



**GOLDEN EAGLE SURVEY**

The *BBC News* website reported that a six month survey of Scotland's golden eagle population is to be carried out. The most recent survey, in 2003, found the overall number of breeding pairs had increased by 20 to 442 since 1992, but there had been declines of 24% and 28% in the north central and south central Highlands respectively over the previous 20 years. The golden eagle population is thought to have remained stable in recent decades, although long-term monitoring has shown a variation in numbers across different areas.

The latest survey, the fourth national survey, has been funded by SNH and RSPB Scotland and will cover all current known golden eagle hunting and nesting areas.

Andrew Stevenson, of SNH said: "Although around half the golden eagle population is monitored every year by the Scottish Raptor Study Group, these broader national surveys are vital to fill the gaps on the status of the whole population. We use the results of these surveys to make decisions about the future conservation of the golden eagle. Intriguingly, there has been a suggestion in recent years that some pairs have learned to cope with fairly extensive forests, despite it being a factor in some range losses historically. The potential risks from renewables have also increased as the industry grows."

Mr Stevenson said that golden eagles face a range of issues, including wildlife crime in some areas and also poor quality habitats with reduced prey in parts of the west Highlands.

**BEAVERS**

Four independent scientific studies have been published by SNH on the ecology of beavers and their effects on the environment during the Knapdale trial reintroduction in Argyll [Jan 15].

Monitoring work by the University of Oxford Wildlife Conservation Research Unit showed that the beavers have established themselves at Knapdale and the population appeared to be stable up to the end of the trial. However the number of beavers didn't increase over the five years of the trial. Of the 16 beavers released in May 2009, three died and five went missing. Fourteen beaver kits were born in the wild but many didn't survive, with only one or two remaining. While the survival rates of the adult beavers that settled was considered relatively good, kit mortality was very high in some years – all of the kits from 2012 and 2013 were lost. The reason for this low rate of survival isn't fully known but two of the kits were preyed on by other animals.

At the end of the trial there were three groups of beavers at Knapdale and one single male beaver, covering an area of 367 hectares, at a density of one beaver family per 5 km of water's edge.

The report concludes: "Population viability analysis suggested that if kit mortality levels remained as high as experienced during the trial, this would preclude establishment of a self-sustaining population."

Researchers at the University of Stirling found that the beavers, surprisingly, have had little effect on rivers and streams in the trial area. Although they have explored many of the streams, nearly all of their activity has been concentrated around the lochs. Another study shows that although beavers have had little effect on most lichen habitat at Knapdale, they have had an impact on lichens that grow on Atlantic hazelwoods. While the felling is very localised, affecting just over half of hazel trees within 60 metres of lochs inhabited by beavers, there is concern that this may eventually cause a temporary or permanent loss of some of the nationally and internationally important lichen

habitat in the area. If beavers were permanently reintroduced to Scotland, they could have an impact on up to 27% of the Atlantic hazel habitat across the country. The study concluded that this would be a significant proportion, given the restricted global range of some lichens.

The British Dragonfly Society found that the hairy dragonfly and the demoiselle were using the small clearings created by beavers felling trees. It also found that dragonfly numbers may be falling at one loch that had changed substantially because of a beaver dam. But the researchers concluded that the five years of the trial was too short to fully evaluate the impact of the beavers.

Simon Jones, project manager for the Scottish Beaver Trial, said: "The trial was successful in being the first trial reintroduction of any mammal species in the UK. The four beaver families introduced were never intended to be a source population for a wider full-scale reintroduction, but a small group to be studied in order to explore how beavers affect the local environment. All but one of the families bred throughout the full five-year period and a full range of natural behaviours was seen, including births, deaths and dispersals. Costs did rise in the first year of the trial when animal importation costs rose, but then the project remained on budget throughout and eventually cost in the region of £1.5m." The original estimate of cost was £850,000.

The trial was run by the Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, on land managed by Forestry Commission Scotland. During the trial the beavers were closely monitored by SNH in partnership with a number of other independent organisations.

See: <http://ow.ly/Jf3p0>

**UIST HEDGEHOGS**

SNH proposes to remove all the hedgehogs from the Uists over ten years. There are estimated to be around 4,000 remaining. Research has also shown they are still preying on the eggs and occasionally young chicks of the dunlin, ringed plover, redshank, snipe, lapwing and oystercatcher populations; this is having a major impact on hatching success on waders in European SPAs in South Uist.

Hedgehog removal would be split into two five-year phases, starting in 2017, and would cost £5m. If work on removal of hedgehogs were to stop then there is a high risk that hedgehog populations would expand, particularly into North Uist, and predation on waders would increase.

The scheme is backed by RSPB, Storas Uibhist (the community landowner) and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

Ian Ross, SNH chairman, said: "Managing invasive non-native species is a high priority in the islands and is recognised in the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership's Single Outcome Agreement. This would represent not only an investment in the natural heritage, but also the character, culture and economic future of the islands."

**GLENLIVET ESTATE**

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that peatland restoration is being undertaken at Glenmullie on the Glenlivet Estate. Old drains are being blocked and non-native trees removed from 160 hectares as part of the Peatland Action programme funded by the Scottish Government. Techniques, not tried in Scotland before, are being showcased such as re-vegetating bare peat with sphagnum-rich moss mulch spread by machine. The Crown Estate is working in partnership with SNH, the Cairngorms National Park Authority and local gamekeepers.



