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## CONSERVATION

### SEABIRD NUMBERS

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) said that some species of seabirds are still declining in numbers, including kittiwakes and Arctic skuas, whose Northern Isles breeding strongholds have seen large declines over a number of years.

On the Isle of May, the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (CEH) found that 2014 was the most successful season on record for fulmars and was also good for kittiwakes and shags. In general, 2014 was found to be a good breeding season for nearly all species on the island. Mark Newell, of CEH, said: "The last few winters have seen a return to slightly cooler winter sea temperatures in the area around the Isle of May National Nature reserve, which is thought to have been beneficial to the development of sandeels, the preferred prey of many of the seabirds. This coupled with more benign spring weather has played its part in an improved breeding season this year."

On Noss, in Shetland, kittiwakes fledging chicks were recorded for the first time in five years. Arctic terns were also recorded as having a productive breeding season with 30 chicks fledging, the highest number in ten years.

For those birds that continue to decrease in numbers, there are a range of negative factors such as food shortages, weather conditions and predation by animals including brown rats and mink. Numbers of small shoaling fish, which are an important food source for many seabirds, have fallen in some areas. These fish are probably being affected by rising sea temperatures because of climate change, as well as other factors.

The Seabird Monitoring Programme, led and co-ordinated by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee involving a range of conservation partners. See: [www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B424907.pdf](http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B424907.pdf)

### BEAVERS

Six independent reports, examining different aspects of the Scottish Beaver Trial in Argyll, have been published by SNH. The reports set out the findings over the five years the Scottish Beaver Trial has been running, since the beavers were released in 2009 by the Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, on land managed by Forestry Commission Scotland [Jun 14].

Work by the University of Stirling showed that beavers have had an effect on aquatic plants in some of the lochs; the most obvious impact was on great fen-sedge, an uncommon, though not rare plant in Great Britain, which declined substantially at three of the lochs used by the beavers. However it survived in other lochs in the area, also used by beavers. The water level in one loch rose significantly, because of a beaver dam, causing a major change in the quantity and distribution of plants. Although some of the original plants in this loch were lost, other plants grew on floating peat. The wetland habitat increased and was rapidly colonised by a range of plants and insects.

The woodland study, run by the James Hutton Institute, found that the beavers had gnawed or felled 8.6% of trees in the area as a whole by early 2014. Most of this activity was within 10 metres of the water's edge. They favoured trees that were 2-6 cm across. Their particular favourites were willow,

rowan and hazel but birch was most often used by beavers as it was the most commonly found tree in the survey area. Many trees felled by beavers regrow from their stumps but an initial flush of re-sprouting earlier in the trial tailed off more recently, as deer have eaten some of the new growth. The overall effect of the beavers on the woodland since they arrived at Knapdale is to significantly change the structure of some areas close to the edge of the lochs where they are living. In these areas the woodland has opened up and at ground level grass cover and woody debris has increased while leaf litter has reduced. Many other areas of woodland along the shore and away from the water haven't been affected by the beavers at all.

The socio-economic impact of the trial was assessed by Scotland's Rural College. Visitor numbers and volunteering in the area have had a boost. The benefits extended beyond the trial area. Between May 2008 and May 2014, more than 32,000 people were involved in various activities held by Scottish Beaver Trial staff. Over 5,000 students from 135 schools took part in field trips and events related to the trial. Researchers received a mixed response from local businesses about how the project was affecting them. Some said that anglers were staying away because of the beavers, while others told of visitors coming to the area in the hope of seeing the animals. The report said that shops and firms might be able to boost earnings and job opportunities if the beavers were allowed to stay on a permanent basis.

The other three reports were published by independent monitoring partners. Argyll & Bute Council monitored public health and found that the additional risk to human health from the beavers at Knapdale is very low. Historic Scotland assessed the impact of beavers on scheduled monuments and concluded that beavers are unlikely to have any effect on the Loch Coille-Bharr crannog, as long as the current water level of the loch is maintained in the expected range. Historic Scotland was not aware of any adverse impact on the Crinan Canal or its associated watercourses during the trial.

The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies carried out veterinary monitoring of the beavers at Knapdale after release, by trapping and visual observations. One beaver was removed from the trial because of poor body condition. Two beavers died shortly after release - one with circulatory failure and one where the cause of death was not clear. Two kits died, most likely due to predation. The body weights of the adult beavers following their release have stayed within the expected weight range for Norwegian beavers.

All the reports also considered the likely future effects of beavers at Knapdale and in the event of a wider reintroduction, based on the results and conclusions from the five years of the trial.

A report on the independent monitoring will be submitted to ministers by May 2015 and then the Scottish Government will decide on the future of beavers in Scotland. See: [bit.ly/1vsLooZ](http://bit.ly/1vsLooZ); [www.scottishbeavers.org.uk](http://www.scottishbeavers.org.uk)

• The *Scottish Farming Leader* reported that NFU Scotland's policy on beaver reintroduction has been agreed by its environment & land use committee. It opposes reintroduction for

a number of reasons and said that it is deeply sceptical that beavers can be excluded from areas of farmland that are heavily reliant on complex drainage systems and flood banks. Species management budgets, which are already stretched, cannot cope with the high cost of managing 'nature's engineer.' Beaver reintroduction would divert resources and attention away from existing species, such as the wildcat and capercaillie, that are under threat. The three year funding cycles for the sea eagle and geese schemes are evidence that any compensation for beaver impacts would be unlikely to be secure over the long-term. Reintroduction would legitimise the illegal release of beavers in Tayside, and therefore incentivise others to take similar action to reintroduce species 'via the back door.'

### CHOUGHS

SNH said that the red-billed chough in Scotland, restricted to Islay and Colonsay, has been in serious decline for several years. Only 39 breeding pairs were counted on Islay in 2013 compared with 95 breeding pairs in 1986. Conservationists from Islay and Aberdeen University, who had been studying the island's chough population, noticed that the problem seemed to be a poor survival rate for young choughs. Few birds were managing to survive the two to three year period from when they leave the nest as fledglings through to adulthood.

SNH and the Scottish Chough Study Group, with the help of local farmers, are now providing additional food for the young birds.

For the last three seasons, the young choughs have been provided with a nutritious mealworm snack at their pre-roost feeding areas, before they go to their communal roosts at night. The census has now counted 46 breeding pairs.

Eric Bignal, from the study group, said that in 2007, 2008 and 2009, as few as 10% of chicks were surviving their first year. He said: "Assuming everything else stays the same you need survival rates of around 30%. Since we started the feeding, the rate has crept up from 10% to 20%, then 30% and up to 40%."

Populations had fallen below a sustainable threshold and a series of bad summers, insect breeding cycles, and changes in farming practices had occurred.

### BREEDING BIRDS REPORT

SNH has released the latest official statistics publication tracking the abundance of Scotland's terrestrial breeding birds.

Over the long term (1994-2013), the combined abundance for 66 species of terrestrial breeding bird showed a steady increase up to the mid-2000s but has since declined. Woodland birds increased by 51%; farmland birds showed a steady increase up to the late 2000s but have since declined, so there is no significant difference between 1994 and 2013, and upland birds decreased by 21%.

Long-term trends differ between species and include the conditions experienced in wintering areas (e.g. chiffchaff), the ability of some birds to exploit different food sources (e.g. goldfinch) or outbreaks of diseases (e.g. trichomonosis in greenfinch).

Over the short-term, (2012 to 2013), the farmland, woodland and all-species indices decreased by 10%. This decline may be partly attributable to the weather conditions in 2012 which resulted in a poor breeding season and subsequently fewer adult birds breeding in 2013. The upland bird index showed no significant change over this period.

