 'all species approach.' The system of 'closed days' for salmon fishing is outdated and ineffective and should be abolished except for certain coastal netting operations where stocks benefit from periods of closure. The system of 'closed seasons' should be reviewed and extended to all species, based on scientific evidence, and brought under the control of the new national unit.

It makes no firm recommendation on whether a rod licensing scheme should be introduced in Scotland, but said that serious consideration should be given to the idea, with any money raised re-invested in angling. The report also says ministers should consider passing a law to make 'reckless or irresponsible exercise of private fishing rights' an offence.

A spokesman for the SGA fishing group said: "The SGA fishing group has called for a quota system to be introduced to urgently conserve dwindling salmon stocks. We are pleased the report recognises the implications of unregulated netting activity when salmon stocks are low. Rod anglers have shown, through record voluntary uptake of catch and release policies in recent years, that they can fish sustainably and still contribute to a healthy fish stock. What the introduction of a science-based licence to kill fish will do is bind everyone to the same principle of sustainable management, whether using a rod or a net, something our members feel has been lacking in recent times."

See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/fishreview/WFRFinal](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/fishreview/WFRFinal)

- The Times reported that the Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST) has backed a documentary film, *Lost at Sea*, for television and cinema in order to publicise the crisis facing wild salmon.

**ELECTRO-FISHING**

A report from Marine Scotland says that research justifies consideration of electro-fishing as 'a viable fishing method for the commercial razor clam fishery in Scotland within sustainable limits' [Jan 14]. The study looked at species that might have been harmed by electro-fishing: crabs (predominantly hermit crabs), flatfish and sandeels.

No mortalities were recorded as a direct result of the fishing equipment or electric field generated and any induced behavioural responses were exhibited for a maximum of ten minutes following exposure. However, the stunned animals may be vulnerable to predation.

The report said: "Tank trials indicated exposure to an electric field typical of that generated through electro-fishing by the vessels involved in this project did not affect short term (five days) survival in razor clams, surf clams, starfish or hermit crabs ... These results suggest electro-fishing for razor clams does not have immediate or short term lethal effects, or prolonged behavioural effects, on vertebrate or invertebrate species exposed to the electric field generated."

It suggests further research to determine medium and long term effects, as well as into sustainability. Assessments should be made of the size of razor clam stocks as a step towards the development of a sustainable fishery scaled to the size of the resource.

John Grieve, of the Scottish Razor Clam Fishermen's Forum (SRCFF), said that the report should put to rest the 'over the top sensationalistic' claims of the environmental damage that would be done by electro-fishing and the danger it posed to operatives.

**SCALLOPS**

Marine Scotland has launched a consultation on new management controls to help protect king scallop stocks around Scotland and to ensure the long-term sustainability of the fishery. Views are being sought on increasing the minimum landing size of scallops; introducing new restrictions on dredge size; changes to licensing agreements to restrict the up-sizing of replacement vessels and placing restrictions on the amount of time that vessels can remain at sea. Scientific advice shows that there are some areas where fishing effort should be restricted or cut, and measures should be taken to increase the number of larger animals able to reproduce. The consultation runs until 5 January 2015. See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/10/8468](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/10/8468)

**QUOTA DISTRIBUTION**

The Scottish Government is consulting on a future framework for the distribution of fish quotas, with changes to be introduced in 2106. It is recommended that quota is taken from holders who have now given up fishing and put towards a national reserve, which would help new entrants and smaller vessels. Community quotas already exist in the Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland where local authorities have been responsible for their distribution.

**MACKEREL QUOTA**

The EU Fisheries Council has agreed to permit the fishing industry to bank 25% of the 2014 mackerel quota, up from the standard 10%, and roll it over for use in 2015. The fish will be left in the sea instead of being caught and potentially going to waste. This will give the industry more time to foster trade deals with new markets, following the Russian embargo on food imports from the EU. Scottish fishermen hold 70% of the UK mackerel quota; the Russian market accounted for 18% of UK mackerel exports in 2013. The legislation change, which includes species of herring and sprat, means that UK fishermen could potentially reserve 72,500 tonnes of the quota for 2015.



**MARINE**

**RADIOACTIVE CARGO**

A cargo vessel, the *Parida*, transporting a cargo of concreted radioactive waste, suffered a fire and it drifted in the Moray Firth. Workers were evacuated from the Beatrice oil rig by helicopter as a precaution. Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd (DSRL) confirmed that the waste had been sent to Dounreay from Belgium for reprocessing in the

1990s, and was being shipped back to Antwerp [Sep 14]. Radiation and containment monitoring was carried out on the vessel and it has been confirmed there is no risk to the public or the environment.

Environment secretary, Richard Lochhead, said: "It raises lots of questions how we regulate the transportation of nuclear waste through Scottish waters ... Most people, like me, may not be comfortable with the idea of a vessel carrying nuclear waste waiting for a weather window to sail through our waters."

Lang Banks, of WWF Scotland, said that the incident was a clear warning not to transport the more dangerous Dounreay 'exotics' (nuclear fuels) to Sellafield in Cumbria by sea, as is currently being considered [Sep 14]. He said: "This latest incident highlights the problems of dealing with the hazardous and expensive radioactive mess that the nuclear industry always leaves in its wake. Given all the severe weather warnings, questions need asked as to why a vessel carrying radioactive material was at sea at all."