**FARMING**

**CROFTING LAW**

The *Herald* reported that Duncan MacPhee, of the Crofting Law group, said that the two existing acts which cover crofting should be dropped and the agricultural laws adapted to cover the country's 12,000 crofters.

The group has produced the Crofting Law Sump, a review of the problems of crofting law with a list of corrections requiring legislative provision, to help ministers. However, Mr McPhee said that more fundamental reform is now needed. He said: "The recent legislation has made crofting law excessively complicated and uncertain. So bad is it, that MacPhee & Partners have concluded that the best thing that could now be done with the crofting law, is to scrap it. We advocate starting over again, and using the agricultural law applying to the rest of Scotland, adapted as little as possible to deal with the extreme circumstances of those trying to farm the poor quality land of the Highlands and Islands."



**WOODLANDS**

**ARGYLL COMMUNITY WOODLANDS**

The South West Mull & Iona Development Ltd (SWMID) has received £750,000 from the Scottish Land Fund to purchase the 2,000 acre Tiroran Forest from Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland. SWMID is to investigate plans for the woodland including an access programme with increased interpretation for visitors and locals; sites for woodland crofts, and the development of archaeological sites.

Kilfinan Community Forest Company also received £750,000 to bring the remaining 1,000 acres of the Upper Acharossan Forest, near Tighnabruaich on the Kyles o' Bute, into community ownership. Both purchases will be made under the National Forest Land Scheme, operated by FC Scotland. The company acquired 300 acres of the forest in 2010, and has plans to strengthen the Kilfinan communities by providing jobs, affordable housing, environmental education and recreation.

**NON-NATIVE SPECIES**

A guide to help forest owners and managers comply with their responsibilities to protect Scotland from any potentially damaging effects of invasive or non-native forestry species has been published online by FC Scotland. These responsibilities are set out in the Wildlife & Natural Environment (Scotland) Act, the UK Forestry Standard and associated Biodiversity Guidelines.

Most non-native commercial tree species used in Scotland are exempt from the offences of the Wildlife & Natural Environment Act but they must still be managed according to the UK Forestry Standard. However, under the Act, allowing any other non-native species to spread into the wild is an offence. In addition, special licences from Scottish Natural Heritage are required to release non-native animals into the wild or to plant or regenerate a non-native tree or shrub that is not exempt under the Act.

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

**ABERNETHY RESERVE**

RSPB Scotland has withdrawn a planning application to block ditches at Abernethy National Nature Reserve, following local expressions of concern [Dec 14]. Around 45 dams were to have been constructed in order to restore bog woodlands.



## FISHERIES & FISHFARMING

### LOCH ETIVE FISHFARM

The Friends of Loch Etive campaign group is challenging, in the Court of Session, Argyll & Bute Council's consent for Dawnfresh's ten cage Sailean Ruadh fishfarm [Feb 14]. If the court upholds the council's handling of the application, the group may be liable for the authority's legal expenses.

Friends of Loch Etive have petitioned the Court of Session for a judicial review of the planning permission. It said that, at the public hearing, the council agreed that planning consent be granted subject to a section 75 list of conditions, which was to be signed by the council, Dawnfresh and the Crown Estate. The Crown Estate declined to sign it.

The group is opposed to Dawnfresh adding to the five fishfarms they already operate on Loch Etive. A spokesman for Argyll & Bute Council said: "The council is committed to defending the Planning, Protective Services & Licensing Committee's decision to grant planning approval." Dawnfresh said that the fishfarm is already fully operational and the fish could not be moved anywhere else.

### KILLING WILD SALMON

A consultation has been launched which will seek views on conservation measures which would seek to ban the killing of wild salmon except under licence, along with an accompanying carcass tagging scheme to ensure compliance. The kill license would apply to anglers and netters and it is hoped the new system would be in place for 2016. The consultation ends on 30 April. See: [bit.ly/1v4aHif](http://bit.ly/1v4aHif)

### TWEED ANGLING

The *BBC News* website reported that a statutory ban came into force on the River Tweed as the 2015 fishing season began. Anglers face prosecution if they fail to release any rod-caught salmon before the end of March. Even if a salmon dies, it must be left in the water and not retained. The new rules take over from the voluntary 100% catch-and-release policy introduced to help preserve salmon stocks, brought in by the River Tweed Commissioners and beat proprietors.

The voluntary ban will still apply to all salmon taken between 1 April and 30 June but sea trout may be killed and retained.

Catches fell last year with only 4,000 salmon taken during 2014 compared with an annual average of 11,000 over the previous five years.

### LOCH KEN CRAYFISH

*The Galloway News* reported that a petition on non-native crayfish in the Ken-Dee catchment has been lodged with the Scottish Parliament [Mar 12]. The Scottish Government has been urged to relax the rules on commercially trapping non-native American crayfish which are having a devastating impact on Loch Ken, near Castle Douglas, in Dumfries & Galloway.

John Thom, the petitioner, said the population of the invasive species had grown out of control causing the destruction of salmon, sea trout and brown trout spawning beds. He said that it has also led to the loss of river walks, farm land, dragonfly nesting areas, wild fowl and the 'complete destruction' of the marine biosphere in the affected areas. The contaminated area has increased from 35 km<sup>2</sup> to 87 km<sup>2</sup>.

