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CONSERVATION

BEAVER TRIAL

The final report has been published on the Scottish Beaver Trial by the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) and the Scottish Wildlife Trust [Nov 14]. The trial commenced in spring 2009 in the Knapdale Forest, mid-Argyll with the scientific monitoring period of the trial ending in May 2014. The report documents the entire process of the Scottish Beaver Trial, from the licence application through the release of the beavers to the end of the monitoring period. It also examines the process objectively and the learning experiences from the reintroduction.

The findings of the trial will help advise informed decisions to be made about the future of the species. The future of beaver reintroduction is ultimately up to the Scottish Government with a ministerial decision expected in late 2015.

See: www.scottishbeavers.org.uk

• *The Herald* reported that the Scottish Beaver Trial said that two pairs of Norwegian beavers swapped partners after emigrating to Argyll; it is unusual behaviour as beavers are known to mate for life.

LICHENS & MOSSES

Rare communities of lichens have been discovered in the Cairngorms National Park by the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). *Bellemerea alpina*, described as critically endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List, had not previously been seen in Britain for more than 30 years. There are only two previous records of the other species in Scotland, *Sporastatia testudinea*, considered to be a 'near threatened, nationally rare species.'

Water-rock bristle, *Seligeria carnoilica*, a rare moss last recorded in Scotland in 1948, was found by RBGE near Newcastleton, Roxburghshire.

CAPERCAILLIE

The Herald reported that the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) is preparing to endorse the next phase of a plan to save the capercaillie [Sep 14]. There are said to be only 1,200 of the birds left, compared with an estimated 20,000 some 40 years ago. The Cairngorms National Park is thought to be home to at least 80% of Scotland's capercaillie. Strathspey is only place where capercaillie numbers are at least stable or possibly increasing. It is vitally important for the Strathspey stronghold to be secured and for it to grow so that it can start expanding into neighbouring areas.

A Scottish Gamekeepers Association spokesman said: "The inability of conservationists to grasp the nettle on this is like a group of people trying to rescue their dinner while the house is on fire. Our understanding, from speaking to workers on the ground is that the numbers (of capercaillie) may be as low as 400. On 20 video monitored nests in Abernethy Forest, 65% of nests were found to be predated, 57% of those by pine marten." He said that it was common sense to proceed with a trial to translocate pine marten from a small core area to monitor such predation.

Justin Prigmore, of CNPA, said that he was confident that the capercaillie figure was not nearly as low as 400 and he disputed the claim that the

impact of the pine marten was being ignored.

A spokesman for SNH said that it was working with the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT), Forestry Commission Scotland and the CNPA. He said that there was a lot of work to be done before any proposals for removing pine martens could be considered. He said: "The potential role of pine marten must be understood and separated from other impacts on capercaillie, such as weather patterns and other predator effects." See: bit.ly/1vgZmeu

CAIRNGORMS MOORLAND

CNPA has published a report, *Moorland Management*. It said: "There are concerns about the single-species focus of this management and negative impacts on other species and habitats in the national park. A central question relates to the cumulative effects at a landscape scale of an increase in intensity of management for grouse in areas characterised by a high degree of wildness."

The report warned that illegal persecution of birds of prey to protect grouse has a 'very damaging effect' on conservation and public understanding. It said: "There is an unfortunate record of illegal raptor persecution in and around the national park, which risks undermining the park's reputation as a well-managed place for nature and wildlife tourism.

"Sporting estates also kill mountain hares to try to prevent them from spreading disease to grouse, but the report said: "There is a risk that hare control is excessive and will lead to a perception that the hare population is at risk in the absence of effective monitoring."

It also highlighted the proliferation of hill tracks on grouse moors, and said: "Their cumulative impacts have a very significant effect on landscape, wildness, habitat and the recreation experience." Multiple problems with fencing, and also with heather burning, were detailed.

Managed moorlands cover 44% of the Cairngorms National Park, but the report suggested that this may have to be reduced to protect wildlife: "To achieve Cairngorms nature targets we would anticipate some reduction in overall proportion of moorland without the loss of the important moorland habitat networks."

Hamish Trench, of CNPA, said that moorland management is crucial to delivering conservation, visitor experience and rural development. He said: "Over recent years though, there has been an increase in management techniques designed to maximise production of red grouse for sport with concerns expressed about their integration with wider land-use objectives. We want to work with land managers to explore how to deliver greater diversity of habitat and species benefits. We have an opportunity to collaborate more on bringing together land management objectives with opportunities for conservation gain."

Duncan Orr-Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, said: "In recent years, we have seen an increase in unsustainable management practices associated with driven grouse shooting in the CNPA and elsewhere in Scotland. While this single issue land management has achieved year-on-year record-breaking grouse numbers for sporting purposes, we consider that this activity comes at significant environmental cost."



Tim Baynes, of Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) Moorland Group, said: "The strategy will explore how individual estates, which all have different management objectives and are already delivering a range of public benefits, can do so more effectively and in a more joined-up way. The park recognises the huge contribution that grouse moors make to upland habitats, birdlife, jobs, culture and remote communities, and understands the operations that are necessary to provide those benefits, and that the park would be a very different place without them."

See: bit.ly/1wArRDu

FRESHWATER PEARL MUSSELS

SNH, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and CNPA have set water quality and flow targets for the River Spey that will support the conservation objectives for freshwater pearl mussel [Sep 14]. It is expected that suitable targets will be included in the second Scotland River Basin Management Plan to be published at the end of 2015. A 50% population decline in pearl mussels means that the River Spey Special Area of Conservation and Site of Special Scientific Interest will be considered to be in 'unfavourable condition.' This places a duty on SNH to seek ways of improving the site for the protected species.

BLACK GROUSE

A new study, *Black Grouse Conservation in Southern Scotland*, has been undertaken by SNH, GWCT and the South Uplands Partnership. The report concluded that black grouse survive where they have large patches of moorland to live in, but that black grouse numbers in southern Scotland are in a severe long-term decline and called for 'greater and more sustained cooperative action' to help save these populations; the decrease is likely to continue unless strategic action is taken to address the situation; they occupy only a fraction of their former range. The report seeks to lay the foundations for a landscape-scale approach which would focus on protecting known core populations before increasing the population numbers and connections to other patches on the landscape.

From 2006-12, there were no males attending leks at survey sites in the Lammermuir Hills; 133 in the Southern Uplands; 12 in East Ayrshire and 2 in Galloway. See: bit.ly/1xyvj1Q

NATIONAL PARKS

The *Press & Journal* reported that the Scottish Campaign for National Parks (SCNP) and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS) have called on the Scottish Government to honour the memory of John Muir by creating more National Parks. The organisations also accused the SNP of breaking its 2011 manifesto agreement to work with communities to explore the creation of new national parks; former environment minister, Paul Wheelhouse, said earlier this year there were no further plans to create any more. The SCNP and APRS said that goes contrary against the wishes of people in Harris who 'voted overwhelmingly' in favour of Scotland's third national park.

Ross Anderson, SCNP chairman, said: "As a nation we are currently near the bottom of the world league in terms of our number of national parks. This is unfinished business in Scotland, so we have published a well-argued strategy for seven more national parks to join the two existing ones covering the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs." Along with Harris, the campaigners are pressing for new national parks including Wester Ross, Glen Affric, and the Ben Nevis/Glen Coe/Black Mount area [May 14].

John Mayhew, of APRS, said: "This would help to protect and promote more of Scotland's magnificent landscapes and to regenerate some of the more economically fragile parts of rural Scotland."