See: [www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1453410.pdf](http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1453410.pdf)

### WILD CATS

A report, *Survey and Scoping of Wildcat Priority Areas*, was produced jointly by researchers at the James Hutton Institute, WildCRU and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland for SNH. The report summarises the findings of three complementary projects commissioned by SNH to inform the selection of Priority Areas for wildcat conservation, as proposed in the Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Plan 2013.

The scoping projects combined field surveys, taxonomic and genetic assessments, population modelling and a questionnaire survey of public attitudes to wildcat conservation measures. The report makes recommendations for six wildcat Priority Areas which all had evidence of cats that were classified as wildcats based on their appearance. However, domestic cats or hybrids (between domestic cats and wildcats) were also found, highlighting the need for conservation actions to reduce the risks they pose to wildcats from hybridisation and disease. The priority areas are the Angus Glens, Strathbogie in Aberdeenshire, Strathavon in Moray and Morvern, Strathpeffer and Dulnain in the Highlands.

Risks to wildcats in these areas will be reduced by co-ordinating a trap, neuter and release programme to neuter all feral and hybrids cats; encouraging cat owners to neuter and vaccinate cats; working with gamekeepers, farmers and foresters to reduce the risks to wildcats from predator control and monitoring populations to see the benefits of this work. See: [bit.ly/1pMjdp3](http://bit.ly/1pMjdp3)

### GRASS SNAKES

*The Herald* reported that research by Caledonian Conservation has shown that grass snakes, *Natrix natrix*, have been spotted in the Highlands. Until 2010, it was generally believed that wild grass snakes do not occur in Scotland. However, three confirmed records were made in Dumfries & Galloway between 2009 and 2010, and there are other unconfirmed but possible records from elsewhere in Scotland. Caledonian Conservation have gathered and verified grass snake data from conservation trusts, amphibian and reptile groups, local authorities, charities and individuals over the past two years. New discoveries of eggs and frequent sightings of young grass snakes prove that the reptiles are mating, breeding and surviving in Scotland.

It is not known if they are recent arrivals or what their range is. See: [bit.ly/1EYjFEa](http://bit.ly/1EYjFEa)

### PEARL MUSSELS

There have been three cases of illegal fishing for freshwater pearl mussels in different rivers in west Sutherland. In one incident, thousands of empty shells were found discarded in a river, resulting in most of the population in the river being killed. It will take decades for the population to recover as pearl mussels are very slow-growing.

A Riverwatch scheme has been launched in Assynt to raise awareness of the threats to freshwater pearl mussels. The scheme works in collaboration with landowners, local communities, river users, fishery boards and trusts, and Police Scotland. The public is urged to look out for piles of shells in the river or the bank, people wading in the river with a glass bottom bucket, or any works on rivers that may disturb a pearl mussel habitat, and to report any suspicious activity to the police.

Chief Inspector Colin Gough, wildlife crime co-ordinator for the Highlands, said: "Protected by law, freshwater pearl mussels are a very important part of a river's habitat, with illegal pearl fishing having the potential to devastate their fragile populations. Police Scotland will

continue to work in close partnership with the Pearls in Peril LIFE+ project by supporting their river patrols, investigating any reports of this type of crime and undertaking enforcement action wherever possible."

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) have been designated as sites of European importance for the conservation of pearl mussels under the EC Habitats Directive which include the Abhainn Clais an Eas and Allt a' Mhuilinn SAC, the Inverpolly SAC near Lochinver, and the Loch a' Mhuilinn Woodlands SAC near Kylesku.

### PINE MARTEN CULL

*The Sunday Herald* reported that the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) wants to launch a trial next year to trap and relocate 120 pine martens over six years in four Strathspey forests. Three of the forests, Rothiemurchus, Glenmore and Inshriach, are owned by Forestry Commission Scotland; Kinveachy is privately owned. Two other woodlands, Abernethy and Craigmore, were omitted from the plan because of opposition by the owner, RSPB Scotland.

The leaked GWCT document states: "Whilst humane killing of captured martens may be the easiest option, we intend to make martens available for wider marten conservation programmes."

The purpose of the trial is to test whether pine martens are harming capercaillie by eating their eggs and chicks. These birds have declined from 20,000 in 1970 to about 1,200, many of which share Strathspey woodlands with martens.

Dr Johnny Birks of the Mammal Society has written to SNH, expressing 'deep concern' about the proposed trial. Evidence in support of it was poor and there were no organisations willing to take any relocated martens. He points out that landowners and gamekeepers have been increasingly pushing for the right to cull pine martens in order to protect red grouse so they can be shot for sport.

Dr Birks said: "Instead of pursuing a flawed scheme to remove it, we should be celebrating the marten's return to Speyside. Unlike our Victorian ancestors, thankfully we now understand that predation is a natural component of healthy ecosystems. Pine martens have coexisted in a stable predator-prey balance with capercaillie in forests across northern Europe for thousands of years. Predators frequently influence the breeding success of their prey, but this is a natural process and should not be used to justify the removal of one protected species to protect another."

Duncan Orr-Ewing of RSPB Scotland, dismissed the proposed trial as 'inappropriate and unnecessary.' Hamish Trench, of the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), said that there were 'significant questions' about a trial removal of pine martens.

*The Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog reported that freedom of information requests showed unease about the GWCT's proposed methods within SNH, FC Scotland and CNPA. GWCT was told that licences to permit the killing of pine martens are unlikely to be supported, and also licences to permit the live-trapping of pine martens during the lactation period (from 15 March to 31 July) are unlikely to be supported on animal welfare grounds.

The original plan was to start live-trapping pine martens in early 2015. However, SNH has asked GWCT for an extended development plan before the research proposal can be considered further. The Vincent Wildlife Trust is 'not receptive' to hosting translocated pine martens.

### LEA MACNALLY FUND

A fund has been established in memory of Lea MacNally, the acclaimed Highland stalker, to highlight and tackle serious problems facing native red deer.

The MacNally family's opening donation to the fund, run through the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, financed a response to the Scottish Government's deer management vision, *'Wild Deer: A National Approach.'*

In recent years, SNH has approved a growing number of licences to enable deer, including hinds in calf, to be culled outwith the legal seasons. The majority of these applications are for forestry and conservation groups' pine regeneration schemes, with red deer in some areas being heavily reduced. Deer wandering into regeneration areas, where no fences have been erected to prevent their passage, can be culled for major parts of the year if licences are granted out of season. This can have significant implications for neighbouring jobs supported by sport stalking, and also for animal welfare.

Lea MacNally junior said: "These out-of-season licences are being rubber-stamped far too easily without proper assessments and it is this type of thing my father would have found utterly abhorrent. Where we are, jobs are at risk, too. Estates can't continue to employ stalkers if their traditional cull is quartered or halved in some areas because many deer are being shot out of season."



## FARMING

### CAP REFORM

NFU Scotland has called on the Scottish Government to bring forward vital information around how it plans to introduce key elements of the new CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) package [Oct 14].

Nigel Miller, of NFU Scotland, said: "The growing frustration felt by new and established businesses is being fuelled by an information vacuum and it is inherent on the Scottish Government to address that by bringing forward the detailed processes and communicate with clarity on the impacts of the new CAP regime. It is now vital that Scottish Government officials operate in a more transparent manner. They must share the fundamentals of the reform options that are increasingly certain to be adopted. For established businesses, the impacts of the transition process to 2019, as announced by the Cabinet Secretary in June, have to be made clear. We understand that the Scottish Government's original transition plan has been rejected by the European Commission and a new formula has been developed behind closed doors. That new formula, as well as the earlier transition models, must be shared so that any implications around the intended 'soft landing' for businesses are fully understood. Any transition approach that front loads extreme change into year one could effectively create a cliff edge for some businesses."

### CAP REGIONALISATION

The Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspection Directorate is in the process of allocating regions to crofters for CAP payments.