Mr Thom, a member of New Galloway Community Council, said that Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Scottish Environment

Protection Agency (SEPA) did not have the resources to carry out a large trapping project, so the only way was to have a commercial, scientific one. Three companies have expressed an interest in commercially trapping crayfish in the region, should the law be changed; trapping is currently only allowed under a scientific licence.

However, both SNH and SEPA are against the move to change the law. They said that a commercial fishery would encourage the spread of crayfish to new areas. Studies in other parts of Scotland have shown that long-term trapping is ineffective.



## MARINE

### CORKSCREW DEATHS

The Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) at St Andrews University has observed a grey seal killing five young seals, leaving them with distinctive spiral injuries previously attributed to ducted ship propellers [Nov 14]. The injury is described as a single, smooth-edged cut starting at the head and spiralling around the body. This predatory behaviour may be more common than previously thought and could explain the unusual clusters of injured seals found in Scottish waters. Similar behaviour has been seen in Germany. This evidence does not completely eliminate ship propellers, but it is now less likely they are a key factor. Marine Scotland will continue to fund research into this issue.

From 2009 to October 2014, 86 seal carcasses were found in Scotland with unusual spiral injuries (corkscrew seals) the cause of which was then unknown. Marine Scotland commissioned SMRU to investigate possible causes. Until late in 2014, the investigation suggested that ducted ship propellers might be responsible for the injuries and, indeed, scale model tests appeared to confirm this. As a result, SMRU were funded to tag a number of grey seals in the Firth of Forth to examine potential interactions with shipping and, if possible, discover if any suffered the recorded spiral injuries as a result. During this work a number of examples of juvenile grey seals with typical spiral injuries were found but, unexpectedly, these were seen and recorded to be the result of adult grey seal predation.

In December 2014, SMRU recorded an adult male seal attacking, attempting to drown, then killing and eating a weaned grey seal pup near the Isle of May in the Firth of Forth. The island has been a hotspot for corkscrew injuries with multiple strandings recorded in 2010, 2012, 2013 and 2014. Over a period of ten days, the grey seal was observed killing five seal pups, and a further nine pup carcasses were found in locations where the adult had been sited. The seal was then traced by researchers to Denmark and Germany. Of the 14 pups the researchers believe the adult male killed, 12 had the characteristic wounds that started at the head and spiralled down the body.

The report concluded: "The wound pattern seen on the grey seal pups at the Isle of May clearly resembled those that have been recorded as corkscrew wounds on previous grey and common (harbour) seal cases in Scotland."

See: [www.smru.st-and.ac.uk/documents/2162.pdf](http://www.smru.st-and.ac.uk/documents/2162.pdf)

### BASKING SHARKS

Basking Shark Scotland said that there were 250 sightings of sharks around the Hebrides in the summer of 2014. Shane Wasik, of Basking Shark Scotland, said: "These sightings ranged from Caithness to Dumfries & Galloway, but the highest concentration of sightings were recorded in the Hebrides. The largest number spotted in

one shoal on one day was over 30 individuals and occurred during a large summer plankton bloom. Although our public sightings submissions had dropped by a third in 2014, our own sightings have increased by 23% from 2013."

### SHARK TAGGING

The *BBC News* website reported that a 20.8 kg tope shark, tagged more than ten years ago as part of the Scottish Shark Tagging Programme, has been recaptured just 12 miles from its original location in Luce Bay in Dumfries & Galloway.

The species makes its annual migration to areas such as the Bay of Biscay and the Azores after spending the summer in Scottish waters. Experts believe it may have swum more than 30,000 miles during that time. The tagging project was run by the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network, and the shark was returned to the sea unharmed.

### RISSE'S DOLPHIN

A rare winter visitor on the east coast, a Risso's dolphin, was stranded in Loch Fleet in Sutherland for several days. It was put down. Dr Andrew Brownlow, of the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme, said that the dolphin was probably ill; a *post mortem* was conducted in Inverness.

### EMERGENCY TUGS

A Lysblink Seaways vessel grounded near Ardnamurchan Point, near Kilchoan in Lochaber, has been refloated on a high tide. Diesel oil leaked from the ship, and an absorbent boom was put into place. However, the one emergency tug in the Highlands, based in Orkney, did not leave its home port until five hours after the accident.

Two emergency tugs were introduced on the recommendation of Lord Donaldson's report into the grounding of the tanker the Braer on Shetland in 1993. One was based in Shetland and one in Stornoway in Lewis. In 2012, the UK government announced public funding for only one, which would be based in Orkney [Apr 14].

Dr Michael Foxley, a longstanding marine safety campaigner, said: "Do we have to wait for a catastrophe? The emergency towing vessel needs to be restored to the Minches to safeguard the marine environment and the fishing, aquaculture and tourism jobs dependent upon it. This coalition government has failed to protect the area. The funding and responsibilities need to be transferred to the Scottish Government and a Scottish Coastguard Agency established."

Environment secretary, Richard Lochhead, said: "Our seas are vast, we have six times more water than land in Scotland and unfortunately incidents do happen. It is unacceptable that we have only one emergency towing vessel to cover the whole of the country. The UK government cannot be allowed to gamble on Scotland's marine environment. I will write to seek early discussions on the immediate review and call of the UK government to extend funding for Emergency Towing Vessels beyond March 2016."