WILDCATS

The Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded a grant of £973,000 to Wildcat Action, a group of more than 30 organisations, community groups and landowners. The funding will be matched by the project partners, bringing the total to £1.95m.

Over the next five years, the decline of wildcats in six identified priority areas will be addressed. The project involves raising awareness of wildcats and the threats they face and providing training in wildcat surveys and wildcat-friendly land management practices. The work will also co-ordinate neutering and vaccination of feral cats and will monitor the wild-living cat populations through an extensive network of trail cameras. The project is a key part of delivering the Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Plan [Sep 13].

BETTER BEETLES

RSPB Scotland reported that two rare beetles have been recorded at their most northerly locations. A water scavenger beetle, *Cryptopleurum subtile*, was identified in a survey of woody debris along the River Nethy near Aviemore and a whirligig beetle, *Gyrinus paykulli*, was found at the RSPB's Loch of Strathbeg reserve near Aberdeen. The insects had previously been found further south in Scotland.

It is only the second Scottish record of the water scavenger beetle. The first was recorded in Melrose in 1969 and there have been fewer than 20 records in the UK. The whirligig beetle has previously been found in Fife and Perthshire; the last Scottish record of this beetle was in 1999.

LYNX

The *BBC News* website reported that Jonny Hughes of the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) said that the charity would like to see the reintroduction of the once native Eurasian lynx to Scotland.

SWT believes there is both a 'moral and ecological case' for reintroduction of species that have been made extinct in Scotland due to habitat loss and persecution. Reintroducing top-level predators such as the lynx would help restore the balance in Scotland's natural ecosystems, which continue to decline in the face of widespread threats, such as overgrazing and inappropriate development.

Mr Hughes said: "Lynx should also be considered for reintroduction and in many ways could be a flagship for the restoration of native habitats, particularly woodlands into the future. Although reintroductions of this nature are complex and must follow strict international guidelines, Scotland is leading the way with its new Scottish Code for Conservation Translocations launched by the Scottish Government earlier this year, through the work of the Scottish National Species Reintroduction Forum of which the SWT is a key member.

"Finding the right locations will be one of the major challenges for a potential lynx project and there will be a range of stakeholders who will need to work in partnership to ensure the best chance of success and support, as has been the case in the Scottish Beaver Trial. It is important that we all understand the potential benefits of bringing back the lynx to our woodland ecosystems, but also to our forestry and tourism industries. At the same time we should understand the challenges that this beautiful once native cat will bring with it."

MOUNTAIN HARES

SNH, SLE and the GWCT have launched a joint initiative aimed at suspending large-scale culls of mountain hares. It should help ensure that future management is sustainable.

Ron Macdonald, of SNH, said: "We are asking estates for restraint on large-scale culls of mountain hares which could jeopardise the conservation status of mountain hares. We recognise that some culling is occasionally needed to ensure healthy grouse stocks, but available evidence shows that large-scale culls of mountain hares are only effective when other tick-carrying animals are removed, or there is an absence of them in the area. Where such animals are not removed we urge that hare culls should not be undertaken. We do not support large-scale culls and we will work with estates to put in place effective but sustainable management of mountain hares."

Adam Smith, of GWCT, said: "We want to ensure that the strong positive relationship between mountain hares and management for red grouse continues. The shooting of mountain hares on Scottish moors can be done sustainably, and under certain conditions more intensive culls may be appropriate as part of a package of actions to sustain moorland management. However, moorland managers should carefully assess the need for and impact of their actions on their own and neighbouring hare populations, and regularly reassess this management. A contributory part of refining this adaptive approach to management is finding practical ways to assess hare abundance with greater accuracy."

SNH has also begun a three year study with the James Hutton Institute and GWCT to trial several methods of assessing mountain hare population densities to determine the number of hares in a particular area. One of the aims of the study is to develop a method which doesn't rely solely on scientists but uses methods that could be collected by people working in the uplands.

Currently most of the information on hare population trends is drawn from game bag reports to GWCT from estates. The last national estimate, in 1995, suggested that there were 350,000 mountain hares in Scotland, but this estimate had error margins of plus or minus 50%.

The game bag data and independently-collected information on hares from breeding bird surveys by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) indicates that mountain hare numbers have declined between 1995 and 2009. When combined, these data give a statistically significant decline of 28%, although care is needed when interpreting this sort of data for species like mountain hares, because they show natural population fluctuations which may make it difficult to interpret overall population trends. There has been a trend since 1995 towards intensive culls on some grouse moors which can result in locally depleted hare populations.

- Alison Johnstone MSP has lodged a question in parliament requesting an update on how SNH intends to assess whether mountain hares are in a favourable conservation status.

SQUIRRELS & PINE MARTENS

Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland is tracking squirrels and pine martens in a pilot project in Strathspey to monitor their behaviour during forestry operations. Kenny Kortland of FC Scotland said: "We have to avoid disturbing pine martens and red squirrels and causing damage to their dreys and dens during our forest management and felling work. But not that much has been known about how they respond to our forestry operations. So we have done a small trial study in Glenmore in Strathspey where we tagged ten squirrels with GPS collars in an area where we had some tree harvesting going on.

“We got good data from five or six. Basically this showed that the squirrels did not desert the area altogether. They stayed around just changing their home ranges slightly, while the harvester machine was in operation. We did not know they would react in this way, so it is very useful. Now we have to do further studies using more sophisticated GPS tags.”

Pine marten breeding areas have been located in standing dead trees, in rock piles, some of them only ten feet from the ski roads.

UIST MACHAIR

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that a survey by RSPB Scotland, the BTO and SNH found over 9,000 pairs of breeding farmland waders on the machairs of Uist. The fourth survey since the early 1980s, it showed that the machair holds a very important population of breeding waders. However, a marked decline in both ringed plover and dunlin was recorded. Most species have seen a decrease in numbers on islands with a large hedgehog population.

SALINE LAGOONS

The condition of saline lagoons on the Uists in the Western Isles were tested by the National Museum of Scotland in a study for SNH. Isopods and rare forms of algae, including foxtail stonewort, were also recorded. See: bit.ly/1zVuKVy



FARMING

CEREAL HARVEST

Scotland’s chief statistician has released the final estimates of the 2014 Scottish cereal and oilseed rape harvest. It is likely to be the largest in 20 years, with an estimated production of more than 3.2 million tonnes of cereals, an increase of 384,000 tonnes on 2013. The figures show that the latest increase is due to an estimated 13% improvement in overall cereal yields over the last year. Overall yields are estimated at an average of 7 tonnes per hectare, ranging from 6.1 tonnes per hectare for spring barley and oats, to 9.1 tonnes per hectare for wheat. Average oilseed rape yields are estimated at 4 tonnes per hectare. The total area of land sown has increased by 4,000 hectares.

2014 was a good year for cropping despite occasionally difficult conditions; 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 remnants of Hurricane Bertha hit the north. The average cereal yield for the last ten years is 7% higher than in the previous decade.

Wheat and winter barley have seen the largest estimated rises in production, both increasing by 52% and 46% respectively. Around 990,000 tonnes of wheat, up from 650,000 tonnes, and around 400,000 tonnes of winter barley, up from 280,000, are expected. Spring barley production is stable at around 1.7 million tonnes, despite a fall in grown areas. Oats are the only major cereal crop to see considerably reduced production, with a decrease of 18% from 190,000 to 150,000 tonnes. See: www.Scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/12/2462

SRDP

The Scottish Government has published its timetable for the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2015-2020 which will support Scottish farming, food production, rural communities and the environment. Although the SRDP is still subject to final European approval, the first schemes will open to applications in January. The new SRDP is now not expected to be formally approved until next summer.