Scottish Government designations for crofters' in-by-land are Region 1 Permanent Grassland which receives a basic payment of around £175 per hectare; Region 2 Rough Grazing Categories B, C and D at about £28 per hectare, and Region 3 Rough Grazing Category A at £8 per hectare. Common grazings have not yet been allocated a region but it is thought that they will be put automatically into Region 3.

The Scottish Crofting Foundation (SCF) said that there is no clear definition of the categories as yet, but if the grassland has been improved

by reseeded at some time and the crofter is keeping its condition up, then it can be classed as Permanent Grassland and put in Region 1. If more than 40% of a parcel of land is Permanent Grassland then all of it is classed Permanent Grassland. Conversely, if more than 60% is Rough Grazing then all of it is classed as Rough Grazing. The SCF always advocated having only two regions but the farming industry convinced the Scottish Government to adopt three regions.



## WOODLANDS

### FORESTRY HEALTH CHECK

Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland has completed a 'health check' on community engagement in the National Forest Estate. It looked to identify good practice in the way FC Scotland has engaged with communities over the past ten years, both in order to build upon that success and to help focus resources on delivering maximum benefit in future.

An independent working group gathered information in a wide-ranging survey of staff and of community groups and provided 19 recommendations for improvement. FC Scotland will respond by September 2015. See: [bit.ly/1xOtcuW](http://bit.ly/1xOtcuW)

### STRATEGIC FORESTRY

FC Scotland has published ten refreshed strategic plans describing how its locally based teams around the country will manage the estate over the next three years.

The *District Strategic Plans for the National Forest Estate 2014-2017* set out what the National Forest Estate will deliver at the regional level in Scotland and also show how local plans contribute to the national context.

See: [www.forestry.gov.uk/fesplans](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fesplans)

### KINNEIL WOOD

26 hectares of Kinneil Woods in Bo'ness, West Lothian are being restructured as the wood has slowly declined due to its age and areas have been blown down in high winds. The former colliery is now a local nature reserve; woodland was planted when the colliery closed in the 1980s [Mar 13].

A replacement planting project over four years will include felling, thinning and clearance of trees which have blown down and 25,000 new trees planted with deer fencing to protect the young trees.

The £160,500 project has been developed on behalf of Falkirk Community Trust and the Friends of Kinneil by the Central Scotland Green Network Trust in partnership with Falkirk Council, Falkirk Environment Trust, Heritage Lottery Fund and Inner Forth Landscape Initiative.



## FISH FARMS & FISHERIES

### SPRING SALMON

A conservation order for early-running spring salmon has been laid in the Scottish Parliament. Mandatory catch and release measures will come into force before the start of the 2015 season and will run for five years [Aug 14]. The measures have been designed to protect the currently low levels of spring salmon in Scotland.

Scottish Fisheries Secretary, Richard Lochhead, said: "The Independent Review of Wild Fisheries has recently concluded [Oct 14] and we are currently considering the recommendations from it and will consult further on firm policy

propositions in due course. However the protection of the spring stocks cannot wait for that work to be completed and we have taken positive action to protect this iconic species."

### DEEP-SEA TRAWLING

*The Sunday Herald* reported that the European Commission (EC) has proposed a ban on deep-sea fishing trawlers in the west of Scotland, that drag heavy nets across the seabed damaging everything in their path. The EC proposal is due to be decided by the European Council of Ministers.

The Scottish and UK governments are all opposed to the ban and the fishing industry said that the proposed ban was a 'knee-jerk' reaction. It said that it supported more sustainable deep-sea fisheries management and was working to protect coral and vulnerable environments to the west of Scotland. Mike Park, of the Scottish White Fish Producers' Association, said that a blanket ban would be 'completely disproportionate' and accused environmental groups of ignoring the science and thrusting the issue on the EC and the European Council of Ministers in pursuit of a 'social ideology.' He said: "A ban would have serious socio-economic consequences for not just the Scottish but for the entire European Union fleet. The long-term sustainable management of fish stocks requires intelligent regulation and not emotive, ill-thought-out, sweeping policies which have the potential to eradicate a sector and set a dangerous precedent."

He said that vulnerable ecosystems were being protected by European regulations and pointed to the proposed network of Marine Protected Areas around Scotland: "These areas are protected because they correspond to pristine or very low-impacted ecosystems. Marine Stonehenge has not been bulldozed."

The Scottish Government rejected 'an ill-thought-out blanket ban on bottom trawling.' It supported protective measures in areas where fishing vessels actually operate, and strict management controls outwith those areas. A spokeswoman said: "This targeted approach provides more precise protection for sensitive habitats as being more readily enforceable. The Scottish Government is firmly committed to protecting vulnerable marine ecosystems and we are keen to see the adoption of deep-sea regulations that are both effective and proportionate."

The UK government's fisheries minister, George Eustice, said that only 12 UK fishing boats trawl the deep-sea bottom below 600 metres.

A petition, signed by nearly 15,000 people, and promoted by a coalition of ten environmental groups, asks Scottish ministers to support the proposed ban. Environmental groups point to more than 100 scientific studies suggesting that deep-sea trawling is unsustainable and harmful to underwater wildlife. It is said to be 'the most destructive kind of fishing in history.'

Claire Nouvian, of the Bloom Association in Paris, said: "If the government supported a law that allowed Scottish castles and outstanding natural features to be wiped off the map to develop intensive, monoculture farming, Scots would probably march on London to stop it. The same is going on in Scottish deep waters but just because that part of Scotland's beauty is hidden under water, very few even know. Deep-sea fisheries are a mistake of the past. The Scottish and UK governments will not be forgiven if they fail to seize this historic chance to preserve the UK's exceptional marine environment from the destruction imposed mainly by French and Spanish vessels."

Dr Richard Luxmoore, of the National Trust for Scotland, said: "Most deep-water species are incredibly long-lived. Anyone who claims to be

managing these fisheries sustainably is trying to pull the wool over your eyes.”

Pete Ritchie, of Nourish Scotland, said: “Out on the deep seabed towards Rockall we are allowing industrial fishing boats, mostly from France and Spain, to create an underwater desert which is at least the size of Fife.”

Professor Murray Roberts, of Heriot-Watt University’s Lyell Centre for Earth & Marine Science & Technology, said: “We know that bottom trawling destroys vulnerable marine ecosystems like deep-sea corals and sponge grounds. Nations are duty-bound to minimise this damage.”

**COMMON FISHERIES POLICY**

New rules, to be phased in between January 2015 and 2019, are part of the new Common Fisheries Policy and aim to cut discards of surplus dead fish. The landings obligation will begin in January by targeting pelagic (open ocean) fish, such as herring and mackerel, then from January 2016 the ban will be extended to Scotland’s mixed whitefish (demersal), where the exclusive targeting of specific species with no ‘bycatch’ of unintended fish is practically impossible. Fishermen will be obliged to land at least 95% of their catch. Negotiations leading up to the EU Fisheries Council in December have recommended only a small quota increase for haddock and potential cuts for species such as cod and whiting.

Bertie Armstrong, of the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation (SFF), said that problems would arise as soon as a fishing boat reaches its quota limit for a particular species. He said that, for example, a boat that had reached its annual limit for haddock landings would continue to pick up haddock as it trawled for other species, as it is not possible to completely avoid haddock while targeting cod, monkfish or whiting.

Unless the rules are either changed or implemented flexibly, it could mean a boat had to stop fishing completely once it had reached its quota for one species, regardless of how much unused quota it still had for other fish. He said: “If fishing boats are forced to land the fish, the question then becomes, whose quota does it come off? It is an unanswered conundrum. If we don’t find a solution the European fishing industry will collapse.”

Mike Park, of the Scottish White Fish Producers’ Association (SWFPA), said: “No fisherman that I know is happy throwing perfectly good fish back into the sea. However, without significant increases to the quota system it will simply not work. Fishing boats will go out of business because the new rules mean that all fishing must stop when vessels run out of the first quota. We call on the governments of all EU member states to recognise the serious dangers of allowing a ban to go ahead without significant additional changes to the management regime and how they set catch limits.”