### MPAS

The *BBC News* website reported that Highland Council, in its response to the Scottish Government's consultation on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), said that the plans were 'unambitious' [Jan 14].

The council said that the proposals did not go far enough, and that proposals on how to manage fishing activity in the protected areas had been 'watered down' by ministers. The council said that it was disappointed that 'protected ecosystems seem to have been limited to small isolated outposts, rather than a continuous network as originally proposed.' There should be tougher restrictions on the most environmentally damaging types of fishing activity, such as scallop dredging.

The council said that it would like to see more areas completely closed to commercial fishing, and urged the government to consider the economic benefits that would come from increased recreational tourism based on the attraction of fully diverse and functioning ecosystems.



## POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

### LAND REFORM

The public consultation on land reform has now completed [Jan 15]. Rural Affairs secretary, Richard Lochhead, said: "Landowners should not view any of the measures being proposed as a threat – unless they deem themselves bad landowners."

The Scottish Conservatives have denounced the proposed land reform measures as 'simply unacceptable.'

*The Herald* reported that the Law Society of Scotland, in its consultation response, addressed the difficulty often experienced in tracing the owners of Scottish land, who may end up being a company registered in a foreign tax haven. It is proposed that, in future, land should only be owned by individuals or by a legal entity formed in accordance with the law of a member state of the EU. The Law Society said that proposals for land reform need to be coherent, clear and workable.

Paul Connolly, convener of the Law Society's property and land law committee, said: "We are concerned about this proposal. Restrictions such as these could be easily by-passed by non-EU companies setting up shell companies in the EU, for example a non-EU company could set up a UK registered company. This would not necessarily fulfil the Scottish Government's policy objectives of achieving greater transparency regarding the real land owner. It could also affect not only commercial land, but residential and agricultural land as well, thus having a potentially serious impact on business, and reducing investment."

Ministers also want to address the 'considerable amounts' of land owned by trusts enjoying charitable status, but which can comprise members of the family who have been the historical landowners. The Scottish Government is proposing that a trustee of a charity should be required to engage with the local community before taking a decision on the management, use or transfer of land under the charity's control.

Stephen Phillips, convener of the Law Society's charity law committee, said: "There are already a number of regulatory obligations that are imposed on charities, and we see no reason why further obligations should be imposed on them ... This just seems wholly unnecessary and cumbersome in practice, and potentially expensive for charities without proportionate benefit to local communities."

The society said that the proposed Scottish Land Reform Commission seemed an appropriate way forward but it would have to 'ensure that it remains independent from executive influence and represents the interest of all stakeholders, such as agricultural tenants, crofters and charities.'

Community Land Scotland (CLS) strongly backs the land reform proposals to give ministers, or a new public body, 'to direct private landowners to take action' if they are preventing local sustainable development – if necessary by forcing them to lease or sell their land. CLS said that whether a monopoly of ownership is detrimental to a particular local area, ought to be capable of examination. It said that if there are

no relevant powers in Scotland, ministers should be able to refer large estates to the Competition & Markets Authority, if their property effectively constitutes a local monopoly.

CLS argues that it is not generally possible to formally ask, within the terms of the law, whether the ownership of land by particular individuals or some body serves the public interest. It said: "The proposal, for the first time in Scotland, would allow this question to be asked within the context of what best serves sustainable development of land and the public interest. It can only be right that ministers, accountable to parliament, are given powers of intervention to be able to ask what serves the public interest in ownership of specific land, and to be able to take actions to require change in that owner's actions or in that ownership itself ... Powers to examine detrimental effects from monopoly land ownership ought to exist within the arrangements surrounding the proposed Land Reform Commission and powers to Scottish Ministers."

Professor Alan Miller, chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission, said: "Human rights have sometimes been painted as something of a 'red card' to stop discussion of land reform in its tracks. But human rights are neither a veto for landowners to stop land reform, nor a trump card for land reformers to buy land. Rather than polarising the debate, human rights should be seen as an impetus for, rather than an inhibition to, constructive dialogue. Viewed through this broader international human rights lens, land is seen as an asset that can contribute to environmental objectives, meet the needs of people in existing and future communities, and build a strong and sustainable economy to provide prosperity for all."

Professor Miller said that land reform could play an important role in realising the right to an adequate standard of living contained in the International Covenant on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights.

Ramblers Scotland (RS), in its response to the consultation, said that the Scottish access legislation has been working well overall over the past ten years, but that there are still a few problems relating to implementation on the ground which need to be improved. RS identified problems in getting obstructions removed, since local authorities have to prove that the obstruction is there for the 'main purpose' of preventing or deterring access. It also focussed attention on issues relating to private level crossings where Network Rail continues to insist that any walker crossing the line is committing an act of criminal trespass [see RECREATION below]. RS called for a right of access to be established across the line at these points. See: [bit.ly/1LumPAR](http://bit.ly/1LumPAR)

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Scotland said: "Land reform should not be focussed purely on who owns the land but how it is effectively managed and used for the benefit of communities, the environment, and public and private interests."

• *The Express* reported that Richard Scott, Duke of Buccleuch, is planning to sell much of his 240,000 acre Queensberry estate in Dumfries & Galloway within the next five to ten years because of the proposed 'misconceived' land reform legislation. The duke, the largest private landowner in the United Kingdom, said that the political situation was his main motive for 'slimming down' but he also had concerns about the ability to fund development of all the land properly.