The government also confirmed a simplification

of the minimum activity rules that farmers will need to meet to qualify for Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) direct payments on rough grazing land.

A new, better targeted approach to addressing Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) will see more than 2,212 farms fully or partially removed from NVZ designated areas and the designation of two new NVZs from 2016, which will affect 130 farms. NVZ areas will be reduced by 24%.

Agri-environment payments will open in March 2015 with contracts likely to issue in autumn 2015. To safeguard key habitats and species, some priority multi-annual agri-environment contracts due to expire in 2014 are being renewed.

See: bit.ly/1Jl65rQ

ISLAY GOOSE PLAN

The Islay Sustainable Goose Management Strategy has been agreed [Oct 14]. The aims of the strategy include maintaining the barnacle goose population at a sustainable level and increasing the number of Greenland white-fronted geese on Islay, through reducing disturbance, managing traditional feeding areas, and diversionary feeding.

The strategy will reduce crop damage by an estimated 25% to 35% by decreasing the number of barnacle geese, improving habitat for rare Greenland white-fronted geese, and helping farmers manage their land more effectively. The island’s habitats are vital for Greenland barnacle and white-fronted geese, which are protected under European law. The barnacle goose population has grown from about 20,000 in 1987 to an average of over 41,000 in recent years. Farmers have received funding to partially compensate for economic losses since 1992.

More than 70% of the island will remain as undisturbed feeding areas for geese. This will include large areas of grassland on individual farms, RSPB reserves, rough grazing, dune grasslands, saltmarsh and roost areas. Crop damage will be reduced through scaring, diversionary feeding for Greenland white-fronted geese, and population reduction of Greenland barnacle geese, which will be made in increments.

The Islay Sustainable Goose Management Group, Islay NFUS, the Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections office and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) have worked together on the new approach.

Stuart Housden, of RSPB Scotland, said: “This Scottish Government and NFU Scotland scheme proposes to reduce the population of a protected wild bird species, which breeds in Greenland and migrates to spend the winter each year on Islay, by 25-30% through shooting. We believe that the evidence base on which that cull is proposed is fundamentally inadequate. We fully acknowledge that grazing geese sometimes affect agricultural operations, but past experience on Islay has shown that, with barnacle goose numbers at their current stable level on the island, less destructive means of managing those impacts are available, and moreover will be, at least in the shorter term, cheaper for the taxpayer.

“Scotland has international obligations towards our wildlife, and the barnacle goose is specially protected under EU conservation law. We urge the minister to reconsider this risky decision. The spectacle of the geese on Islay is itself an economic benefit to tourism operators on the island, and we fear this ‘cull’ will deter birdwatchers from visiting.” See: bit.ly/1wVC4Pz

• The *West Highland Free Press* reported that greylag geese on Lewis & Harris will be culled in 2015 to reduce the population to around half its present level. There are estimated to be between

6,000 and 7,000 birds on the island, year round. The programme will run over the next three years; local people have registered to take part.

SEA EAGLES

The Telegraph reported that research has shown that sea eagles eat more lamb than fish. It reported that a series of photographs were taken by SNH at a single white-tailed eagle’s nest in Argyll between January and July this year. The study, part of an on-going effort to understand the conflict between sea eagles and farming/crofting interests in western Scotland, showed that this eagle pair brought in 117 prey items to the nest. 67 of these (57%) were unidentifiable. Of the identifiable items, 21 were mammals, 14 were birds, 7 were fish and ‘8 or 9’ were lambs. It is not known if the lambs were already dead and taken as carrion.

The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog said that to determine raptor diet using a single method (such as nest camera footage) is a well-known problem that is beset with bias; research has shown that a combination of methods should be used, rather than a single one. It criticised using a sample size of one nest and said that the diet of individual eagle pairs can vary across years in western Scotland.

See: bit.ly/1xELPTX

CROFTING

The Economic Condition of Crofting 2011-2014 report, published by the Scottish Government, reported that crofting generated an estimated total revenue of almost £86m last year. Over 150 new crofts have been created over the past four years with 347 abandoned crofts brought back into use in the same period. Direct funding for crofters from the CAP will increase from around £20m in 2013 to £33m in 2019.



WOODLANDS

AIGAS COMMUNITY FOREST

Aigas Community Forest has received additional funding of £519,000 from the Scottish Land Fund; the total land fund investment in the project is now £740,000. This will enable the purchase all 700 acres of Aigas Forest from Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland under the National Forest Land Scheme. 120 acres of the woodland, between Cannich and Beauly in Inverness-shire, were purchased in January. The forest is to have new foot and cycle tracks, associated visitor infrastructure, recreational, conservation and educational activities and new business opportunities.

KILFINAN FOREST

Kilfinan Community Forest Company (KCFC) has applied to the National Forest Land Scheme to purchase approximately an additional 432 hectares of woodland at Upper Acharossan, near Tighnabruich in Argyll. KCFC currently own 127 hectares, also acquired from FC Scotland.

ABERNETHY RESERVE

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that RSPB Scotland are planning to create up to 45 dams to help restore bog woodland in Abernethy National Nature Reserve by Nethy Bridge where there are currently forestry plantations. The ditches to be blocked were originally dug by previous landowners who wanted to reduce the water level in order to plant non-native pines and spruce.

LARCH DISEASE

The Herald reported that FC Scotland has extended its thanks to woodland owners and managers for their ‘huge level of cooperation and support’ in working to help slow the spread of *Phytophthora ramorum* on larch. The felling of hundreds of acres of woodland, and favourable weather conditions,

have largely contained the spread of the disease in south west Scotland. 14 harvesting teams working in FC Scotland woodland have felled 1,500 acres of diseased larch stands in Galloway as part of a strategy to manage the disease and its impacts.

STRATHSPEY FUNDING

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that the Highland Aspen Group, together with the Coille Alba project, has received £9,460 funding from Highland Council's Landfill Communities Fund. Trees will be propagated at a nursery in Kincaig, and landowners encouraged to manage and expand aspen woodlands in Strathspey.

RSPB Scotland's Abernethy Nature Reserve by Nethy Bridge received £4,920 from the fund to assist in a regeneration programme. 4,000 trees will be planted in Abernethy Forest next year.

FORESTRY & RENEWABLES

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that FC Scotland earned £5.65m in the last financial year through 876 MW of installed capacity for energy projects on the land it owns. A report to the Scottish Parliament rural affairs committee said that FC Scotland expects to generate £7.85m in the current year, £9m in 2015/16 and £12.33m in 2016/17. It has a target of 2 GW of installed capacity on the forest estate by 2020. The community benefit associated with these schemes is currently £2.13m per annum.

The core income from renewable energy on the forest estate is used directly to support its ongoing sustainable management, covering the provision of recreation infrastructure, environmental improvements and community engagement activities.



FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

JELLYFISH & FISHFARMS

A research project, funded by The Crown Estate, at the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) has identified over 40 species of jellyfish in west of Scotland coastal waters. In general, it is the more abundant, smaller species that present a risk to farmed fish through gill damage rather than the larger oceanic species. See: bit.ly/1vVHucT

• Up to 300,000 salmon have been killed by the mauve stinger jellyfish, *Pelagia noctiluca*, at Loch Duart's fishfarm on North Uist. Bad weather following the incident prevented the fish from recovering from their injuries; Loch Duart said that half its stock at the farm had died.