DSRL said that another vessel, the *Oceanic Pintail*, was in the Pentland Firth undergoing trials to see if sea transport is a viable option for taking exotics to Sellafield. These contain unirradiated highly-enriched uranium; unirradiated plutonium and irradiated fuels.

Drew Hendry, of Highland Council, renewed calls to have two emergency tugs covering the Minch and Northern Isles, reinstating the one the UK government removed [Apr 14].

Richard Lochhead contacted Baroness Verma, who has responsibility for the UK nuclear regulatory body, to discuss whether it was wise for a vessel carrying such material to set sail in a 'weather window' when the weather condition led to the ship drifting and made the rescue effort more difficult than it would have been in better weather. He sought assurance from the UK government that a suitable towing vessel would be in the vicinity of the vessel as it makes its way out of Scottish waters.

In addition to asking Westminster to investigate the incident, Mr Lochhead also said that the Scottish Government should have the powers to regulate the transportation of nuclear waste on Scottish land and sea.

**LEATHERBACK TURTLES**

The *BBC News* website reported that four rare leatherback turtles were found dead, all within a fortnight, in Scotland. They were found off Dunbar, East Lothian; Drumbeig in Sutherland; off the Isle of Coll; and on the Isle of Skye, north of Elgol. The Scottish Marine Animal Strandings Scheme said that the 350 kg Dunbar turtle was found to have drowned following entanglement with creeling ropes; the Sutherland turtle also drowned.

**HYBRID DOLPHINS**

The *BBC News* website reported that Whale & Dolphin Conservation (WDC) said that fieldwork off Lewis between 2010 and 2014 had recorded four dolphins with the characteristics of two different species. Photographs suggested that bottlenose dolphins had been mating with resident Risso's dolphins. WDC said that the occurrence of four atypical dolphins consistent with hybridism in one small geographical region was highly unusual; it is the first evidence of wild dolphin cross-breeding in the UK.

Nicola Hodgins of WDC said: "One species mating with another may be down to a lack of suitable mates within their own individual species group. But further research is needed to understand the implications of this unusual

activity. The conservation implications of hybridism are unknown, but demonstrate the importance of effective management for these individuals and also for the wider populations found in the area. Only continued monitoring will help us to understand the extent and significance of hybridism in wild dolphins."

She also said the findings have ramifications for the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the area. "All four of the atypical dolphins were sighted within the proposed boundaries of the MPA and therefore they would hopefully benefit from increased protection."

The findings are published in *Marine Biodiversity Records*.

**SOUTH ARRAN MPA**

COAST, the Community of Arran Seabed Trust, reported on its website that it was as surprised as local creelers by the emergency Marine Conservation Order which prohibited fishing within three subsections of the South Arran MPA [Sep 14]. This was imposed after a scallop dredger violated a voluntary agreement to stay out of maerl beds within the MPA, prior to considered management being put in place.

The Order excluded creelers in addition to dredgers; however, creelers avoid maerl as they are not lobster grounds. COAST does not believe that creelers should be treated in the same way as dredgers; well-managed creeling can be sustainable. COAST urged Richard Lochhead to remove the ban on local creelers.

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

**OTTERS**

*The Press & Journal* reported that the Otter Survival Fund on Skye, together with Cardiff University, is researching the long-term pollution threat to otters. The study has shown that Scottish otters live for only about five or six years. However, in Germany and the Czech Republic they live for 15-16 years.

The bodies of otters have been sent, for the past ten years, to Glasgow and Cardiff Universities for autopsy. Toxicology tests have shown that the otters have accumulated high levels of cadmium and mercury in their bodies from fish originating in the North Sea, which has had traditionally high levels of industrial pollution. This is thought to have weakened their immune systems so making them susceptible to disease.

Organochlorines and PCBs have now been banned, but the effect of new chemicals and of the cocktail effect of the combination of different chemicals in the environment is unknown. Hormone-disrupting chemicals, commonly found in plastics and shampoos, are also believed to be affecting reproduction rates in otters.



**POLITICS & PARLIAMENT**

**CLIMATE CHANGE**

The Scottish Government's Cabinet Sub-Committee on Climate Change has held its inaugural meeting [Jun 14]. Chaired by the environment secretary, Richard Lochhead, the group discussed the progress made so far in delivering the government's climate change ambitions and the challenges facing Scotland as a society and policy options for making the transition to a low carbon economy.

**WILDLIFE CRIME**

The Rural Affairs, Climate Change & Environment Committee took evidence on the Scottish Government's *Wildlife Crime in Scotland 2013 Annual Report*. [See GENERAL ENVIRONMENT below] and: <http://ow.ly/DBLWX>



## GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

### MUIRBURN

*The Effects of Moorland Burning on the Ecohydrology of River Basins* (EMBER) project at Leeds University has shown that the tradition of burning heather, muirburn, on sporting estates causes significant environmental damage to both peatlands and nearby rivers.

The practice, which has been carried out for almost 150 years, is used predominantly to support red grouse populations for gun sports by ensuring a supply of new shoots for the birds to feed. The water table depth is significantly lower in areas where burning has taken place, compared to unburned areas.

The EMBER report stated: "A deeper water table means that the peat near the surface will dry out and degrade, releasing stored pollutants, such as heavy metals into rivers, and carbon into the atmosphere. Other important findings include a decrease in the diversity and population sizes of invertebrates, such as insect larvae, in rivers draining from burned areas. There is also an increase in soil temperature in the immediate years after burning."