He said: "I and the management team are determined to carry on rethinking the use of the land, of farms and forestry, to ensure it delivers

the best for the local community. I can understand people who have a deep-down visceral dislike of others who own large amounts of land. All I can do is try to make a case for our stewardship of it as being good and responsive to the best interests of the community."

### NATIONAL PARKS PETITION

An online petition has been lodged at the Scottish Parliament by the Scottish Campaign for National Parks and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS) on a National Parks Strategy for Scotland. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to prepare and implement a strategy to designate more National Parks in Scotland, including at least one Coastal and Marine National Park [Dec 14].

John Mayhew, of APRS, said: "Scotland's landscapes rank amongst the best in the world, but we only have two National Parks, the highest national accolade which can be given to any place. Scotland's first two National Parks have achieved a great deal in their first decade, and they inspire pride and passion amongst local people and visitors. There are other outstanding landscapes in Scotland worthy of National Park designation, and local and national public support for this.

"More National Parks would generate many environmental, social and economic benefits. They would bring additional resources, strengthen Scotland's international standing for environmental protection and support our crucial tourism industry. It is now time for the Scottish Government to prepare a strategy to designate more of Scotland's land, coast and sea as National Parks."

*The Herald* reported that a Scottish Government spokeswoman said that ministers were aware of the petition and had met the two charities. She said: "However, the Scottish Government is yet to be convinced that there is a compelling case for the designation of new National Parks at this time."

She said that the government fully recognised the importance of the two existing National Parks and the significant contribution they make to conservation, tourism and the wider Scottish economy.

The closing date for the petition, *PE01556: A National Parks Strategy for Scotland*, is 13 March 2015.

See: [www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/nationalparks](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/nationalparks)

### BARVAS BUYOUT

80% of people living on the 44,000 acre Barvas Estate, on the west side of the Isle of Lewis, voted in favour of a community buyout. The landowners, the Duckworth family, have indicated their willingness to negotiate a deal. There are 300 crofts on the estate with an adult population of about 1,000 in Barvas and Shawbost. It also includes the uninhabited islands of North Rona and Sula Sgeir.

The Barvas Estate Trust plans to build 40 affordable homes in the area, a five turbine community windfarm and an environmental interpretation centre. The fishing rights will be excluded from the sale, but a salmon hatchery is included.

70% of the Western Isles is under community control.

### GREAT BERNERA BUYOUT

Public meetings have been held on Great Bernera to discuss plans for a community buyout of the island. The family of the late Count Robin Mirrlees, who owned the island until his death in June last year, has given crofters first refusal on buying it.



## GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

### WILDLIFE CRIME REPORT

A report, *Natural Injustice: A review of the enforcement of wildlife protection legislation in Scotland*, has been published by Scottish Environment LINK. It examines the experiences of LINK member organisations who have been involved in reporting wildlife crimes and tracks the progress of 148 confirmed crimes that were reported to the Police over a six-year period (2008-2013).

The report claims that the number of incidents identified by police investigations and prosecutions is just the 'tip of the iceberg' and that many more go unreported. LINK warns of a waning of political will in Scotland to tackle wildlife crime and say that the partnership approach adopted by the Scottish Government has failed. LINK demands better policing is to break down the 'wall of silence' surrounding wildlife crime and that courts use the full panoply of sentences available to them to crack down on culprits.

The report states: "If the partnership approach is to continue, the Scottish Government should commission research to assess the true extent of the different types of wildlife crime in Scotland and remove any group tainted significantly by association with any area of wildlife crime from PAWS ... The Scottish Government should also consider how wildlife crime connected to a specific piece of land might lead to the withdrawal of subsidies associated with land ownership."

The report concludes that four areas of wildlife crime (persecution of badgers, raptors, bats and freshwater pearl mussels – four of the stated national wildlife crime priorities) are under-recorded and the standard of information that is recorded is generally inconsistently collected which limits its usefulness. This is highlighted by the significant discrepancies between the annual crime figures produced by the wildlife NGOs and those produced by the Scottish Government.

There is an urgent need to re-examine the recording systems in use, not only to increase public confidence in the Scottish Government's figures but also to provide a more accurate evaluation of the extent of wildlife crime. Of the 148 confirmed wildlife crimes reported to the police during 2008-2013, 98 (66.2%) are known to have resulted in a follow-up investigation. At least 27 wildlife crimes (18.2%) did not result in a follow-up investigation and were effectively ignored. It is feasible that as many as one third of reported incidents were un-investigated. The failure to conduct a follow-up investigation was not limited to one particular region but occurred in five of eight regions. Of the follow-up investigations that did occur, LINK respondents considered just over one third (35.1%) to have been conducted satisfactorily.

Criticisms included delayed police response times (sometimes as long as several months from the initial incident report) leading to the disappearance of evidence; delays exacerbated by un-trained police wildlife crime officers and a lack of seriousness with which senior police officers treat wildlife crime; failure to apply for search warrants, failure to conduct covert searches, poorly-targeted and/or restricted search efforts; the premature disposal of evidence prior to toxicology examination and a chronic failure to communicate with partner agencies either as a result of police under-resourcing and/or politically-motivated deliberate exclusion policies.