SALMON FARM DEATHS

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that the Aquaculture Stewardship Council published an audit into Marine Harvest's Loch Greshornish salmon farm near Edinbane on Skye. It revealed that 197,018 fish died in the current production cycle, with almost 46,000 of these caused by amoebic gill disease (AGD). Significant losses were caused by transfer damage, poor performers and *Moritella*. The company said that the mortalities were largely due to jellyfish and algal blooms, helped by dry weather in the summer.

• Marine Harvest's fishfarm at Loch Duich in Inverness-shire has been emptied of all fish, following a 'highly damaging' sea-lice outbreak.

• Marine Harvest's third quarter report for 2014 for Scotland states: "The cost of medication and other treatment related costs have increased by more than 100% compared to last year, due to preventative AGD and lice treatment, and mitigation costs ... Sea-lice remain the main biological challenge."

LOCH EISHORT

Objections have been made to Hjalmland Seafarms' applications for two separate fishfarm developments on opposite sides of Loch Eishort in south Skye. Sleat Community Council, the local fishing fleet and local business owners are amongst the hundreds of objectors. Hjalmland has also applied for a fishfarm in Uig Bay on the north end of Skye.

WILD SALMON KILL LICENCE

A public consultation is to be launched by the Scottish Government to seek views on a conservation measure to ban killing wild salmon except under licence, along with an accompanying carcass tagging scheme to help enforcement. The measure would apply to both anglers and netters; it is hoped that the new system would be in place for the 2016 season. Catch and release in the rod fishery already stands at 80% across the season. The introduction of a kill licence was a key recommendation of the independent review of wild fisheries [Oct 14].

The Herald reported that the environment minister, Aileen McLeod, said: "This forthcoming consultation shows we are committed to meeting our obligations on salmon conservation by ensuring that killing by any method is sustainable."

Hugh Campbell Adamson, of the Salmon & Trout Association (Scotland), said: "This announcement signals an acknowledgement and confirmation by government that our wild salmon stocks are under considerable pressure and that they need as much protection as possible from indiscriminate killing."

George Pullar, of the Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland, said: "It is very important that both rods and nets have a sustainable future and we welcome anything that will help achieve that."

A spokesman for the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA)'s Fishing Group said: "The detail of how the scheme will operate and be policed, and the use of the best science available to decide the number of fish which can be caught, will be crucial to successful application. However, the SGA Fishing Group, which numbers ghillies, boatmen, river workers and anglers agrees with the principle being put forward in the consultation."

SALMON CATCH

The Herald reported that a dry early summer, floods in August and warmer sea temperatures affecting feeding grounds in the Atlantic are being blamed for the very low number of salmon caught in 2014; the year is on course to be the worst on record since 1952. Official figures will be published in spring 2015, but the total rod catch is set to be well under 50,000 – a decrease of more than 16,000 on the number caught last year which itself was the worst season for a decade. The five year average is 84,500.

Roger Knight, of the Spey Fishery Board, which had the lowest rod catch on record of 4,553. Dr David Summers, of the Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board, believed that the catch on the Tay would be under 7,000 – a decrease of 3,000 from 2013. *FishTweed* reported that 4,000 salmon were caught between 1 February and 29 November on the River Tweed, compared to the five year average (2008-2013) of 11,000.

FISA FUNDING

The Fishing Industry Science Alliance (FISA) has allocated £160,000 from Marine Scotland funds for four fisheries projects that aim to improve understanding of inshore fish stocks and reduce unwanted catches. The Orkney Fisheries Association have been awarded £24,200,

alongside Heriot-Watt University, for a study to verify and quantify important areas for juvenile scallops in Orkney waters. The study will inform spatial management decisions and includes the training of commercial fishermen to contribute to underwater surveys.

A further £35,000 has been allocated to the North Atlantic Fisheries College and Shetland Fishermen's Association to undertake a tagging study to obtain movement data on a range of data limited species caught within the Northern Sea.

£60,000 will go towards a project conducted in both Shetland and the west coast to investigate the commercial viability of demersal fish traps. Partners include the North Atlantic Fisheries College, Shetland Fishermen's Association, Marine Scotland Science and a west coast fisherman.

On the west coast, the effects of lifting bags on the selectivity of nephrops trawls will also be studied. The funding of £40,000 builds upon on the successful work funded by FISA in 2013/14 to assess the effect of codend mesh size on the selectivity of nephrops trawls.

MACKEREL

The West Highland Free Press reported that the Scottish Government has agreed to top-slice the annual mackerel quota and allocate less than 10% to vessels under 10 metres in length. This amounts to 1,300 tonnes. The Outer Hebrides Inshore Fishing Group conducted local trials this summer.

FISHING QUOTAS

North Sea fishing quotas have been agreed at the December Fisheries Council for 2015, following the annual EU/Norway and EU/Faroeese fish negotiations. The total allowable catch (TAC) for cod is 29,189 tonnes, 5% up on 2014. This increase will give UK fishermen an additional 542 tonnes and Scottish fishermen 343 extra tonnes. A 6% increase in the haddock catch to 40,711 tonnes gives the UK an additional 3,468 tonnes and Scottish fishermen more than 2,500 extra tonnes. The plaice quota has also been increased to 128,376 tonnes which is an increase of 15% on 2014. This gives the UK an additional 4,432 tonnes; Scotland 851 tonnes.

Catches of saithe, whiting and herring will be decreased in line with long-term management plans. The TAC for saithe has been set at 66,006 tonnes which is a decrease of 15% on 2014; this gives the UK 926 tonnes less and Scotland around 511 tonnes less. The quota for whiting has been set at 13,678 tonnes which is also a 15% decrease. However, the negotiations successfully secured a further inward transfer of 750 tonnes of whiting from Norway which has the effect of mitigating the cut to 10%, saving the UK 396 tonnes (Scotland around 299 tonnes). The herring quota has been set at 445,329 tonnes which is a 5% decrease on 2014, giving the UK 4,378 tonnes less (Scotland around 3,126 tonnes less).

The North Sea monkfish quota was agreed at 6,044 tonnes (+20%) and prawns (nephrops) 10,572 tonnes (+15%), west coast haddock, 2,822 tonnes (+14%) and west coast monkfish, 1,117 tonnes (+20%) and Rockall haddock, 1,574 tonnes (+113%). Across a broad range of stocks, including skates, rays and ling where 20% automatic cuts were proposed, a rollover was secured.

A freeze on proposed cuts to days at sea was agreed. Richard Lochhead, the fisheries minister, said that Scottish fishermen would now be helped with the implementation of the 'challenging but transformational discard ban' which is being phased in from January 2015. He said that the increases are in line with scientific advice and show that stocks are recovering. Increases have been secured in eight of Scotland's ten most valuable stocks across the North Sea and west of Scotland.

• The EU/Faroe agreement resulted in fishing levels remaining at the same level as this year in Faroese waters with the exception of a minor reduction in redfish. The agreement allows access for the whitefish fleet to Faroese waters.



MARINE

NATIONAL MARINE PLAN

The first National Marine plan was laid in Parliament and sets out the Scottish Government's vision for the sustainable development and use of the marine environment. Policies include economic, social, climate change and marine ecosystem objectives.

The National Marine Plan will cover all of Scotland's sea out to 200 nautical miles and will apply to the exercise of devolved and reserved functions. It balances the development of established industries such as oil and gas and fishing with emerging sectors such as marine renewables and carbon capture and storage. It also ensures the environment itself is protected and enhanced where possible.

The Plan includes policies for the sustainable growth of fishing, aquaculture, salmon and migratory fish, oil and gas, carbon capture and storage, offshore wind and marine renewable energy, recreation and tourism, shipping, ports, harbours and ferries, submarine cables, defence, aggregates.