The SFF has raised the question repeatedly with the EU, the UK and Scottish fishing authorities, but said it has not received a satisfactory reply. The first phase of the discards ban is not expected to create problems for Scottish fishermen, as pelagic fish swim in shoals and catches are rarely mixed with significant quantities of other species.

However, if no solution to the problems with mixed whitefish is found within the next 12 months, the SFF warns that the Scottish fishing industry could be seriously damaged.

The SFF opposes the proposed 10% cut the North Sea cod quota as it believes that cod stocks have now significantly recovered in recent years; if EU fishing ministers agree quota cuts there is

a danger that they would ‘kill the patient with the medicine’ in an attempt to boost fishing stocks [Oct 14].

• A study, by the Institute for European Environmental Policy for the RSPB, recommends that boats which best meet a new set of environmental, social and economic criteria should receive a ‘quota bonus’. Until now, UK fishermen have been given permission to fish based on ‘historic catch records.’ The new CAP legislation states that those boats which bring social and economic benefits to local communities, without damaging the marine environment, should have more opportunities to fish than others.

The RSPB has called on the UK governments to explain exactly how they will meet with this requirement to reward our ‘best’ fishermen, who have the least environmental impact.

Kara Brydson, of RSPB Scotland said: “The way we dish out fishing opportunities must change if our governments are to comply with the new laws to reward and encourage environmentally friendly fishing practises which benefit local communities and economies, and delivers healthy seas rich in marine life. 2015 will see huge changes in fisheries management, with effective Marine Protected Areas, the introduction of the Discard Ban and new targets for sustainable fishing. Allocating quota based on historic records alone is no way to manage modern fisheries and fails to reward those who work sustainably.”

• The *Press & Journal* reported that the Pew Charitable Trust is soliciting signatures from Scottish businesses and groups for a letter condemning ministers for allegedly allowing increases in overfishing. Mike Park of SWFPA, said: “Civil society needs to wake up to the fact that Pew and others like them are spending a multimillion pound war-chest dictating how we in Scotland and other parts of Europe manage fishing dependent communities.”



**MARINE**

**CORKSCREW DEATHS**

*The Sunday Herald* reported that a study for the Scottish Government by the Sea Mammal Research Unit at St Andrews University has confirmed that seals trapped in ducted propellers suffer horrific and fatal ‘corkscrew’ gashes [Sep 13]. The report suggests that larger seals could be decapitated by the blades. Ducted propellers are used in shipping and offshore industries. They run inside a casing, which makes them more efficient at low speeds, but it is thought that the animals get trapped between the propeller blades and the casing.

A coalition of 26 wildlife and conservation groups is now demanding a Scottish, UK and international ban on ducted propellers. They have written to the Scottish and UK governments warning that they are breaking the law by failing to protect seals.

Sarah Dolman of Whale & Dolphin Conservation, said: “This is one of the UK’s biggest marine conservation and welfare tragedies. This latest evidence confirms that seals are being sliced up by some kinds of ships’ propellers and possibly in much greater numbers than previously realised. Despite the worst-affected populations of common (harbour) seals heading for local extinction, we have not seen any evidence that the UK and devolved governments plan to act to stop these needless deaths.”

About 100 seals have been officially confirmed killed in Scotland by a ‘single continuous curvilinear skin laceration spiralling down the body’ most of them since 2010. The report said

that this number is reliant on carcasses being washed ashore and reported, so it is very likely to be a gross underestimate.

Reports of adult grey seals found beheaded are common in the UK. They may have lost their heads to covered propellers because they are larger than other common seals killed by corkscrew injuries.

The study said that further research is needed to understand how the injuries occur before anything can be done to stop them.

Dr Richard Luxmoore, of the National Trust for Scotland, said: “There is already ample evidence that ducted propulsion systems are responsible for these gruesome injuries to huge numbers of seals. Exclusion devices are already being used in other parts of the world to prevent them and it’s time we made them compulsory here. The rush for offshore windfarms is partially to blame but we don’t want them built on foundations spattered with seal blood.”

Conservationists are concerned that four offshore windfarms were given approval off the Forth and the Tay without restrictions on the types of propellers that could be used on the vessels which service them [Oct 14]. Seal numbers in the area have been plummeting, partly due to corkscrew injuries.

Sarah Gregerson, from the green law group ClientEarth, said: “The UK has legal duties to protect seals. Immediate and simple measures can be put in place by authorities to prevent these injuries.”

The shipping industry opposed a propeller ban, and complained it had experienced difficulties engaging with researchers on the issue.

David Balston, of the UK Chamber of Shipping, said: “Once the cause of these injuries is fully understood then steps can and should be taken as a matter of urgency to prevent more incidents. A blanket ban in the interim, however, is neither realistic nor sensible.”

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said that it was funding the world’s only research into corkscrew injuries, which have been seen in nine other countries. She said: “Good progress is being made narrowing down the cause of these deaths, but we do not yet have conclusive results. Results will inform whether Scottish, UK or international action might be most appropriate.”

**MPA CONSULTATION**

The Scottish Government has launched a public consultation on statutory management measures for nine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in inshore waters and 11 Marine Protection Areas (MPAs) [Jul 14].

Calum Duncan, convener of Scottish Environment Link’s marine task force and Scottish programme manager for the Marine Conservation Society, said: “We have always said that without effective management, MPAs are simply paper parks. Over the next few months, the future of these new marine protected areas is therefore in the balance.”

• A survey in the seas off Wester Ross has discovered new areas of a seabed habitat formed by maerl off the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT)’s Ben Mor Coigach Wildlife Reserve, off Isle Martin, and near the Rhue Lighthouse at the mouth of Loch Broom. Further discoveries were made along a stretch of coast between Gruinard Bay and Little Loch Broom. The survey failed to find previously recorded maerl beds in an area of the Summer Isles that has seen the largest amount of scallop dredging in recent years.

SWT said that the findings strengthen the case for large areas of the Wester Ross Marine Protected Area (MPA) to be closed to potentially damaging fishing such as scallop dredging and bottom trawling. Maerl can form an ideal nursery habitat

for marine life including young cod, scallops, and crabs. It is extremely vulnerable to disturbance and, as it grows very slowly, takes many decades to recover from damage.

Alex Kinninmonth, of SWT, said: "The survey has proved to be very important as current Scottish Government proposals will leave many of these newly discovered maerl beds unprotected from damaging fishing methods like dredging. Now that these fragile habitats are on the map they must be included in protection plans. It also serves as a reminder that there are still big gaps in our knowledge of the seabed, and so there is a clear need for a more precautionary approach to protecting it."

The SWT carried out the survey in collaboration with Fauna & Flora International and members of the local community, with Marine Scotland funded underwater camera equipment and expertise provided by Scottish Natural Heritage.

The Wester Ross MPA was created for the protection of important seabed habitats including maerl beds, kelp forests and flame shell beds [Jul 14]. Under the terms of the protected area, maerl beds in the Wester Ross MPA must be managed to allow for their recovery, as their condition is known to be poor. The Scottish Government is currently consulting on plans to prohibit fishing including scallop dredging and bottom trawling on certain seafloor habitats within the Wester Ross MPA and other MPAs in Scottish coastal seas. See: [bit.ly/1uLk1pE](http://bit.ly/1uLk1pE)

Bertie Armstrong, of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, said that carefully managed bottom-trawling could take place in MPAs as long as it didn't harm protected natural features: "Pushing for blanket no-take areas will deliver absolutely no marine conservation benefits and will just simply displace fishing into other areas. The management of the MPAs is all about using the scientific evidence to develop management measures for each site. It is all about sensible management to achieve the twin aims of sustainable fishing and marine conservation.