Of the 148 confirmed wildlife crimes, only 20 (13.5%) resulted in a prosecution. A minimum

of at least 111 crimes (75%) failed to result in a prosecution. The failure rate was consistent across all regions.

In some instances the failure to prosecute was recognised as a result of the innate problems associated with investigating crime in remote areas, but in many cases the cause of failure was inextricably linked to a poor follow-up investigation. 20 of the confirmed wildlife crimes (13.5%) are known to have reached the prosecution stage and of those, 15 are known to have resulted in a conviction. This figure should be viewed as a minimum as several cases are currently on-going and thus the number of known convictions may increase. Many of the sentences were at the lower end of the scale and penalties issued for similar crimes appear to have been applied inconsistently. Overall, but with a few noticeable exceptions, there is, amongst LINK members, an overwhelming lack of confidence in the ability of the statutory agencies to adequately investigate wildlife crime and in the willingness of the judiciary to impose meaningful deterrent sentences.

The report includes three case studies, and appendices detailing the personal experiences of LINK members. The report's findings have been supported by 17 LINK environmental NGOs.

The *BBC News* website reported that Eddie Palmer, convener of LINK's Wildlife Crime Task Force, said: "Wildlife crime arises from modern versions of old and outdated practices. Practices that were once acceptable are now considered cruel and criminal. This is especially so where the practices are obviously linked with economic interests. Behaviour in certain minority groups has lagged well behind these changes in our attitudes. It is time to change that behaviour and stamp out these crimes."

A spokesman for the Crown Office said: "This report is ill-informed and based on flawed methodology. It is a matter of real concern that no discussion or contact in relation to these cases has been made with the Crown. The Crown rejects the finding of this report on the basis that many of the conclusions are inaccurate. There was no consultation with us prior to publication and therefore no context for the erroneous conclusions and recommendations which appear to be supported by examples which are outdated and anecdotal at best. The Crown will raise these concerns directly with Scottish Environment LINK."

Ian Thomson, of RSPB Scotland, said: "Together, these papers should be a wake-up call for those involved in tackling wildlife crime. A law is only as good as its enforcement and the comprehensive analysis contained in these papers shows that this is far from good enough here in Scotland."

Douglas McAdam, of Scottish Land & Estates, said: "The LINK report seems to dismiss the official statistics produced by the Scottish Government in recent years which show most types of wildlife crime in Scotland have reduced in recent years or are now stable at single figure or tens of incidents recorded by police each year. The government produces a rigorous annual report into wildlife crime, and part of the reason for introducing that is to get at the facts. In all there is a tough and effective regime to deal with wildlife crime and we believe that the partnership approach already in place is the most effective way forward. Far and away the most common form of wildlife crime is poaching and illegal hare coursing and we believe that is an area which needs to be prioritised."

A spokesman for the Scottish Gamekeepers Association said: "There are many partner

organisations involved in tackling wildlife crime in Scotland, ourselves included, and all groups are entitled to call for things in public. However, this appears more to be a thinly veiled public vote of no confidence in Police Scotland and a fight between who should have control over wildlife crime investigations and how they should operate. As a member representative organisation with no investigatory powers, we don't want, therefore, to be drawn into an operational power battle between charities with investigative roles and the police service."

LINK has also published a second report, outlining 20 recommendations for improvement for government, police and prosecutors, which include the possibility of setting up a national wildlife crime rapid response unit. Police Scotland should agree a wildlife crime strategy in consultation with environmental groups and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service should investigate why such a high percentage of cases fail to be prosecuted and pursue stiff sentences.

See: [bit.ly/1GCpLUA](http://bit.ly/1GCpLUA); [bit.ly/1N57JoT](http://bit.ly/1N57JoT)

### BANNED PESTICIDES

The Scottish Government has launched a pesticides disposal scheme. This is a free and confidential service, allowing those who are still in possession of banned substances an opportunity to dispose of them without fear of consequence.

Many of these poisons have been banned for years, and even being in possession of them has been an offence since 2005 (Possession of Pesticides (Scotland) Order 2005). Dr Aileen McLeod, the environment minister, said that the amnesty will be 'short-lived.'

### RAPTOR POISONING

Police Scotland has executed search warrants on a shooting estate in the Stirling area after a peregrine falcon was found to have been poisoned by the banned pesticide Carbofuran. A dead red kite was found on the same estate last year, also poisoned [Jul 14]. A police statement said: "It is evident that an ongoing and intentional effort to poison wildlife is occurring at this location and we will be working closely with the relevant partners and using all investigative techniques at our disposal to identify the offender(s) and bring them to justice."

### POACHING PROSECUTION

A deer poacher was fined £100 and ordered to pay compensation of £70 at Fort William Sheriff Court. He was prosecuted with the help of DNA evidence from the deer's blood, killed on the Glenfinnan Estate in Lochaber. The Crown Office said that this was first time that DNA profiling has been used to detect deer poaching. Sara Shaw, a procurator fiscal specialising in wildlife and environment, said that the investigation and prosecution had been a joint effort involving Science & Advice for Scottish Agriculture, police and specialist prosecutors from the Wildlife & Environmental Crime Unit.