GREY SEALS

Research by Moredun Research Institute Edinburgh, the University of St Andrews Sea Mammal Research Unit, and the College of Medicine at Swansea on newborn and juvenile grey seals found that *Campylobacter jejuni* bacterium was present. The bacteria was found in 70 out of 140 of the pups, dead and alive, on the Isle of May. The study was published in the journal, *Molecular Ecology*, and raises concerns about the environmental pollution of British coastlines with faecal bacteria, and the subsequent spread of human pathogens to wildlife marine sentinel species. See: onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/mec.13001/abstract

ROSEMARY BANK SEAMOUNT

Marine Scotland has discovered the largest deep sea sponge reef in UK waters while carrying out surveys at Rosemary Bank seamount, an extinct underwater volcano off the north west coast.

Francis Neat of Marine Scotland, said: "The sponge reefs provide refuge for a great diversity of marine life; among the sponges we saw sharks, skates, octopus and crustaceans. The new data from this survey reaffirms the case for designation of the Rosemary Bank as a Marine Protected Area and will allow us to provide a stronger scientific basis for developing management plans for the area."



POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

WILDLIFE CRIME

The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog reported that the Scottish Parliament's cross-party Rural Affairs, Climate Change & Environment (RACCE) committee has written a letter to the environment minister, Aileen McLeod.

The letter sets out its views on the issues that were discussed during two hearings on wildlife crime in parliament [Nov 14]. These include continuing concerns about the inconsistent presentation of data in the annual wildlife crime reports; their concerns about recorded wildlife

crimes being 'the tip of the iceberg' and how this needs to be addressed; continuing concerns about police under-resourcing; and a suggestion that PAW Scotland should include incidents of poison baits and illegal traps in their annual wildlife crime mapping exercise.

RACCE's letter states that Police Scotland undertook 'a full review' of the inquiry into the Ross-shire raptor killings [Nov 14], including the investigative approach, the media strategy and the forensic investigation, and that 'this process has involved partners including RSPB Scotland and the SSPCA.' The committee commented that 'once the case has concluded, Police Scotland and PAW Scotland are asked to consider what lessons are to be learned for the future.'

The letter also includes the committee's concerns about the poor detection and conviction rates associated with wildlife crime, and suggests that these crimes are 'insufficiently prioritised' by the Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service.

RARE BIRD PROSECUTION

A gamekeeper, George Mutch, has been found guilty on four charges at Aberdeen Sheriff Court of killing a goshawk and setting traps illegally to capture a goshawk and a buzzard on Kildrummy Estate, near Alford, Aberdeenshire.

It is the first time in Scotland that hidden camera footage, obtained by RSPB Scotland, has been allowed in evidence in a case of this kind.

A spokesman for the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA), which has now banned Mr Mutch, said they would not condone anyone taking the law into their own hands. However, he said that the SGA believed it was wrong for individuals 'from one particular profession' to be under surveillance in their place of work without their knowledge. He said: "It is not right for the Scottish Government to deny people whose livelihoods come under pressure, due to the activity of certain species or animals, recourse to a legal solution to solve that conflict."

LAND REFORM

A consultation, the *Future of Land Reform in Scotland*, has been launched [Nov 14]. It will consider a dedicated resource within the Scottish Government to promote and facilitate community land ownership across the whole of Scotland; the improvement of deer management legislation; the proactive management of public sector land and the extension of the powers of Forestry Commissioners.

Information on who owns land is held by many different bodies. This consultation will look at finding ways to bring this information together, which will not only inform debate and public decision making but also help private decision making and drive opportunity.

The consultation will also discuss the restriction of companies, trusts and partnerships that can own land to within the EU. This will not affect individuals from all over the world who want to buy land in Scotland but will make it easier to contact the landowner or hold them to account if necessary.

The management of Common Good will be looked at, together with how it should be used and transferred. It is important that these assets are managed appropriately, especially where they have historical, social, cultural or environmental importance to the local community. The community right to buy to be extended to urban areas will be considered.

New powers are proposed for Scottish Natural Heritage to ensure that landowners implement sustainable deer management plans to protect the public interest. This would cover projects to

restore natural woodlands undermined by excessive deer numbers. The Land Reform bill will be taken forward by May 2016.

Aileen McLeod said: "The Scottish Government's vision is for a strong relationship between the people of Scotland and the land of Scotland, where ownership and use of the land delivers greater public benefits through a democratically accountable and transparent system of land rights that promotes fairness and social justice, environmental sustainability and economic prosperity. I am keen to see a fairer and more equitable, distribution of land in Scotland where communities and individuals can own and use land to realise their potential. Scotland's land must be an asset that benefits the many, not the few."

David Cameron, of Community Land Scotland, said: "This full range of land reform proposals ... represents a comprehensive package of important reforming proposals. The statement of land policy sends a clear message that land is to be managed in the public interest and for the common good, and that greater diversity in land ownership is an objective of government policy. This is very welcome. The further ideas to give a new and wider role for the Forestry Commission are interesting and potentially powerful, as are the greater details we now have on how ministers will be able to intervene to protect the public interest in land transactions and on the role for the Land Reform Commission.

"Land reform looks set to dominate much debate over the next couple of years, with a clear agenda for change emerging. This is encouraging and long overdue. While the forces for the *status quo* will no doubt gather and threaten dire consequences if any change of any importance takes place, the time for change is now and obvious."

David Johnstone, of Scottish Land & Estates (SLE), said: "We will study the consultation in much greater detail, but our initial response is to express disappointment that the Scottish Government continues to miss an opportunity to create modern and meaningful land reform. There is a real lack of recognition of the major social, economic and environmental contribution estates and land-based businesses make in Scotland and we believe the government's desire to make rural Scotland more prosperous would be better served by viewing private landowners and land based businesses as part of the solution. Instead, we are now faced with the threat of landowners being forced to sell land if they are regarded as being a barrier to sustainable development. The reality is that many landowners are the drivers of sustainable development.

"There needs to be much greater clarity on this issue particularly on what evidence exists to suggest this measure is necessary and in what circumstances the government thinks it is all right to force someone to sell their home and business. We are also concerned by what the Scottish Government means that land should be owned and used in the public interest. Does that mean all land based business activity or what happens on private land across rural and urban Scotland has to be solely in the public interest? Again, greater clarity is needed. Taken in the round, all these proposals have the potential to deliver a serious blow to land-based businesses of all types and sizes and we do not think that is in the interests of rural Scotland. The First Minister has said that responsible landowners should have nothing to fear but few will take any comfort from this consultation document."

An SGA spokesman said: "We feel very strongly that creating a fairer or more socially just country does not mean taking away lifeline rural employment which is a very real danger if the drive to change ownership patterns turns into

discouragement of inward investment ... There has to be an acknowledgement that some rural business models already deliver in the public interest."

The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog said: "There should be two essential elements to land reform. One, which these new proposals serve, and which is indeed a rural business model that delivers in the public interest, brings much more land under the essentially benevolent influence of many more communities. The other is to create opportunities for nature that have been denied to it for centuries, and that is a cause that can perhaps best be served by bringing a large area of land into state control to create a showpiece national park devoted to species conservation and reintroduction, native habitat restoration, recreation and expansion.

"A national park owned by the nation may sound like shooting for the moon, but, in mainland Europe and North America, it is simply the norm and always has been. Our peculiarly Scottish (peculiarly in both senses of the word) land use history has left us far, far behind the times, so that our new aspirational frame of mind has to be willing to think big just to achieve these norms that are a facet of life in so many modern, independent nations. Imagine a Heartland National Park that stretches from the Moor and the Black Wood of Rannoch south to Loch Tay and Glen Dochart and west across the Black Mount, Glencoe and Glen Orchy to the shores of Loch Etive. It would also link our existing national parks and serve as a role model in matters like prioritising the needs of nature over development and tourism.