Professor Joseph Holden, one of the report's authors, said: "Altering the hydrology of peatlands so they become drier is known to cause significant losses of carbon from storage in the soil. This is of great concern, as peatlands are the largest natural store for carbon on the land surface of the UK and play a crucial role in climate change."

The project compared 120 patches of peat in ten river catchment areas across the English Pennines. Dr Lee Brown, a co-author of the study, said that, while the study sites were all south of the border, there was no obvious reason why the findings were not transferable to Scottish grouse moors. Dr Brown said: "Even small changes in soil temperature can affect the decomposition of organic matter and the uptake of nutrients by plants. But we found increases as high as 20°C, with maximum temperatures reaching over 50°C in some cases."

Tim Baynes, of the Scottish Land & Estates (SL&E) Moorland Group, said: "The research is an interesting addition to a growing body of science about moorland burning although we need to be aware of differences between moors in the north of England where this study was carried out and cooler, wetter moors particularly in the north of Scotland." He said that the practice was governed by the Scottish Government's Muirburn Code which is undergoing a comprehensive review. He said the review would: "... take into account all the emerging science, including that which shows the benefits of well-managed muirburn for reducing wildfire risk and improving habitat for endangered bird species."

Alex Hogg, of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, said that it was also important to monitor the effects of all management practices on land. He added: "Controlled heather burning only takes place within very short, regulated, seasons. Following best practice, it only takes place when the fire will not burn into peat edges."

See: [bit.ly/1o129L3](http://bit.ly/1o129L3)

• *The West Highland Free Press* reported that the Heather Trust has conducted surveys of damage caused by the heather beetle, *Lochmaea suturalis*, over the past few years. Simon Thorp, of the trust, said: "We seem to be seeing far more large-scale breakouts and that could be to do with climatic conditions and it could be linked to all sorts of things. The trouble is that it's difficult to get a real hold of the situation. People are a bit

reluctant to report major outbreaks of the heather beetle because they think it is a reflection of bad management. But it's not at all."

1,024 hectares of moorland near Langholm was devastated in one outbreak. Moorland destroyed by the beetle will revert to unpalatable coarse grass for a while, affecting the wider biodiversity of the landscape.

### SCOTGOLD

*The Herald* reported that Scotgold Resources, the company mining for gold and silver in Argyll, said that it believes there is 'potential to define further resources close to the Cononish mine, subject to appropriate further work' whilst admitting that the possibility is 'highly conceptual' and there is 'no guarantee' of finds [Mar 12].

A new planning application is to be lodged with the Loch Lomonds & the Trossachs National Park planning authority shortly, following an easing of planning restrictions. Scotgold said that almost two thirds of the conditions relating to the planning approval for the project had now been discharged [Feb 12].

The Scotgold company continues to actively pursue exploration activities on its substantial land position in the Dalradian group of the south west Grampians, a terrain highly prospective for both gold and potential base metal occurrences. The majority (85%) of the area currently under option to Scotgold is located outside the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park. In 2011, the company began stream sediment sampling and has now taken over 750 samples, with a further 500 to come.

It now plans an airborne geophysical survey in order to assess the area's potential to host similar 'Cononish style' deposits.

### WILDLIFE CRIME

The *BBC News* website reported that Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) issues General Licences to land managers which enable them to shoot or trap birds deemed harmful to livestock or crops [Dec 12]. SNH said that such licences would no longer apply where police showed evidence of wildlife crime. Decisions to withhold licences would be based on a civil, rather than criminal, standard of proof.

The environment minister, Paul Wheelhouse, said: "It is too often the case that there is clear evidence that a crime has been committed, but the perpetrator is able to hide behind a wall of silence among those who really should be cooperating with the police. That is why I asked SNH to consider how better use can be made of general licenses, which, rather than a 'right' are a privilege that can and should be withdrawn where there is evidence of illegal activity taking place."

Ian Ross, of SNH, said: "We're committed to taking action whenever there is evidence of wildlife crime, and we believe this new measure will make it much tougher for those committing offences. Because of the remote locations where most wildlife crime takes place, it's often difficult to prove. So we need every tool we can to fight against those who persecute raptors in Scotland."

The application of the restriction will be back-dated to incidents that have taken place since 1 January 2014, and will apply for a set period of three years; it may be extended if further evidence of criminal activity is found within the initial restriction period. The decision to apply a restriction will be publicised on the SNH website.

However, the *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog reported that there are several flaws in the new arrangements. The decision to apply the restriction will be based on evidence supplied to SNH by Police Scotland, and not on that reported by the

Scottish SPCA, a statutory reporting authority whose evidence is regarded as being equally valid in criminal investigations. Police Scotland has under-resourcing issues and there are concerns that some raptor persecution incidents will slip through the net and not be reported to SNH. The blog asks who will monitor compliance once a restriction has been applied? If an area of land is under a restriction notice, individuals working on that land can still apply for an individual licence which would allow them to continue their activities.

Douglas McAdam, of SL&E, said: "Overall, we support the objective of reducing the already small number of crimes against wild birds but it is important to note that a large proportion of such incidents will be caused by people for whom general licences are not applicable. There were a number of concerns we raised during SNH's consultation, particularly in relation to the appeals process. We are pleased that these have been taken account of in the announcement and the system of giving landowners time to respond to a notification is welcome. There does, however, remain a need to ensure that evidence presented by police is sufficiently robust and the mechanism by which this is handled is seen to be fair and transparent. There also remains an issue that this licensing process could, for example, be seen to cloud a concurrent criminal investigation by police into the same matter."