"Whilst it is difficult to comment specifically upon this apparent new find of maerl beds, the very fact that they might be there would seem to suggest that any fishing activities in the area are having no impact upon them. As a more general point and to make a comparison, if every natural feature on land was fully protected, then we would have no houses, roads, farms or any other kind of infrastructure that our lives depend upon."

He said that the new MPAs were on top of the 150 other marine sites that were already protected, and accused some conservation groups of wanting 'the gratuitous displacement of sustainable fishing just for the sake of it.' They seemed 'unconcerned about supporting our fragile fishing communities or the importance of fish as a food supply.'

The consultation concludes on 2 February 2015. See: [ow.ly/E6trT](http://ow.ly/E6trT)

**BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS**

An interim report, by the University of Aberdeen and the Sea Mammal Research Unit at the University of St Andrews, was published by SNH. It said that the number of bottlenose dolphins using the Moray Firth SAC has remained stable for 25 years.

Scotland's east coast is home to around 200 bottlenose dolphins. The dolphins are frequently seen in the Moray Firth, part of which is a SAC designated to help protect the world's most northerly population. The dolphins are a big tourist attraction, generating around £4m a year for the local economy.

102 individuals were estimated to use the SAC during the summer of 2011. In 2012 this figure

rose to 112 and in 2013 an estimated 94 dolphins used the area. Although there is variability in the estimated numbers of dolphins using the SAC seasonally and each year, between 1990 and 2013 the numbers appear to be stable.

However, the North Sea's only resident bottlenose dolphin population is still considered to be potentially vulnerable. The population, stretching from the Moray Firth to Fife and further south, is relatively small and dolphins reproduce slowly. Whilst some of the dolphins in the population travel along the coast between these different areas the population remains isolated.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has a duty to report on the condition of bottlenose dolphins within the SAC every six years. The next full report is due in 2018, when SNH will update its assessment of the status of the Moray Firth SAC.

The overall east coast population size was 195 individuals in 2012.

See: *SNH Commissioned Report 797: Site Condition Monitoring of Bottlenose Dolphins within the Moray Firth Special Area of Conservation: 2011-2013*; [bit.ly/1FB6h78](http://bit.ly/1FB6h78)



**POLITICS & PARLIAMENT**

**CABINET RESHUFFLE**

The new First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has announced her cabinet. Richard Lochhead continues as the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food & Environment. His responsibilities will include Rural Scotland – land reform, the physical and marine environment, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, aquaculture, food and drink, crofting, sustainable development, biodiversity, natural heritage, environmental protection, flooding, water quality, national parks, environmental and climate justice.

Dr Aileen McLeod has been appointed as minister for Environment, Climate Change & Land Reform, replacing Paul Wheelhouse.

**LAND REFORM**

The *BBC News* website reported that Nicola Sturgeon announced 12 new pieces of proposed legislation, as part of a Programme for Government, which include plans for a Land Reform Bill. Ministers will be able to intervene 'where the scale of land ownership or the conduct of a landlord is acting as a barrier to sustainable development.' She also said that business rate exemptions for shooting and deerstalking estates 'put in place by the Tories in 1994 to protect the interests of major landowners' would be abolished as part of a series of radical land reforms. *The National* reported that a new Land Reform Commission would be created to 'enhance the national debate about the use of land' and work to ensure that land-owning charities 'consider the impact on local communities of decisions on the management and uses of land under their control.'

Companies owning land will be required to register in the EU and not offshore tax havens. These changes would pay for an increase in the fund which supports community land ownership from £3m to £10m a year until 2020. Ms Sturgeon said: "Scotland's land must be an asset that benefits the many, not the few."

*The Press & Journal* reported that David Johnstone, of Scottish Land & Estates, said they were already working hard to back Scottish government aims, like as renewable energy, agriculture, housing and tourism. He said:

"Sporting estates are too readily singled out in a negative light, when in fact they are businesses that make a key contribution to rural tourism, local employment and the environment ... the announcement that business rates exemption is to be scrapped for sporting estates does not take into account the current voluntary payments made for river and deer management. The perception that sporting estates do not pay their dues is not accurate."

*The Press & Journal* reported that a spokesman for the Scottish Gamekeepers Association said: "Should [the government] make land reform an ideological vehicle to punish landowners on sporting estates, the real affect will be to sacrifice the jobs of working people such as gamekeepers, stalkers and land and river ghillies, and their families, who will be the first people to suffer if investments are withdrawn and taken elsewhere."

Lesley Riddoch, writing in *The National*, said: "With democratic stewardship and new non-traditional landowners, a thousand flowers could blossom, quite literally, as the monoculture of the sporting estate makes way for long-denied diversity. The Land Reform Bill looks set to make a long overdue start on a massive task."

*The West Highland Free Press* reported that David Cameron, of Community Land Scotland, said: "The range of proposal shifts considerations about land from being largely about private interest, to land issues being a public-interest matter ... The acid test of all of this will be whether in a decade's time and beyond our land ownership patterns have begun to shift decisively and are fairer, or whether Scotland's land is still largely owned by a small and privileged elite."

Andy Wightman, the land reform campaigner, said: "For far too long, the ownership and control of Scotland's natural resources have been in the hands of a small elite. Their political influence has been such that reforms that would, in any other European country, be regarded as normal, have been dismissed as extreme or an unjustifiable attack on property rights."

A consultation will be published in December.

**PENTLAND PARK**

The plan to extend the boundaries of the Pentland Hills Regional Park south of Edinburgh, to cover the entire Pentlands range, has passed the first stage of consultation and has the backing of a cross-party group of 18 MSPs. Christine Grahame MSP will now hold more detailed talks and will prepare a Private Member's Bill to create the legislation to allow the extension.

Funding is a key issue for the project and a fresh overall approach to how to pay for facilities such as the park's 50 miles of pathways will be considered. Up to £1m a year would be needed to maintain the new Pentland Hills Regional Park if it were extended further south, doubling its reach over Midlothian and West Lothian and into Lanarkshire and the Borders.

The park draws about 500,000 visitors a year for pursuits such as cycling, walking, fishing, horse riding, orienteering and hill-running. Current funding partners are Edinburgh, West Lothian and Midlothian Councils, and Scottish Water.

Scottish Natural Heritage is in favour of the extension, and claims that extending the boundary would help give local people access to activities that would have health benefits.

NFU Scotland opposes the bill because of funding issues in the current park, claiming that it has 'always been underfunded.'

Alison Johnstone MSP said: "It's important we take every opportunity to protect our most valuable landscapes from inappropriate development while maximising public enjoyment of them, and

there's logic in extending the park boundary to reflect the natural geography of the Pentland Hills and moors. I'm interested in the prospect of local communities having a greater say in the management of the region, and balancing recreational access and nature conservation."

**WILDLIFE CRIME**

The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog reported that Dave Thompson MSP has called on the, then, justice secretary, Kenny MacAskill, to undertake a review into the police handling of the investigation of the killing of 22 birds of prey in Ross-shire [Oct 14]. Mr Thompson is a member of the Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs, Climate Change & Environment committee, which recently heard evidence from Police Scotland about the incident. He said: "It would be useful if a full review of the investigation process was carried out. It would go a long way to allaying any fears the general public may have but also, in the interests of transparency, such a review would take away any lingering confusion about how these great birds of prey met their demise."

A police statement said that the 'birds were most likely not targeted deliberately' [Oct 14]. The *Press & Journal* reported that Andrea Goddard, a volunteer at the Tollie red kite centre said: "I think its fair to say that everybody has been stunned by what the police had to say. It seemed to contradict everything they had said up until that point, I just can't understand it at all. We need the police to be accountable and engage with communities about this. I welcome what Dave Thompson MSP had to say about carrying out a review of this investigation. That's something that is very much needed here."