"It would lead by example in teaching new community-owned estates how to be better neighbours with the natural world, so that the growing rural population of people would relearn something of the old skills our ancestors once knew about honouring the company of the growing population of nature, rather than obliterating it with shotguns, traps, and a Victorian apothecary's arsenal of poisons."

Christopher Nicholson, of the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association, said: "These proposals which will unlock the potential of rural Scotland have been eagerly awaited by many who have felt stultified by the concentrated pattern of land tenure. Land reform is now firmly on the agenda and will dominate discussions over the next few years as we strive to make rural Scotland a better and fairer place."

Fiona Mandeville, of the Scottish Crofting Federation, said: "Crofting has been central to Scottish land reform since the formation of the Crofting Reform Group in 1997, leading to the establishment of the Crofting Community Right to Buy and the new crofting legislation of 2007 and 2010. There is much work to be done to achieve the Land Reform Review Group's recommendations 'to ensure that the common good of the people of Scotland is well served by its land resources.'

"Crofting can bring people back to the vast tracts of land currently managed from tax havens for the benefit of anonymous individuals or consortiums. The Scottish Government's will to tackle, at long last, such misuse of our land is to be applauded."

Among the proposals are draft measures for stronger deer regulation. Proposal 10 in the consultation recognises that Scotland's biodiversity needs urgent protection from damage caused by high deer numbers. Among a package of measures to reform land ownership and use, the paper calls for Scottish Natural Heritage to be given new powers to 'require that landowners have in place detailed sustainable deer management

plans that protect the public interest and that the plans are fully carried out.'

The new powers would underpin the current voluntary system, as a backstop to be used if the voluntary arrangements fail to deliver the 2020 Biodiversity targets. The Scottish Government is also carrying out a separate review, which will be concluded in 2016, into whether the voluntary arrangements should be replaced by a new statutory system of deer management.

Mike Daniels, of the John Muir Trust (JMT), said: "We warmly welcome this proposal from the Scottish Government to take action to protect what remains of our native woodland. Much of our upland environment is bare, degraded and impoverished as a result of overgrazing by deer. Many sporting estates have not just allowed, but encouraged deer numbers to escalate to unsustainable levels, which are harmful both to our ecosystem and to the wellbeing of the deer themselves. This is a chance to halt and reverse two centuries of damage."

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Jamie Stewart, of the Scottish Countryside Alliance, said: "Scottish landowners – large owners in Scotland – have subsidised communities and the people whom live in that land for a long, long time. If you remove them from the equation, we've got a real potential for land abandonment in Scotland and to set in place the exact opposite of what they hope to do. They're not going to repopulate the Highlands, they're going to see a recurrence of the Highland clearances."

Responses to this consultation need to be sent to the Scottish Government by 10 February 2015. See: bit.ly/1xbRyRE; bit.ly/1ADawQu

PLANNING APPEALS

The charity, Planning Democracy, is working with the JMT to pursue an Equal Right of Appeal for communities, affected individuals and relevant non-government organisations in planning decisions. Developers may challenge Scottish Government or local authority planning decisions, when objectors do not have the same rights to review or appeal. Planning Democracy has submitted a petition to the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee, *PE01534: Equal rights of appeal in the planning system*.

This calls on the Scottish Parliament "to urge the Scottish Government to review the current rights of appeal within planning and other consenting processes which give deemed planning consent, considering the benefits of widening the scope of appeal, and providing an equal right of appeal."

JMT said that the option for an appeal and Public Local Inquiry would be better, and cheaper, than Judicial Review.

CROWN ESTATE

The Smith Commission, set up after the referendum to examine further powers for Scotland, stipulates that 'management of those [Crown Estate] assets will be further devolved to local authority areas such as Orkney, Shetland, Nan Eilean Siar or other areas who seek such responsibilities' [Nov 14]. The report still has to be approved by the Westminster government, but recommends that the devolved responsibility should include the seabed out to 200 miles.

The Crown Estates total revenues from its Scottish estates in 2014 were £13.9m, £3.3m of which came from aquaculture. This total is less than 4% of its total income in the UK.

Fiona Mandeville, of SCF, welcomed the Smith Commission proposals on the Crown Estate [Nov 14]. She said: "We are interested to see how responsibility for the management of the

Crown Estate's economic assets in Scotland, and the associated revenue generated, translates to the local level. We would expect such revenue to come to the areas where it is generated, such as the Western and Northern Isles. However, we question the capability of the highly-centralised Highland Council to return these assets to its west coast communities."

The Smith Commission also addresses Scotland's position in negotiations at European level. Ms Mandeville said: "We are at the bottom of the pile with the lowest Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) payments from Europe. Scotland needs more and better ways to support crofting communities and to address the serious and worrying deficits coming to crofters as a result of the new CAP."



GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

VICARIOUS LIABILITY

The *BBC News* website reported that landowner Ninian Stewart has been fined £675 at Stranraer Sheriff Court over the actions of a gamekeeper who illegally poisoned a buzzard near Whithorn in Dumfries & Galloway. The maximum penalty for this offence is £5,000 and/or a six month prison sentence. Mr Stewart is the first person to be convicted under section 18A of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which means that people can be held liable for the actions of employees. The law created a new offence of 'vicarious liability' which means that a person who has shooting rights over land, or who controls the exercise of such rights, can be found guilty of crimes committed by an employee acting as their agent [Jan 12].

The Crown Office said that while there was no indication that Stewart had commissioned or knew about the offences, there was also no evidence he had exercised due diligence in respect of shooting on his estate.

The Procurator Fiscal, Sara Shaw, said: "There is a proactive responsibility placed on those who employ gamekeepers to run shooting estates, to ensure that is done within the parameters of the law. These offences were committed almost a year after the vicarious liability offence (under section 18A of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981) was introduced. Mr Stewart had adequate notice and time in which to take advice and put appropriate measures in place. Mr Stewart failed in his responsibilities and as a result stands convicted of the killing of a wild bird."

Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) said that the gamekeeper was subsequently dismissed from his post and the shoot closed down. Glasserton & Physgill Estates were expelled from SLE, following the conviction of the gamekeeper, who was also expelled from the Scottish Gamekeepers Association [Mar 13]. A spokesman said: "The estate believed it had sufficient safeguards in place but that was not the case so the estate has admitted ignorance of the law and the limited extent of its culpability is reflected in the low level of fine. Before this incident, the estate had an unblemished record. When vicarious liability offences were introduced there was a great deal of confusion over the liabilities of estates and that remains an ongoing issue despite the industry trying its utmost to advise on the pitfalls of this legislation."

ENVIRONMENTAL COURTS

Lord Advocate, Frank Mulholland, called for special courts to deal with environmental criminals. He believes that real judicial focus would send a powerful message to gangland and other polluters.

He also mooted the possibility of other measures against polluters, including clean-up orders and newspaper adverts to name and shame those

convicted of such crimes. Around a dozen organised crime groups are now believed to be involved in environmental crime, including running landfill sites that many assume are legal. Such waste crime is now thought to be worth £30m with the environmental damage done far in excess of that figure.

Typically criminal organisations will use sites with limited permits for the storage or transfer of waste, such as former collieries or railway cuttings, so they can claim some legitimacy when collecting rubbish from non-criminal companies. As landfill taxes rise, it is becoming increasingly lucrative for gangland firms to avoid paying it, undercutting their rivals. Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) officials admit that the tax is incentivising criminality.