### GOSHAWK PERSECUTION

The *BBC News* website reported that men wearing balaclavas, suspected of trying to kill protected goshawks in Aberdeenshire, are being sought. RSPB Scotland had deployed a video camera on Forestry Commission Scotland land to monitor a nest at Glenochty, Strathdon. Footage shows a group of men repeatedly visiting the area. Police said they seemed to be attempting to kill the birds and destroy the nest.

RSPB Scotland is offering a reward of £1,000 for any information that subsequently leads to a successful conviction in this case.

The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog said that the men made at least four visits to the nest tree in May 2014. The video has been released in an appeal for

information some nine months after the alleged crimes were committed.

**WILD LAND & WINDFARMS**

In an open letter to the press, written jointly by Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, the John Muir Trust, Mountaineering Council of Scotland, The Munro Society, the National Trust for Scotland, Ramblers Scotland, the Scottish Wild Land Group and Scotways, the alliance said: "... There is public disquiet about proliferation of energy developments in Scotland's wild land areas. It is vital that any decisions on the location of these developments rely on the fair and impartial assessment of all pertinent information and points of view. The people of Scotland depend on their government to ensure this happens. Unfortunately, we do not believe that the Scottish Government is doing this in a consistent manner with windfarm developments. In the face of evidence and objections from many different organisations, communities and individuals, the Scottish Government has approved proposals to site colossal windfarms inland, at Stronelairg in the Monadhliath Mountains, and offshore, straddling the Firths of the Forth and Tay.

"In both cases the Scottish Government chose to ignore the views of its own expert advisers from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). Their advice made it absolutely clear that the impact from these turbines will be very significant, and that the locations were problematic as a result. It seems iniquitous to us that, having put in place a planning system which invites the expert views of statutory consultees, the Scottish Government too frequently ignores them if they prove inconvenient. At the very least, evidence of this calibre from SNH should trigger public inquiries. We therefore call on the Scottish Government to commit to taking cognisance of its own advisors. Rather than force objectors to challenge these decisions in the courts at great expense, the Scottish Government should first ensure they have been exposed to the proper and democratic scrutiny that their scale and potential impact warrants."

*The Times* reported that Helen McDade, of the John Muir Trust, said that it was now essential that that 'independent experts' be appointed to a national energy commission. She said: "We need a national plan, or at least some advice from disinterested parties about what is actually necessary. We don't think the Scottish Government has the expertise to study some of the very significant natural heritage issues."

One unnamed campaigner, quoted in *The Times*, suggested that SNH had proved too ready to bend to the minister's wishes. The source said: "SNH has a fine line to tread. They can't protect all of the natural heritage, all the biodiversity, because they have to recognise the government's energy targets. People accept that, but we feel that SNH has sometimes become facilitators of the development, and not the protectors of the environment." The Scottish Government was accused of riding roughshod over SNH in pursuit of ambitious targets for renewable energy.

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) has published *Respecting Scotland's Mountains: MCofS Vision for the Future*. It points the way ahead to a sustainable future where appropriate development and conservation can go side by side. Two major areas of concern highlighted in the document are inappropriately-sited windfarms and the lack of effective control over damaging hill tracks.

Brian Linington, of MCofS, said: "We call on politicians to protect and promote our mountains as the incredible asset that they are, to open their eyes to the permanent damage being done

to this irreplaceable resource by ill-considered developments. With a General Election looming the moment has come for all the political parties to be absolutely clear that they are committed to the protection of our mountains and wild places. They can do this by joining us in working for a future which respects our natural heritage and makes the most of it for our country and its people."

See: [www.mcofs.org.uk/assets/media/Respecting\\_Scotlands\\_Mountains\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.mcofs.org.uk/assets/media/Respecting_Scotlands_Mountains_booklet.pdf)

The public is asked to show their support by signing a petition which calls for a ban on further industrial development such as large scale windfarms on the remaining wild land.

See: <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/p/wild-land>

**T IN THE PARK**

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) said that the T in the Park music festival's proposed new site on the Strathallan Castle estate, near Auchterarder, Perthshire could be vulnerable to sudden 'convective rainfall events' [Sep 14]. SEPA, in a response to the planning application, has advised DF Concerts to realign the planned campsite to higher ground: "It is particularly important due to the flashiness of the catchments as shown in previously recorded rainfall events."

An osprey nest is to be relocated within the 1,000 acre estate. DF Concerts has consulted with RSPB Scotland and SNH over how to avoid affecting the nest. RSPB Scotland said that it would not object to the plans, but was disappointed at the 'minimalist' and last-minute measures to reduce the impact on birds and wildlife. The organisers have been advised to move the osprey nest to another location within the estate in the next couple of months. The young would be likely to have either fledged or be about to fledge by the time the event takes place in July.

**SCOTTISH WATER PROSECUTIONS**

*The Sunday Herald* reported that Scottish Water has been fined more than £240,000 for 47 spills, leaks and discharges between 2005 and 2014. It has been formally admonished by courts for four further incidents. The figures were supplied in answer to a parliamentary question by Mary Fee MSP. The average fine paid by Scottish Water over the ten years was £4,700, with fines for 28 of the pollution breaches below that. The relatively low level of the fines has prompted concerns that they are failing to deter Scottish Water from making mistakes that affect wildlife.