Alex Hogg, of the SGA, said that the new legislation was ill-judged and could have serious unintended consequences: "A law-abiding gamekeeper going about his or her job properly could lose their livelihood and family home on the basis the estate upon which they are working is suspected of a wildlife crime. This is open to legal challenge as a breach of rights."

• The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog reported that Duncan Bryden, convenor of the Cairngorms National Park Authority, has written to the environment minister, Paul Wheelhouse, to tell him that continued incidents of raptor persecution and 'disappearing birds' in the eastern side of the park 'threatens to undermine the reputation of the National Park as a high quality wildlife tourism destination.'

He asked for the minister to attend a meeting of stakeholders in the Eastern Cairngorms (including RSPB Scotland and SL&E) to discuss ways to address this on-going issue.

### WILDLIFE CRIME REPORT

*Wildlife Crime in Scotland 2013 Annual Report* has been published by the Scottish Government [see POLITICS above]. It covers wildlife crimes ranging from badger baiting, raptor persecutions and damage to freshwater pearl mussels. The figures in the report show that the largest volume of recorded wildlife crime in Scotland continues to be poaching related (fish, deer and coursing offences). These offences are both broad in nature and levels of cruelty and can often incorporate elements of organised crime including the use of illegal firearms or illegal gambling.

Police recorded crime figures for the five year period covered in this second wildlife crime annual report have risen by 5.5%; there was an increase of 6.5% in guilty convictions over the same period.

Salmon and freshwater fisheries offences were the most frequent poaching incidents recorded, with 130 crimes in 2012/13, compared to 101 in 2011/12, an increase of almost 29%. 19 people were prosecuted with 13 found guilty. There were also 11 proceedings for hunting with dogs, with seven guilty verdicts.

*The Herald* reported that the annual report said that the survival of a population of pearl mussels in the Outer Isles is in the balance. Pearl

fishing is thought to be less significant than the damage caused by unconsented or unlawful river engineering and pollution events in Scotland. Half of the population in a remote river in North Harris was killed in 2009. In 2013, evidence came to light that 50% of the surviving population had been killed in a further pearl-fishing incident.

Raptor persecution continued to be the most high-profile of wildlife crimes in 2013, with four buzzards, one red kite and a golden eagle poisoned. Carbofuran has been used, either solely or in combination with another chemical, in just under 70% of recorded raptor poisoning incidents between 2009 and 2013. This is despite it being illegal to possess; it has been banned in the UK since 2001.

Paul Wheelhouse said: "While poaching is the most commonly recorded offence, crimes against our beautiful birds of prey and pearl mussels remain the most serious in terms of damage to Scotland's natural environment and our reputation. Though the numbers involved are relatively small, there is absolutely no room for complacency."

However the *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog questions the data in the report, saying that Scottish SPCA, Scottish Badgers and Operation Meles (a police-led operation dedicated to badger crime) reported 50 incidences of badger crime, for instance, in 2013 whereas Police Scotland had reported only one. The report said that additional incidences had not been included because they might have occurred during a different time period (financial year), there might not have been sufficient evidence for the incident to be recorded as a crime, or that the Scottish SPCA might have dealt with it.

The blog stated: "If anything, this report just highlights the on-going issue of wildlife crime reporting and recording, revealing huge problems in our ability to understand the extent of wildlife crime. We clearly can't use the data in these government reports to analyse whether wildlife crime is decreasing, increasing, or remaining 'static' as the government press release suggests." See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/10/2293](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/10/2293)

**ROSS-SHIRE RAPTOR DEATHS**

22 raptors were poisoned near Conan Bridge in Easter Ross in March [Sep 14]. Police Scotland now says that the raptors were not deliberately targeted and that they believe that the raptors were 'accidentally killed' by pest control measures.

Det Supt Colin Carey said: "Investigations into the suspicious deaths of wildlife and especially raptors can be difficult and prolonged. The areas covered can be vast and it is seldom immediately apparent why a bird may have died. We work closely with partners to identify and thoroughly investigate all wildlife crime. The death of the raptors in Ross-shire remains an on-going investigation during which we are endeavouring to establish all of the circumstances around this crime."

In a letter to *The Herald*, Tim Baynes, of SLE's Moorland Group, said that claims by conservation groups about the 'Ross-shire massacre' have wrongly sullied the reputation of their members. Mr Baynes said: "The announcement by Police Scotland that the 20 (*sic*) raptors found poisoned in March near Conon Bridge were not 'deliberately targeted' raises a number [of] serious matters.

"Despite the trend of crimes against birds of prey having gone down in the last three to five years, particularly by poisoning, the speculation around each case has become more hysterical. The RSPB even tried to link the Conon Bridge incident to grouse-moor management. There are now websites and bloggers and organisations

involved in police investigations who are not slow to feed information to the media and promote speculation.

"This speculation is having a corrosive knock-on effect on many other aspects of land management, severely straining the relationship between land managers and conservation bodies. This also brings into focus the new measure whereby General Licences to control pest birds may be withdrawn where there is only a suspicion of wildlife crime, rather than it being proven in court. Any deliberate killing of a bird of prey was illegal and should be condemned. It is not in anyone's interests that various activists and organisations can leap to conclusions without any evidence to support their point of view, which in turn is afforded political and media credence.