Green offending is not restricted to landfills and includes illegal fishing, criminal polluting and other complex crimes.

CAIRNGORMS HOUSING

14 environmental groups have written jointly to Scottish ministers urging them to block the building of 73 houses in three housing developments in Carrbridge and Nethy Bridge in the Cairngorms National Park because they will destroy wildlife sites. They want the developments to be deleted from the latest version of the Cairngorms local development plan.

Ian Lawson, of the Cairngorms Campaign, said: "We are requesting these particular housing allocations be removed from the local development plan because significant new information has revealed their exceptional value for wildlife. We simply cannot afford to continually eat away at our most precious countryside if we are to leave a national park worthy of the name to future generations."

Carol Evans, of Woodland Trust Scotland, said: "We are very concerned that the local development plans for the park leave a number of areas of ancient woodland dangerously exposed to development, against national planning policy. Ancient woodland is an irreplaceable habitat that has developed over many hundreds of years and supports a rich variety of rare wildlife. Any further loss of ancient woodland is unacceptable, particularly within our national parks."

Plantlife has written separately to the Scottish Government, pointing out that the mushrooms, mosses and orchids threatened by the Carrbridge and Nethy Bridge housing schemes could not be recreated elsewhere.

Murray Ferguson, of the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), stressed that the local development plan had been through a long and inclusive consultation process. "All unresolved objections to the plan have been considered by Scottish Government reporters, and we have accepted their recommendations and have submitted the proposed plan to Scottish ministers."

The CNPA has given notice of their intention to adopt the Cairngorms local development plan. It is now with Scottish ministers for consideration.

See: bit.ly/1zcaESS

LITTER

Derek Robertson, of Keep Scotland Beautiful, said that £73m a year was spent in Scotland on picking up litter, as well as wider costs associated with wildlife and the environment. The Clean Up Scotland campaign, comprising the Scottish Government, local councils, the voluntary sector and private firms, aims to make dropping litter as culturally unacceptable as drink-driving. The government's Zero Waste Scotland programme is driving the first ever strategy to tackle littering.

REST AND BE THANKFUL

Traffic Scotland is using aerial drones to get a top-down view of landslides that have frequently closed the A83 at the Rest and Be Thankful pass in Argyll [Mar 14]. The unmanned aerial vehicles have delivered photographs which could help pinpoint mudslides as they develop for the engineers analysing where the problem spots are and why they are happening.

The drones are fitted with infra-red lenses which see into the non-visible spectrum and show the distribution of water. A Transport Scotland spokesman said that, on the Rest and Be Thankful, there is a thin layer of earth on rock which when it becomes waterlogged slides forward, bringing the hillside onto the road. He said: "We are considering whether we could make more use of this type of imagery to improve our monitoring of and response to landslide events as part of our on-going mitigation programme."



ENERGY

RENEWABLE GENERATION

Figures released by the UK Department of Energy & Climate Change showed that electricity generated from renewables in Scotland during 2013 accounted for 32% of the total electricity generated in Scotland, as did that generated by fossil fuels. Scotland also continues to be a net exporter of electricity, exporting 28% of generation in 2013.

When taking the electricity exported into consideration, renewable sources of electricity accounted for 44.4% of Scotland's electricity consumption in 2013, an increase from 38.8% in 2012. The statistics also show that Scotland's renewable electricity generation in the first three quarters of 2014 was 21% higher than the same period in 2013. This overall increase is primarily due to a 39% increase in hydro generation and a 13% increase in wind output.

• UK government statistics show that Scotland's renewable electricity industry displaced 11.9 million tonnes of CO₂ in 2013, an increase of over 14% on the 10.4 million tonnes of CO₂ displaced in Scotland by the sector in 2012.

WINDFARM OBJECTION NUMBERS

The Herald reported that a parliamentary question from Murdo Fraser MSP found that there have been 5,942 complaints about developments of over 50 MW this year, compared to 2,951 complaints last year. The figures also show that 1,120 instances of public support have been recorded for large turbine developments this year, compared to 2,156 in 2013.

• Almost 1,400 applications to install turbines have been made in the last 18 months, according to figures obtained by the Scottish Conservatives.

MICROTURBINES

The *BBC News* website reported that the University of Stirling, together with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), undertook a study into the impact of small domestic wind turbines on birds and bats. The study used data, questionnaires from turbine owners and computer modelling to calculate that up to 5,510 birds and 3,363 bats could be killed every year by these turbines. More than 19,000 microturbines are already in place in the UK, mainly in domestic and farmland settings, and their use has increased due to technological advances and financial incentives.

The research team also found that bats have started avoiding microturbine development sites, abandoning potentially suitable feeding areas. The study concluded that turbines must be carefully

positioned to avoid installing them in areas where bird and bat activity is likely to be high.

The study is published in *Biodiversity & Conservation*.

WINDFARM UPDATES

Borders: Councillors have rejected plans for a six-turbine extension to Infinis' 11 turbine Glenkerie windfarm near Biggar. Scottish Borders Council officials had advised that there were no planning grounds to refuse the application; the original turbines had been largely contained within a remote valley. However, the proposed extension would have seen new turbines encroach over the saddle of the ridge. Two community councils, as well as walkers and hill-runners organisations, had objected to the proposals.

Dumfries & Galloway: The *BBC News* website reported that Element Power's Twentysixhill Hill nine turbine windfarm near Sanquhar, Upper Nithsdale has been approved despite opposition from the council's planning officer, who said that it would have a significant impact on a valuable scenic area. Two local community councils had supported the scheme with the other offering no objection.

• Ecotricity has proposed seven 126 metre turbines at California, Creetown, adjoining a previously rejected proposal at Blackmyre. The Kirkcudbrightshire local plan states that turbines up to, but not exceeding, 50 metres in height are acceptable.

• RSPB Scotland is objecting to plans for Community Windpower 14 turbine Spango (Mid Ring) windfarm on moorland north of Sanquhar. RSPB Scotland said that the site was important for hen harriers, peregrines and short-eared owls.

A previous application for the site was withdrawn by the developers following objections from RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and local residents. The RSPB Scotland argues that the resubmission is virtually identical to the original application, with the location of one turbine moved by just 10 metres. The site is part of the Muirkirk & North Lowther Uplands Special Protection Area.

Easter Ross: The *Press & Journal* reported that PI Renewables has lodged an appeal against the refusal of the 14 turbine Carn Gorm windfarm above Strathgarve Forest on the slopes of Ben Wyvis [Sep 14].

Inverness-shire: Falck Renewables Wind Ltd are planning to extend the existing 26 turbine Millennium windfarm by ten larger turbines. Fort Augustus & Glenmoriston Community Councils objected to the application because of the cumulative landscape impact with four windfarms consented within a radius of less than ten miles. The Scottish Rights of Way Society has concerns over the cumulative impact on recreational users of this countryside.

The John Muir Trust (JMT) said: "It does not on the whole significantly increase the impact of the existing structures with the exception of the new proposed access route from the south. This new route is not justifiable and could change access to the whole windfarm." The Scottish Environmental Protection Agency highlighted the lack of justification for the proposed new 4x4 access track, which crosses peatlands.

The Mountaineering Council for Scotland (MCoFS) also objected because of the cumulative visual impact in an area of outstanding landscape importance. It argued the capacity of this area to absorb the environmental impact of windfarms has been exceeded. Dave Gordon, of MCoFS, said: "The MCoFS objected to this application, the third for this windfarm, on the grounds of the cumulative impact of the density of turbines."