- A resolution to tackle raptor persecution was put forward at the Scottish National Party annual conference in Perth. The, then, environment minister Paul Wheelhouse, said: "Listen to the will of the Scottish people and understand that we will not tolerate these crimes any longer. The sand is running out of the hour glass and they [the raptor-killing criminals] really do have to start listening to the messages we're giving them very strongly. Enough is enough. Obey the law, respect the will of the Scottish people and protect our wildlife ..."

"We must recognise that not all estates are engaged in this activity, there are, unfortunately, several rotten apples in the barrel who are spoiling this for everyone. I hope people do listen to the messages today, we really don't want to have to go down the route of licensing game-shooting but we have indicated, in parliament and elsewhere, that if we are forced to do so, that is the direction we will travel. I hope offenders heed the warning, stop spoiling what is a strong industry in the rural economy for Scotland, and make no mistake, as I say, we will not hesitate to act if they do not listen to what we are saying."

The resolution was passed unanimously.

**CLIMATE CHANGE**

The Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs, Climate Change & Environment Committee has written to the new Scottish Climate Change minister, Aileen McLeod, calling for urgent action in response to missed carbon emission targets in 2010, 2011 and 2012. If voluntary measures are shown not to work, mandatory moves should be considered.

A new cabinet sub-committee on climate change has been set up to focus on delivering emissions reductions.

**CROWN ESTATE**

The Smith Commission recommended that responsibility for the management of the Crown

Estate's economic assets in Scotland, and the revenue generated from these assets, be transferred to the Scottish Parliament. Preparations have been made for the transfer of existing rights and titles to Marine Scotland, on behalf of the Scottish ministers. These include Crown Estate's seabed, urban assets, rural estates, mineral and fishing rights, and the Scottish foreshore for which it is responsible.



**GENERAL ENVIRONMENT**

**EDINBURGH LIVING LANDSCAPE**

The Edinburgh Living Landscape, a partnership project between the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), City of Edinburgh Council, Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust, GREENSURGE and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, has been launched to bring a transformational change to the city's urban environment. It becomes the SWT's third Living Landscape, joining Cumbernauld and Coigach/Assynt.

The Urban Pollinator Project, a collaboration between Edinburgh Council and the University of Edinburgh, has already begun to boost numbers of bees, butterflies and other pollinating insects within the city. Future projects include the creation of a bespoke Edinburgh wildflower meadow seed mix, improvements in access to high-quality green space for residents, and also working with developers to transform derelict land around the city for the benefit of local communities.

**LEVENHALL LINKS**

*The Herald* reported that Alison Johnstone MSP and RSPB Scotland have called on ScottishPower and East Lothian Council to clean up the land at Levenhall Links, near Musselburgh, which was used to store ash from Cockenzie power station since the 1960s. Part of the area has been reclaimed and turned into a recreation and boating park, with a bird reserve and walkways. However, the ash lagoon has still to be cleared, amid growing concern over 'protracted' negotiations, some two years after the Cockenzie plant was closed.

RSPB Scotland would like the area closest to the mouth of the River Esk landscaped, lined and kept wet, using pumps to create a habitat attractive to wading birds. The Levenhall area is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and is part of the Firth of Forth Special Protection Area.

Ms Johnstone said: "Local Nature Reserve status should still be a goal, and I will continue to support local efforts to achieve this. Fantastic green spaces on our doorstep, even artificial ones like Levenhall, should be protected for the benefit of our communities."

Thomas Quinn, of RSPB Scotland, said: "The Firth of Forth is internationally important for wintering birds and it is crucial the habitat is managed to benefit them. The Musselburgh coast suffered a loss of important mudflats when the lagoons were constructed almost 50 years ago and creating more wetlands now could lead to the area becoming a really significant wildlife hotspot in future. Following constructive meetings held with ScottishPower and East Lothian Council in the summer, we are keen to see a finalised plan agreed for the restoration of the site as soon as possible, hopefully with site work getting under way early next year."

**SEPA COMPLIANCE REPORT**

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) assessed 5,178 industrial sites in 2013, of which 4,478 of which were excellent, good or broadly compliant. The compliance

assessments rate the environmental performance of 349 industrial sites as either poor or very poor. The biggest offenders were 83 water suppliers, 82 waste industry sites and 45 fishfarms. There were also 32 private sewers, 29 public sewerage works, ten distilleries and breweries, nine crematoria, six food plants and five open-cast coal mines assessed as poor. See: [bit.ly/1vjhj0J](http://bit.ly/1vjhj0J)

**NATURAL CAPITAL**

The City of Edinburgh Council has become the first local authority to join the Scottish Forum on Natural Capital, which brings together key players from the public, private and voluntary sectors to protect and enhance Scotland's natural capital [Nov 13]. The council has commissioned the Trees in the City survey to get a greater understanding of the important value woodlands have in Edinburgh and also initiated the Urban Pollinator Project, a collaboration with the University of Edinburgh. See: [bit.ly/1ybWzpp](http://bit.ly/1ybWzpp)

The forum has over 50 member organisations including Alliance Trust, BT Scotland, the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), SSE, SEPA, John Muir Trust, Buccleuch Estates, The Crown Estate, James Hutton Institute, Woodland Trust Scotland, Balfour Beatty and the Scottish Government. The founding partners are the SWT, Scotland's 2020 Climate Group, Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland, Institute of Directors Scotland and the University of Edinburgh.

**GLENDEVON QUARRY**

Perth & Kinross Council has refused planning permission to reopen Cemex's Glendevon gravel quarry in the Ochils. A number of community councils and neighbouring local authority Clackmannanshire Council were opposed to the plans. Residents were concerned about potential road safety issues, impact on natural habitats and biodiversity, pollution, and the scale of the development. Clackmannanshire Council raised concerns about the impact of increased HGV traffic, and of tourism in a popular walking area being affected.

No extraction has ever been carried out at the site at Glenquey, despite permission being given for work in 1964 and again in 1986. About 10,000 tonnes of material were removed to prepare the site in 1991, but the 20 year working period agreed expired in 2011. Cemex UK said that 3.5m tonnes of sand and gravel could be removed from the site, across an area spanning 22 hectares, over the development period.

Council officers had recommended the application to allow extraction until 2035 be approved on the grounds that 'the principle of the quarry development on this site is established.'

**CAIRNGORMS HOUSING**

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that a proposal to build 58 homes in School Wood near Nethy Bridge in the Cairngorms National Park has been refused planning permission by the CNPA [Sep 14]. The application, from Argyll Developments (Scotland) Ltd, was refused in line with a recommendation from the Scottish Government Reporter that the site be deleted from the Local Development Plan.

The planning committee said that the project would have a significant negative impact on the natural heritage of School Wood, an area of ancient woodland. The wood has green shield moss, *Buxbaumia viridis*, which is listed as endangered in the UK and has only been recorded at School Wood and four other sites in Scotland. Rare invertebrates are also found in School Wood which include the wood ant eating spider, *Diploena torva*, which is found only in Caledonian pinewoods in upland areas of

Scotland and the pinewood mason bee, *Osmia uncinata*, only found in the Scottish Highlands.

A spokesman for Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group said: "School Wood is a popular wood that is important for an amazing variety of rare and threatened wildlife. We are relieved that the CNPA has now recognised both the high ecological value of this irreplaceable ancient woodland site."

Alice Farr, of Buglife Scotland, said that research has shown that Strathspey in general has almost double the number of rare species of insect in comparison to other areas in Scotland. She said: "The Cairngorms is one of the best places in the UK for invertebrates, especially for species associated with mountains, woodlands and cooler climates."

Carol Evans, of the Woodland Trust Scotland, said: "Ancient woodland is among the most precious and biodiverse habitats in the UK. It's a finite resource, covering just 1% of Scotland, which means that any further loss is unacceptable."