"It would be a major step forward if government and other interested organisations were to take a lead in ensuring that reckless speculation should be discouraged. If everyone sticks to the facts and works more constructively together then the interests of conservation will be better served."

RSPB Scotland and the Scottish SPCA contacted Police Scotland for an explanation of its claim that the Ross-shire incident was 'accidental.'

Ian Thomson, of RSPB Scotland, said: "The use of poisoned bait, deliberately placed in the open countryside, is an indiscriminate and criminal act, whatever the intention of the perpetrator, and is aggravated in this case by the fact that an illegal chemical was used. Whether these birds were killed deliberately or otherwise is irrelevant. Someone placed a fast-acting and very toxic poison out in the open, in an area well-known as being frequented by protected birds of prey, including a significant part of the north of Scotland red kite population. The resulting deaths were an entirely predictable result. The placing of poisoned bait, just a few miles from the popular Tollie red kite feeding station, was not only a reckless attack on local wildlife but also on the local tourist economy."

Duncan Orr Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, responded to Mr Baynes in a letter to *The Herald*: "As director SL&E Moorland Group, Mr Baynes could perhaps do more with his own audience to help tackle the crimes that are impacting on the populations of golden eagles and hen harriers, and marginalise bad practice. The flouting of national laws designed to protect our most vulnerable wildlife is what undermines the relationship between conservationists and grouse moor owners, and it also tarnishes the reputation of those land owners who observe best practice."

**WINDFARM RAPTOR DEATHS**

The Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme report, published by Science & Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA), said that four raptors were killed by windfarm turbines between January and June this year and a fifth, a golden eagle, was electrocuted by a power line.

*The Telegraph* reported that, over the same period, two birds were confirmed to have been poisoned or shot. However, the *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog pointed out that the SASA report includes data on five confirmed killings of raptors between January and June 2014, plus one rook and one unidentified bird; the 22 Ross-shire killings have been excluded 'for some reason.'

The SGA said that the report revealed the truth behind the 'prejudice' aimed at landowners and farmers which painted the shooting industry as 'guilty until proven innocent.' A spokesman said: "It is important the public can understand for themselves the true picture regarding wildlife crime. After the appalling finger-pointing at

the shooting and farming industries following Conon Bridge this year by the highly politicised conservation movement, we will be interested to see if those groups now call for the same licensing measures against the government-backed windfarm industry.'

See: [www.sasa.gov.uk/document-library/wiis-quarterly-reports](http://www.sasa.gov.uk/document-library/wiis-quarterly-reports)

**SPPCA POWERS**

The Scottish Government has published the responses to its consultation on whether the Scottish SPCA should be given increased investigatory powers to allow them to investigate a wider suite of wildlife crimes than their current remit allows [Sep 14]. There were 233 responses. See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/10/8427/downloads](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/10/8427/downloads)

**MIDGES**

Dr Alison Blackwell, of Advanced Pest Solutions which runs the Scottish Midge Forecast, said that midge numbers were significantly higher at most of their trapping locations across Scotland than they had been in 2013. A bumper number of midges is forecast for next summer after higher than usual numbers this year and a third hatching in September; Midges spend the late autumn and winter as larvae, living below the soil surface; they begin to emerge as adults in May and June.

**PEAT EXTRACTION**

A Scottish Government reporter has rejected an appeal from Everris Ltd for an additional extension to the time allowed to extract peat at Nutberry Moss near Eastriggs in Dumfries & Galloway Council. The local authority ruled they should cease extraction by November 2024. The company wanted a 25 year extension to its operations but the reporter decided that the environmental costs would outweigh any economic benefits.

**RADIOACTIVE WASTE**

The Atomic Weapons Establishment site at Chapelcross in Dumfries & Galloway is one of five sites in the UK shortlisted to house radioactive waste from 27 decommissioned nuclear-powered submarines.

Richard Lochhead, the environment secretary, said in a letter to the UK government: "Scotland must not be turned into a dumping ground for Ministry of Defence nuclear waste. The Scottish Government will be continuing to make the case that waste arising from the MoD submarine dismantling projects in Rosyth and Devonport should be stored elsewhere."

**HARLAW GAIT**

*The Herald* reported that Lord Dalmeny has applied for planning permission to build a residential development at Harlaw Gait near Balerno, near Edinburgh. The site, currently used for grazing, is greenbelt land and included within a site of Importance for Nature Conservation. It has also been identified within the candidate Pentlands Special Landscape Area.

**SPRI**

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has published the Scottish Pollutant Release Inventory (SPRI) data for 2013. An 8% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from industrial processes is largely due to the closure of Cockenzie Power Station in March 2013. A total of 1,335 sites reported data to SPRI in 2013, compared to 1,337 in 2012.

Carbon dioxide emissions dropped to 21,106,530,545 kg/year from 22,929,115,343 in 2012. Methane emissions decreased to 47,329,292 from 47,548,895 kg/year in 2012. Nitrous oxide dropped to 173,848 from 192,447 kg/year and

Sulphur hexafluoride to 241 from 304 kg/year. The release of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) increased from 2,342 kg in 2012 to 3,490 kg in 2013. HFC totals vary year on year due to maintenance and top ups of systems. Perfluorocarbons (PFCs) release rose by 126 kg from 3,090 to 3,216. A contributing factor for the increase in 2013 is the release from one site due to a process issue.