Taken together with Beinneun windfarm and its proposed extension, this area will appear as a substantial mass of turbines particularly visible from classic mountains to the west and south.

"It is regrettable, but predictable, that Highland Council's planners would recommend no objection. This area is already an industrial site and intensifying development does less harm than a new development elsewhere. However, our worry is that we will continue to get both further development on existing sites and new sites being proposed, such as at Culachy, just across the Great Glen, where an application is imminent. Large chunks of the Highlands are losing their appeal to many mountaineers."

Perthshire: The JMT has lodged an objection to West Coast Energy's plans for the 25 turbine Crossburns Windfarm, which would be built across the Ardtalnaig to Aberfeldy leg of the Rob Roy Way. Consideration of the application has now been delayed by councillors, who have agreed on a site visit before deciding whether or not to object to the application. The final decision will be taken by Scottish ministers; an objection from council as a statutory consultee could trigger a public inquiry.

Sutherland: AES Wind Generation and Wind Energy, the developers of the 34 turbine Glenmorrie Wind Farm near Bonar Bridge, is taking the Scottish Government to Judicial Review, following its decision to refuse consent [Aug 14]. The developers claim: "Significant material issues were left out of the Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals' Report and that the process leading up to the decision was flawed."

OFFSHORE WINDFARMS & SEABIRDS

The *BBC News* website reported that the BTO and the University of the Highlands & Islands' Environmental Research Institute, on behalf of Marine Scotland Science, found that over 99% of seabirds were likely to alter their flight paths in order to avoid collision with offshore turbines.

The study, which collected data from studies of 32 UK windfarms, focused on five species which are widely believed to be at most risk from turbines – gannet, kittiwake, lesser and greater black-backed gull and herring gull. It found that gannets were among species that steered clear of offshore windfarms, whereas foraging gulls appeared to be attracted to the sites, although they stayed away from turbine blades.

Aonghais Cook, of BTO, said: "It is important not to get lulled into a false sense of security by these figures. Whilst 99% of birds may avoid turbines, collision may still be a significant risk at sites with large numbers of birds. Furthermore, there are still a number of key gaps in knowledge for some vulnerable species.

Aedán Smith, of RSPB Scotland, said: "Although there remain major uncertainties for some species, it provides good additional evidence that some seabirds will avoid wind turbines on most of their flights. However, the small proportion of flights that result in collision could still result in many thousands of birds being killed each year and could even significantly reduce the total populations of some species. It is therefore vital that individual developments avoid the most important places for seabirds. Impacts on seabirds must be reduced significantly if offshore wind is to realise its full potential of delivering much needed sustainable renewable energy."

OPENCAST COAL

Energy minister, Fergus Ewing, said that the Westminster autumn statement failed to deliver measures to ensure at least some of the coal levies

raised from coal produced in Scotland be made available to restore opencast sites in Scotland [Sep 13]. Mr Ewing said: "I have written on numerous occasions to my counterparts in the UK government on this issue since September 2013 and I have yet to receive a substantive reply. Even in the autumn statement there were no provisions for coal communities. The UK government's lack of engagement in this manner is a disrespect to the people of Scotland. These monies could go some way to assist in reducing the financial burden that our local authorities are feeling across Scotland due to the huge costs of restoration.

"The money collected by the UK government over the years from coal mined in Scotland, now in the region of £15m, should be put to good use to help with the restoration of opencast sites. We have a significant restoration legacy to deal with in Scotland and that money, paid into the central funds in London, has not been used for the industry or affected communities. It is now needed to help restore these sites."

- The *Sunday Herald* reported that the Scottish Government has reversed a decision to 'wind up' its opencast coal task force. The task force will now reconvene to try to stem the loss of jobs and ensure restoration of the sites.

SOLAR FARM

Associates Borealis Energy's East Balloch solar energy farm, between Brechin and Montrose in Angus, has been granted planning permission. 70,000 free-standing solar PV panels will be located in a 153 acre greenfield site.

- Lightsource Renewable Energy said that it had identified around 70 potential sites for ground-mounted solar PV farms in Scotland.

- Ofgem reported that the capacity of 35,000 homes and 600 business solar PV has reached 140 MW in Scotland, a rise of 32% on 2013.

DOUNREAY

The *BBC News* website reported that new Metrac H5 all-terrain vehicles are being used to monitor for radioactive particles at Sandside, Strathy and Murkle beaches near the Dounreay nuclear power plant in Caithness [Jun 13]. Sandside is the most frequently checked of the beaches, while Strathy and Murkle are looked at in May and November.

The new vehicles have replaced the Hill Cat ATVs, which have been used for a number of years but will be retained for use in peak periods of particle detection work. Dounreay Site Restoration Limited expects the monitoring to continue for several years.

- The decommissioning and closure date for the Dounreay nuclear power site in Caithness has been pushed back from 2025 to 2029. The UK government requires changes in the way that radioactive fuel should be handled. Fuel inherited by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority was to have remained at the site, but the UK government has decided to consolidate its fuel inventory at Sellafeld by the early 2020s [Sep 14].

 **RECREATION & TOURISM**

LEDGOWAN ESTATE

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Highland Council is to install self-closing gates at two access points on the Ledgowan estate near Achnasheen, Wester Ross [Jan 14]. These will enable access rights for walking and cycling, whilst allowing field gates to remain secure. The council still awaits a response from the estate as to how public access and estate operations can both be accommodated to the access point to the

glacial terraces. The council has, so far, chosen to pursue a solution outwith the courts.

OPEN AIR

SNH's *People & Nature Survey*, showed that four out of every five adults questioned said that they had been outdoors for recreation over the past year, a 3% increase from a similar study in 2012. Walking is the most popular activity, followed by family outings. Half of all visits were spent in the countryside, a third in a town or city, and the remainder at the seaside. Just under a quarter of the visits included a forest.

See: bit.ly/1xEFcRE

ISLE OF MAY

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has launched a public consultation on the Isle of May National Nature Reserve (NNR) to help prepare a new ten-year management plan for the island. The consultation runs to 25 January.

See: www.nnr-scotland.org.uk/isle-of-may

 **NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS**

JMT

The John Muir Trust (JMT) has appointed Peter Pearson as its new chair, taking over from John Hutchinson.

NTS

Sir Moir Lockhead is to succeed Sir Kenneth Calman as chairman of the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), who retires from the role in 2015.

RAMBLERS SCOTLAND

Ramblers Scotland is undertaking an online survey in order to shape a ten year vision for walking in Scotland.

David Thomson, convener of Ramblers Scotland said: "At a time when land reform is back on the political agenda and Scotland's National Walking Strategy has recently been published, we are asking our members, and also members of the public who enjoy walking, to set out their thoughts on why walking is important. We'd like to know how we can make walking even more enjoyable for everyone in Scotland.

"Ramblers Scotland is the only organisation to represent the interests of all walkers, whether they are strolling around their local park, walking to the office, or standing at the top of Ben Nevis. We have a long and proud heritage as campaigners on access and countryside issues. But in 2015 it will be ten years since the Scottish Parliament established world-beating access rights, and the walking public now mainly take access rights for granted."

See: www.ramblers.org.uk/RSSurvey

SCOTTISH LAND

The Scottish Land Action movement is a collective of activists striving to deliver comprehensive and radical land reform in Scotland by 2016.

See: www.scottishlandactionmovement.org

SCF

The Scottish Crofting Federation has appointed Fiona Mandeville as its new chair, at the end of the tenure of Derek Flynn.

A HAPPY NEW YEAR to all SCENES subscribers, and a very special thank you to every 'newshound' who sends in cuttings, each and every month, from their local newspapers.