The developer said that it had learnt of the presence of the rare moss only ten days before the planning meeting. It is not ruling out the possibility of an appeal.

**STIRLING GREENBELT**

Graham's The Family Dairy, which wants to build a new estate called Airthrey Green on its Stirlingshire farm, has lodged an appeal against the adoption of the Stirling Council Local Development Plan (LDP) [Sep 14]. The concerns by Graham's and the developers, Mactaggart and Mickel Homes, relate to the Scottish Government examination of the plans which they said could stall the project if not addressed. They said that they have met environmental concerns with an innovative scheme to tackle floods and provided plans for school and infrastructure provision as well as shops and community facilities.

**REWILDING**

*The Scottish Farmer* reported that NFU Scotland is concerned that rewilding has become synonymous with reintroducing charismatic mammals, rather than the pedestrian work of reinforcing existing species and reintroducing uncharismatic fish, bird and insect species that often form the bedrock of healthy ecosystems. In Scotland, some 40 years after the reintroduction of sea eagles, it is only now that farmers and crofters claim that they are suffering predation of live lambs have received official acknowledgment. Decades of official denials and attempts to downplay the impacts have hardly put farmers and crofters in the mood to trust. Although the recent NFU Scotland/Scottish Natural Heritage accord on sea eagles will not immediately resolve the situation, it hopefully creates a base from which, through words and deeds, trust can be rebuilt.

NFU Scotland said that it would continue to try to educate rewilding enthusiasts about the value of healthy farms and crofts, so that they stop seeing land managers as an obstacle to progress and instead view them as an equal partner in efforts to help more people reconnect with nature and strengthen the biodiversity of our countryside. NFU Scotland said that the disciples of rewilding are not going to give up their quest, but perhaps with input from NFU Scotland and that of others with experience of rewilding realities elsewhere, 'their quest can be shaped into one that farmers and crofters can be willing partners in.'

**WATERSHED**

The *Press & Journal* reported that Peter Wright, the author of *Ribbon of Wildness*, has called for the Scottish watershed line to be designated as a UNESCO biosphere reserve; it runs through half

of the wild land in mainland Scotland. There is only one settlement, Cumbernauld in North Lanarkshire, built directly on the watershed, together with 20 other houses.

**MOSSMORAN PEAT**

SWT has opposed Everris Ltd's plans for commercial peat extraction at a 76 acre site near Moss Moran in Fife. SWT strongly believes that there should be no new peat extraction sites, and existing sites should be restored to as near favourable condition as possible. SWT said that the proposals for peat extraction at Moss Moran over the next decade are contrary to the Scottish Government's plans to reduce and phase out the use of peat in horticulture.

The application site comprises mainly scrubland and had previously been worked for peat more than a decade ago. The company said that the site is some distance from any local wildlife spots and the proposals do not include intensive peat extraction methods.

**CANNA RABBITS**

The *Press & Journal* reported that 9,000 rabbits were shot, over three months, by marksmen on the island of Canna in the Inner Hebrides. The population had exploded following the extermination of rats on the island; their burrows and eating habits were causing serious damage on the National Trust for Scotland-owned island. The carcasses were sold to French restaurants.

Around 7,000 rabbits remain, some ten months after the cull began; one marksman remains on the island to complete the task.



**ENERGY**

**OCTOBER RENEWABLES**

WWF Scotland analysed figures from the WeatherEnergy organisation, looking at the estimated amount of power produced by the wind and the sun in Scotland. Wind power produced 126% of the electricity needs of every home in Scotland – an estimated 982,842 MWh during October. Solar PV panels provided 46% of the electricity needs of the average home in Edinburgh, while houses in Inverness could get 38% of electricity needs this way, compared to 37% for homes in Glasgow and 33% for Aberdeen.

For properties with solar hot water panels, there was enough sunshine in October to meet 41% of average needs in Edinburgh, compared to 31% in Inverness, 30% in Glasgow and 27% in Aberdeen.

• Figures from the UK Department of Energy & Climate Change showed that in the first half of last year, wind and hydro power produced 10.3 terawatt-hours (TWh) of electricity in Scotland. Nuclear power stations, which had been Scotland's main source of electricity, generated 7.8 TWh over the same period. 5.6 TWh of electricity came from coal-fired power stations, with a further 1.4 TWh from gas-fired stations. This is the first time that renewables have overtaken conventional sources of electricity.

Lang Banks, of WWF Scotland, said: "Renewables overtaking nuclear power to become the largest source of electricity is certainly historic and represents a major step on the way to Scotland becoming a 100% renewable nation. Last month, while nuclear reactors were forced to shut because of cracks, Scotland's renewables were quietly and cleanly helping to keep the lights on in homes across the country."

**SEISMIC ZONING**

The *BBC News* website reported that Eskdalemuir seismic monitoring site currently has a 10 km exclusion zone and a 50 km consultation zone for windfarm developments. A Scottish Government working group has proposed to simplify the system by having a single 15 km exclusion zone. This could free up sites across the Scottish Borders, Dumfries & Galloway and beyond for developments. A number of windfarm applications have been refused in the past because of potential impact on seismic detection equipment at the station. However, the Ministry of Defence has now revised its procedures. Scottish Borders Council said that any increase in windfarm applications would be 'potentially contentious.'

**WINDFARM UPDATES**

**Aberdeenshire:** Muirden Energy has been refused permission for a 100 GW, 12 turbine windfarm on top of Mormond Hill in Buchan. Visual impact was cited, together with safety concerns raised by the Ministry of Defence.

**Argyll:** Infinis Energy is to proceed with plans to build the 21 turbine A'Chruach windfarm near Minard in Argyll after securing £52m development funding.

The company had said it would only begin construction of the 43 MW windfarm once the outcome of the referendum on Scottish independence, and its potential effect on energy policy, was known.

**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.

**Dumfries & Galloway:** E.On has submitted applications for the 18 turbine Benbrack windfarm, north east of Carsphairn, and the 26 turbine windfarm at Loch Urr, south west of Moniaive. Both developments have been reduced in scale following 'community and environmental feedback.'

**Highland:** The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that SSE is planning a transmission connection and substation near Melgarve, by Laggan in Badenoch, which will serve the Stronelairg windfarm [Aug 14]. Concerns have been expressed by Councillor Gregor Rimmell about a power line from Creag Meagaidh 'further desecrating this previously unspoilt landscape towards Laggan.' There have been calls for planning processes to be changed for windfarm applications to include the connection of the windfarm to substations and the national grid.

• The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) has urged its members to support a legal challenge being made by the John Muir Trust (JMT) against the Scottish Government. The JMT is taking its case to the Court of Session with the objective of halting construction of the Stronelairg windfarm.

Terry Levinthal, of NTS, said: "The 67 turbines, up to 135 metres tall, will cover an area the size of Inverness within the Monadhliath Mountains, bounding a Special Area of Conservation. Ironically, their construction will require thousands of tonnes of steel and concrete to be placed on top of significant peatlands and their ecosystems. These act as a natural carbon 'sink', tying up greenhouse gasses that could otherwise accelerate climate change. We find it particularly disturbing that the government's own agency, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), and the Cairngorms National Park Authority both objected to the development yet their protests were ignored. It has also been suggested that SNH's efforts to have Stronelairg added to the Wild Land Areas Map, which would have afforded a measure of protection from development, were stymied."

Given the precedent this enormous windfarm may set, the implications for the conservation of wild land are deeply concerning.”

- The *Press & Journal* reported that Airvolution Energy is planning seven turbines at Carr Ban near Farr, south of Inverness. Local campaigners said that Strathnairn would be surrounded by turbines on all sides.

- Force 9 Energy is planning 17 turbines at Cnoc an Eas near Balnain, Glen Urquhart, close to the Glen Affric National Nature Reserve.