See: [www.sepa.org.uk/spri](http://www.sepa.org.uk/spri)

### KINGCRAIG POINT FIRE

A fire at Kingcraig Point, west of Earlsferry in Fife, damaged part of the Firth of Forth Site of Special Scientific Interest, designated for the Northern Brown Argus habitat. This butterfly is only found in five other sites in Scotland, all of which are also protected. The butterfly relies solely on the common rock-rose. Over six acres of dry grassland slope by the Fife Coastal Path were ignited.

SNH said that the fire coincided with the most vulnerable stage in the butterfly's life cycle as the caterpillars were going in to hibernation on the ground below the vegetation. Next year's population may have been seriously affected with many caterpillars dying in the fire.

### SPEY DIVERSION

The *Badenoch & Strathspey Herald* reported that SSE has withdrawn plans to 're-water' the River Garry in the Tay catchment using flow diverted from the River Spey. Much of the natural flow of the Garry has already been diverted to produce hydropower at the Tummel plant. SEPA now intends to review the licence conditions with a view to delivering improvements to the rivers and implementing the EU Water Framework Directive governing the ecological quality of rivers and burns.

### SKYE GRAZING

SNH has extended an ongoing study, by eight years, to monitor how grazing by rabbits and sheep affects upland plants and soil erosion on the Trotternish Ridge, Skye. The ridge is a Special Area of Conservation and Site of Special Scientific Interest and is owned by the Scottish Government.



## ENERGY

### ENERGY SUPPLY

A report, *Assessing Scotland's Security of Supply in the GB Electricity Market*, has been published. It highlights the UK's emerging energy gap and the shift in UK energy policy needed to secure the construction of new clean thermal plant and flexible hydro power in Scotland.

Alex Salmond, the first minister, said that investments in pumped storage are not best served by the current system. A transfer of energy policy powers, which has been proposed to the Smith Commission, is the best way to ensure that Scotland's energy security and renewable ambitions remain protected and on track.

See: [bit.ly/1sNrmZu](http://bit.ly/1sNrmZu)

### WINDFARM UPDATES

**Angus:** Eurowind UK has withdrawn its application for consent to erect 17 turbines on Nathro Hill near Brechin, a few miles from the Cairngorms National Park boundary. The developers said that current investors had taken the decision 'after making their own assessment of the current planning climate.' However, the company expects to re-submit the project at a later date.

**Dumfries & Galloway:** Renewable Energy Systems has lodged an appeal with the Scottish Government after plans for the five turbine Barclay

Hill windfarm near Kirkcudbright were rejected [Jul 14]. The developer said that the visual impact of the scheme had been 'over-stated' and said that it was confident that an objection from National Air Traffic Control Services could be resolved.

**East Ayrshire:** E.ON's 27 turbine, 74 MW Afton windfarm near New Cumnock in East Ayrshire has been granted consent by the Scottish Government.

**Inverness-shire:** The Save The Monadhliath Mountains (SMM) coalition has called on the Scottish Government to stay true to its word to protect wild land; ministers have now allowed RWE to prepare a wild land impact assessment for the Allt Duine windfarm [Sep 14]. The development would be located wholly in wild land, partly in the Cairngorms National Park and adjacent to a National Scenic Area.

The public inquiry concluded two years ago. However, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has now stated their formal objection to the development, citing concerns with the impact on the wild land resource and the recent changes to national planning policy.

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that Jenny Gascoigne, of RWE, said: "The new planning policy states that windfarms may be acceptable within areas of wild land, so it is clear that a 'wild land' area, derived only through a desk-based assessment, should not be the determining factor in this decision. Whilst this late objection is very disappointing, recent decisions have demonstrated that it is possible and acceptable for ministers to approve schemes where SNH has objected."

Helen McDade, of the John Muir Trust (JMT), said: "The new planning policy makes it quite clear that the Wild Land Areas (WLAs), as mapped by SNH, must be afforded significant protection and yet developers are continuing to argue about whether areas within that WLA can be called wild land."

• The JMT had lodged a petition in the Court of Session asking for a judicial review of the decision to approve the 67 turbine Stronelairg windfarm without a public inquiry [Jun 14]. Lord Phillip has now refused to grant JMT a Protective Expenses Order. Stuart Brooks, of the JMT, said: "[This] decision suggests that charities in Scotland will find it extremely difficult to obtain a measure of protection from very high legal costs when bringing environmental cases in the public interest."

**Lewis:** The *BBC News* website reported that GDF Suez, backer of the 39 turbine Eisgen windfarm, has pulled out of the project [May 12]. The company blamed delays in laying the subsea cable needed to carry electricity generated on the isles to the mainland. GDF, along with other renewable energy developers, had been expected to contribute to the cost of the estimated £780m cable. Work is expected to be completed on the cable by 2019.

The *Herald* reported that Michael Rieley, of Scottish Renewables, said: "We need to see meaningful regulatory and policy change to enable these vital connections. Without these necessary grid connections, Scottish islands, like Lewis, will be unable to realise their renewable electricity potential."

**Easter Ross:** ABO Wind UK Ltd has withdrawn its planning application for five wind turbines at Woodlands Farm near Dingwall. The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoFS), had objected to the plan, citing the 'completely unacceptable' visual impact on Ben Wyvis and the scenically important area north of Inverness. SNH had also objected.

**Perth & Kinross:** PNE Wind Ltd is proposing, in conjunction with Forestry Commission Scotland, the 25 turbine, 62.5 MW North Hill windfarm near Dunning in the Ochil Hills. The 21 turbine Burnfoot Windfarm, 18 turbine Lochelbank Windfarm and 12 turbine Green Knowes Windfarm are all within a six mile radius. The proposed location overlaps two previous windfarm application sites, both of which were refused planning permission.

David Gibson, of MCoFS, said: "We consider North Hill to be a particularly egregious and ill-advised proposal. This would be a significantly larger windfarm, with significantly larger turbines, than any existing in the Ochil Hills."

**Scottish Borders:** A public inquiry into plans for the 18 turbine Cloich Forest windfarm, near Eddleston in Peebles-shire, has been called [Jun 14]. The local authority objected to the proposals on the grounds of impact on landscape character.

### OFFSHORE WINDFARMS

The Scottish Government has approved four offshore windfarms off the east coast of Scotland. The developments, in the Firths of Forth and Tay, could provide 2.284 GW of power.

The Neart na Gaoith windfarm east of the Fife Ness coastline will have up to 75 turbines, generating 450 MW. The Alpha and Bravo Seagreen developments combined will consist of up to 150 turbines, around 27 to 38 km off the Angus coastline, and could generate 1,050 MW. The Inch Cape development, also off Angus, will comprise 110 turbines, generating 784 MW. The four developments could supply two-thirds of Scotland's electricity needs on windy days, representing as much capacity as Scotland's current nuclear reactors.

RSPB Scotland expressed major concerns over the proximity of the developments to seabird colonies. Large colonies of gannet, kittiwake, puffin and razorbill breed along the coastlines near the windfarm sites, including the 110,000 gannets at the Bass Rock and puffin breeding grounds at the Isle of May. RSPB Scotland said that it was inevitable that there would be a decline in species due to seabirds colliding with turbines and displacement from foraging grounds at sea.

Stuart Housden of RSPB Scotland said: "If the models and assessments of potential damage prove accurate, these windfarms would be amongst the most deadly for birds anywhere in the world. RSPB Scotland wants to see the development of offshore wind in Scotland but it must not be at such massive cost to our internationally important seabirds."

Whale & Dolphin Conservation said that the decision by Scottish ministers to consent the new offshore windfarms 'will drive another nail in the coffin of the local common (harbour) seal population.' WDC said: "The rapidly declining common seal population at the Firth of Tay & Eden Estuary Special Area of Conservation is predicted to become locally extinct in less than ten years. They are part of a bigger national population whose status is 'unfavourable, inadequate'. The dramatic decline of this population and the failure of the Scottish Government to maintain the population at favourable conservation status is a continuing breach of European environmental legislation. The Scottish Government does not have a clear strategy to reverse this decline."

### DALWHINNIE HYDRO

The *Badenoch & Strathspey Herald* reported that Cairngorms National Park Authority's planning committee have objected to RWE Innogy's plans for a 9 MW hydroelectric scheme on the River Pattack [Jul 14]. Planning officials had recommended approval. The committee asked for more information on the ecological impact on the

river, the potential impact to the waterfalls and the design of the powerhouse on the shores of Loch Laggan.

**COALBED METHANE**

Dart Energy had applied to Falkirk and Stirling councils for permission to drill 22 wells to extract coal bed methane at 14 sites in Airth and the Forth Valley [May 14]. The firm then called on the Scottish Government to take over the planning decision from the local authorities, which it has now done.

- The *BBC News* website reported that Ineos has bought a licence for shale gas exploration and development near its Grangemouth plant. The company has secured the rights to 400 km<sup>2</sup> adjacent to a 329 km<sup>2</sup> area bought in August. Ineos plans to drill test wells to determine whether the resources can be extracted at a reasonable cost.

**BIOMASS PLANT**

A 20 MW wood-burning biomass plant is being proposed for the Inveralmond industrial estate in Perth. The plant would burn up to 200,000 tonnes of timber a year. The proposed plant, on two hectares of land currently used for agriculture, would export electricity to the national grid as well as providing heat to surrounding businesses.

**SOLAR PARK**

Solar Cities Scotland is planning the country's largest community-owned solar energy farm in Dundee. Income derived from the project would fund energy-efficiency measures and renewable energy installations in hard-to-heat homes.



**TOURISM & RECREATION**

**LOCH LOMOND**

The *BBC News* website reported that the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) board has put forward new proposals to restrict camping in parts of the park, which are out for public consultation. Seasonal bylaws banning unauthorised camping and alcohol have already been introduced to parts of east Loch Lomond [Mar 14]. The park's board now propose to bring in camping management bylaws for two more areas, saying that the existing bylaw system is a 'resounding success' – vandalism and reports of anti-social behaviour are down 81% in the regulated areas.

The *Herald* reported that Gordon Watson, of the LLTNP authority, said: "The National Park Authority has been recording evidence over many years of the entrenched problems experienced during the summer season at other hot-spot locations in the wider park area. These are where popular loch shores are easily accessible from a public road meaning they attract very high levels of car-borne camping use. Such heavy usage is causing environmental damage through loss of vegetation and habitats. This is significantly compounded by the anti-social and irresponsible behaviour of some visitors. The shared success of our east Loch Lomond initiative has shown that a package of measures can transform the area for visitors, residents, local businesses, and restore the environment to its former glory."

Anti-social behaviour included littering, cutting down live trees and irresponsible fire lighting. Campers who set up caravans and campsites for months on end were also identified as an issue.