- ABO Wind is planning the 25 turbine Allt Carach windfarm in Strathglass on the Breakachy, Erchless and Farley Estates. A meteorological mast has been approved after an appeal.

- Kilmac Construction has submitted a planning application for the 14 turbine, 42 MW Glen Ullinish windfarm on government-owned land between Ose and Struan at Allt Dughail on Skye. It is to be built in partnership with the community, and is backed by local crofters.

- The JMT has asked Highland Council to lodge objections to the Glencassley and Sallachy windfarms in Sutherland in the light of the new National Planning Framework and Scottish Planning Policy and the publication by SNH of the official Wild Land Areas map [May 13]. The planning committee had decided not to object to the proposals after officials pointed to uncertainty in the Scottish Government’s attitude to wild land protection from windfarms. The boundaries of the proposed windfarms both lie entirely within Wild Land Area 34.

**SUNART HYDRO**

Sunart Community Renewables aims to create a micro hydro scheme at a former Scottish Water supply dam at Allt nan Cailleach in Strontian. It has received £43,000 from SSE’s Highland Sustainable Development Fund to cover the cost of employing a project manager.

**FRACKING**

A new coalition of 26 community and environmental groups, led by Concerned Communities of Falkirk and Friends of The Earth Scotland, has urged the Scottish Government to impose a moratorium on unconventional gas development in Scotland, saying that risks to public health, staff and the environment are ‘impossible to regulate away.’ The group also wants the Scottish Government to stop 22 wells to extract coalbed methane in Falkirk and Stirling.

Andrew Austin of iGas, which recently took over Dart Energy, said that onshore oil and gas had been safely explored in Scotland since 1851. He said: “A number of leading scientific and industry expert reports have all concluded that any potential risks associated with the extraction of natural gas from shale are low and can be managed in a properly regulated industry.”

- A report, by Dr Rob Westaway and Professor Paul Younger from Glasgow University, said that the current rules governing fracking in Britain are too strict, and called on the UK government to relax the rules on surface vibrations. The report is published in the *Quarterly Journal of Engineering Geology & Hydrogeology*.

- The *BBC News* website reported that Ineos is to invest up to £640m in shale gas exploration and production in the UK. It plans to use the gas as a raw material for its chemical plants. Ineos is currently building Europe’s largest shale gas import facility to feed its petrochemicals plant at Grangemouth with US shale gas. It has bought two licences for shale gas exploration and development across a 329 km<sup>2</sup> area around the Grangemouth power plant and is applying for more [Oct 14].

**FIRTH OF FORTH COAL**

Cluff Natural Resources (CNR) has announced plans to extract gas from under the Firth of Forth following a major coal find. A report by independent assessors estimated there were up to 335 million tonnes of coal under the seabed. The company has two licences in Scotland – at Largo Bay and Kincardine. Two coal seams in the Kincardine licence have been identified with 43 million tonnes of ‘stranded’ coal of sufficient quality for an underground coal gasification (UGC) plant. The licence covers an area of 37.6 km<sup>2</sup> of tidal estuary waters. The process of gasification involves drilling horizontally into a seam and then injecting air and oxygen to produce syngas – a mixture of combustible gases which include hydrogen, carbon monoxide, methane and carbon dioxide.

CNR plans to build the UK’s first deep offshore UGC plant, possibly at an existing industrial complex such as Longannet or Grangemouth; a pilot plant could be running within two years.

Lang Banks, of WWF Scotland, said: “We need to see Scotland and the rest of the UK move toward an electricity system that is largely free of polluting fossil fuels. Plans to ‘burn’ coal under the Firth of Forth will not deliver that aim and should therefore be a complete non-starter. In a worst case scenario, proposals such as this one could even extend our use of fossil fuels, locking us into a high carbon world. Scientists from the United Nations issued their latest predictions of the growing threat from global climate change and the need to be rapidly phasing out our use of fossil fuels. Since the developers themselves have admitted that carbon dioxide will be emitted by their plans, from a climate change perspective, this scheme is nothing short of irresponsible.”

Algy Cluff, of CNR, said: “The emerging UGC industry has a significant role to play in unlocking the UK’s most abundant indigenous energy resource which, with the imminent closure of the last deep coal mines, is now otherwise effectively beyond reach. The deep offshore UGC projects being undertaken by CNR have significant environmental safety and, when combined with carbon capture and storage, climate change benefits compared with coal mining and coal-fired power generation.”

Professor Stuart Haszeldine, of the University of Edinburgh, said: “Cluff’s offshore deep UGC is a bold and innovative proposal which could help to regain energy security and value through low-carbon production of fossil fuel. Domestic coal resources exist which are sufficient to supply many decades of secure energy production and feedstock. But those resources will remain inaccessible until new extraction technology is deployed such as UGC, and unless the produced carbon is captured after use. Fuel and feedstock extracted from coal by underground gasification will be much cleaner than importing coal because most of the engineering occurs deep below ground offshore. Underground gasification will have less impact on the public than other forms of unconventional gas extraction.”

Alison Johnstone MSP said: “Many people will be shocked to learn of the extent of the underground coal gasification industry in Scotland, and will be seriously concerned at the prospect of drilling on their doorstep. If Cluff get permission to press ahead under the Forth it will send a terrible message that our coast is up for grabs and it will set us back in our journey towards a successful low carbon economy.”

**DUNBAR WASTE-TO-ENERGY**

Viridor is to go ahead with a £177m plant which will burn rubbish to create energy near Dunbar in

East Lothian. The new system will incinerate more than 300,000 tonnes of waste a year, avoiding the need for landfill and generating 30 MW of base-load renewable energy direct to the grid and 10 MW of heat. The company secured planning consent for the site from Scottish ministers in 2010 [Dec 10], and approval from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency in 2011. Completion is due in December 2017.



**RECREATION & TOURISM**

**LOCH LOMOND CAMPING**

Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park Authority has proposed camping restrictions in two areas of the National Park [Oct 14].

Nick Kempe, former president of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS), wrote to *The Herald* letters page: “The real questions are why Police Scotland has been so ineffective in using its powers around the shores of Loch Lomond and why it appears to be abandoning its responsibilities to others? Before the consultation on new by-laws goes any further the national park and Police Scotland need to answer these questions and be accountable for their answers to the Scottish Parliament.

“The licensing system for wild camping would be a bureaucratic nightmare ... To require permits in National Parks would require a huge resource – hundreds of people camp over the course of the year, a very positive thing in general as it encourages people to get out and take exercise – and would be extremely damaging to tourism. If the thousands who camp while walking the West Highland Way are required to apply for a permit before they come in order to get across the national park, a significant proportion will simply go elsewhere.

“The one positive proposal from the national park authority is to create more campsites. It is extraordinary that it has taken so long to come up with a proactive strategy on this, given all the economic and other benefits, but now it has it should focus on implementing this and drop its proposals to extend by-laws and instead focus on working with the police to ensure they are available when needed.”

**JOHN MUIR WAY**

A 5km, £492,000 path extension is to be added to the John Muir Way, which runs from Dunbar to Helensburgh. The new path, due to open in May 2015, is in the Kilpatrick Hills and will provide an alternative to the Balloch to Carbeth section which runs on a public road and footpath.



**NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS**

**CSGN**

Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) has signed a concordat with Glasgow City Council which will help to improve the social, physical, cultural and environmental well-being of the area. Stretching from Ayrshire, Inverclyde and Dunbartonshire in the west, to Fife and the Lothians in the east, the CSGN encompasses 19 local authorities across 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> and has the potential to benefit 3.5 million people, 70% of Scotland’s population.

Glasgow’s Green Year has also been declared for 2015, which will mark the city’s journey from an industrial powerhouse to a champion of sustainability as it strives to become one of the most sustainable cities in Europe by 2020.

See: [www.centalscotlandgreennetwork.org](http://www.centalscotlandgreennetwork.org)