The new bylaws would cover 'concentrated areas of entrenched pressures' such as many lochs in the Trossachs, much of the west side of Loch Lomond and the north-east tip of Loch

Long. The bylaws would make it an offence to camp outside authorised sites without a permit or to cause damage to the area or wildlife and would be in effect from 1 March to 31 October each year. They would cover less than 5% of the park's 720 square miles.

Helen Todd, of Ramblers Scotland, said: "I've talked to the park authority and we share the same desires for how to manage these places and I have a lot support for the work they're doing. But I really don't buy the case that they need bylaws to bring these into effect. In terms of setting precedents, we've seen it spreading across the park, and I'd imagine there are communities in other parts of Scotland where people will be thinking they need them too. Bit by bit this fantastic access legislation we have is being whittled away."

Kevin Lilburn, of the East Loch Lomond Visitor Management group, said: "Previously we suffered some sort of incident at my home pretty much every weekend in the summer, including litter, theft, vandalism and verbal or even physical intimidation. Since the bylaws have been introduced, there have been none. Not one. That speaks for itself and official statistics tell a similar story. We have gone from a situation where my neighbours and I dreaded sunny days to one in which we can relax, enjoy where we live, and happily share the area with responsibly behaved visitors."

Fiona Logan, of LLTNPA, said that the plans being put out for consultation were 'unashamedly ambitious.' She said: "The park is within an hour's drive of more than 50% of Scotland's population, and this gives us specific problems, which, despite our best efforts, have been escalating. The package of measures we are proposing has been developed in conjunction with partners and local communities and reflects our wholesale commitment to dramatically improving the experience of the park for both residents and visitors."

The 'Your Park' consultation will run until 12 January. The authority is seeking input from individuals, landowners, businesses, community enterprises and charities who may be interested in setting up or running new facilities. This would be supported by £10m from the park authority, which has already identified potential sites for additional camping, campervans and motor homes.

See: [www.thisisyourpark.org.uk](http://www.thisisyourpark.org.uk)

**GLEN LYON ACCESS**

The *BBC News* website reported that the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) said that Perth & Kinross Council is failing in its duty over access to North Chesthill Estate in Glen Lyon [May 14]. The MCofS said that it, and Perth & Kinross Council, Perth & Kinross Local Access Forum, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Ramblers Scotland had all been involved in trying to come to an amicable solution with the owner.

However, the MCofS said that on the SNH 'Heading for the Hills' website the estate owner had said that stalking would be taking place on at least 25 days between 15 September and 15 October. David Gibson, of MCofS, said in a letter to the council: "This blanket closure is completely unacceptable and outwith the spirit of the access legislation."

A spokeswoman for the council said: "The council is fulfilling its legal obligations and is committed to utilising the resources available for dealing with obstruction cases as effectively as possible."

The estate owner, Major Riddell, insists that he has made every effort to accommodate walkers while endeavouring to run a sheep and stalking business.

**MARINE TOURISM**

Highlands & Islands Enterprise has launched a public consultation on marine tourism. The market is currently estimated to be worth £100m, but is expected to increase to £145m over the next ten years. Sailing tourism is a key area of the marine offering, bringing high-spending tourism to many remote and fragile communities. Funding has been provided for Sail Scotland over three years.

**WEST HIGHLAND WAY**

Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland has completed £230,000 of path upgrade work along the West Highland Way at Loch Lomondside.

Repair work has focused on eroded sections of path near FC Scotland's Sallochys campsite, and has included general work to improve drainage and surface quality on other sections.

The work is part of a larger, £750,000 programme to upgrade paths that are on the national forest estate within the LLTNP.

**GLENMORE MASTERPLAN**

The *Badenoch & Strathspey Herald* reported that the £10m Glenmore Outline Masterplan is out for consultation. Forestry Commission Scotland and the Cairngorms National Park Authority are leading the project. Glenmore is to be promoted as an activity destination, with a new path network, carparking, new visitor hub and an 'arrival experience' structure. Once the plans are further developed, a bid will be made by the stakeholders for funding.



**NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS**

**CSGN**

£500,000 of new funding has been made available from the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) Development Fund. The fund kick starts projects which transform the quality of life for people living and working in the central belt, using stalled, vacant and derelict land. A wide range of environmental enhancements across the central belt of Scotland create valuable greenspace resources for local communities to enjoy. Over the past five years, the CSGN Development Fund has supported over 150 projects with almost £5.3m. See: [www.csgn.org.uk](http://www.csgn.org.uk)

**NTS**

84% of respondents who took part in an online poll said that the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), should be a more 'active advocate for heritage and conservation.' Other options supported were making trust properties 'community hubs' (87%) and taking its collections and artefacts on tour (71%).

The NTS has 320,000 members and cares for more than 100 sites of built, cultural and natural heritage. The results of the poll were presented to the AGM as work begins to set out its new five-year strategy [Sep 14]. Among the topics on the agenda were plans for a more co-ordinated approach to managing key heritage sites and responses to calls to improve links between the trust and local communities.

**TREES FOR LIFE**

Trees for Life is to receive funding of almost £80,000 for new forest conservation projects in Glen Affric near Loch Ness. The initiatives will involve the planting of 20,000 trees, removal of non-native trees and plants, restoration of habitats, conservation training, and the renovation of Athnamulloch Bothy in partnership with Forestry Commission Scotland.

The funding comes from the Legacy 2014 Active Places Fund and the European Outdoor Conservation Association.

See: [www.treesforlife.org.uk](http://www.treesforlife.org.uk)