Andrew Graham-Stewart, of the Salmon & Trout Association (Scotland), said: "The organisation's record over the last ten years amounts to a depressing catalogue of failures to curtail breaches. For a public utility, fines are of little, if any, consequence. We fear that an improvement is unlikely unless the regulatory regime is altered so that Scottish Water's senior managers and directors are held personally responsible and liable."

Scottish Water said that it had reduced the number of 'non-compliant' sewage works by 90% over the last ten years, and had seen a 23% decrease in pollution incidents in the last year. It had invested more than £1 billion since 2002 to deliver 'substantial improvements' to Scotland's environment. Scottish Water has more than 2,000 treatment works and over 60,000 miles of water pipes and sewers.

- Scottish Water was fined £8,000 at Perth Sheriff Court after it accidentally polluted several kilometres of the River Farg with aluminium sulphate, killing virtually all the trout and salmon in the vicinity. Approximately 4,900 trout, salmon, lamprey, eels and stickleback were killed.

**M74 CONTAMINATION**

Esso Petroleum is suing the Scottish Government over claims that its West Street site is being contaminated by chemicals from land used for the M74 extension. Esso wants ministers to take action to prevent further escapes and is seeking damages for the cost of monitoring its land and loss of value. Ministers sought to have the action dismissed but a judge at the Court of Session said it could proceed.

Esso claims that, as a result of the M74 construction, trichloroethene present on the M74 land were released into the groundwater system and contamination of its site occurred.

**DERELICT & VACANT LAND**

Scotland's chief statistician has released the latest annual statistics on the extent of vacant and derelict land in Scotland. Of 10,874 hectares recorded in the 2014 survey, 2,366 hectares (22%) were classified as urban vacant and 8,509 hectares (78%) were classified as derelict. The total amount of derelict and urban vacant land in Scotland decreased by 129 hectares (1.2%) from the previous year to 10,874 hectares in 2014.

Highland Council had 1,373 hectares (13% of the Scotland total). North Ayrshire 1,341 hectares (12%), North Lanarkshire with 1,297 hectares (12%) and Glasgow City with 1,171 hectares (11%).

For those sites where the previous use is known, 24% of derelict land recorded in 2014 had been previously used for defence (1,964 hectares), 23% for mineral activity (1,851 hectares), and a further 21% for manufacturing (1,747 hectares). The most common previous use for urban vacant land, where previous use is known, was agriculture (403 hectares, 20%) and the second most common previous use was residential development (384 hectares, 19%).

3,355 hectares (35%) of derelict and urban vacant land in 2014 is reported to be developable in the short term, with an expectation of development within five years. A total of 900 hectares (9%) of land is seen by local authorities as being uneconomic to develop or is viewed as suitable to reclaim for a 'soft' end use (i.e. non-built use).

The most common new use for derelict land was residential, with 30% (60 hectares) of the derelict land that was brought back into use since the previous survey reclaimed for this purpose. The second most common new use was for agriculture, accounting for 19% (38 hectares). For urban vacant land the most common new use was residential, with 54% (63 hectares) of the land reclaimed for this purpose. See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Planning/Publications](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Planning/Publications)

**RIVER DEE LANDSCAPE**

Dumfries & Galloway Council is preparing a Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Scheme bid for the River Dee catchment. If successful, the project would last five years, starting in 2017 with funding of £4m.

**SEPA RIVER WORK**

SEPA is restoring flows in the River Cour (a tributary of the River Spean) which has been impacted by the operation of the Lochaber hydro power scheme operated by Rio Tinto Alcan. This will enhance the natural biodiversity of the catchment, and provide improved conditions for migratory fish such as salmon to re-colonise. The hydropower scheme was constructed in the 1920s.

- Studies are being carried out by SEPA along the River Leven in Fife, and a number of its tributaries, as part of a project which aims to demonstrate the potential for combining improvements to river habitats with reducing flood risk.

The River Leven is one of five pilot catchments in Scotland where SEPA is assessing the physical condition of rivers and identifying where there may

be scope for improvements. The improvements are required to help Scotland comply with European legislation on the water environment, known as the Water Framework Directive.

## CAIRNGORM HOUSING

The *Strathspey and Badenoch Herald* reported that the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) has declined planning permission for up to 93 houses on two sites in woodland at Dalfaber near Aviemore. Reidhaven Estate said that the refusal was not based on merit, but on a technicality. The three year period for 'changes to matters specified in conditions' had long expired.

- The Scottish Government has told the CNPA that it must reinstate the size of a proposed housing development in Carrbridge woodlands in the Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan. A public local inquiry, backed by the CNPA, had recommended that Tulloch Homes' 72 house development be confined to the Boys Brigade field only and not the woodlands [Dec 14].

## ACCESS TRACK

The CNPA has granted permission to Drumochter Estate, on 'A9 road safety grounds', to retain a 4.7 km access track and two bridges constructed for the Beaully/Denny transmission line upgrade within a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Under the terms of the planning permission for the power line, all temporary tracks were due to be reinstated at the end of construction; the estate had previously been refused permission [Feb 14].



## ENERGY

### WINDFARM CONTRACTS

11 Scottish projects, with planning permission, were successful in a bid for UK Department of Energy & Climate Change Contracts for Difference. The contracts provide long-term certainty for investors in renewable energy schemes; successful projects receive 15 year contracts to supply electricity to the National Grid.

The successful windfarms are: Neart na Gaoithe offshore windfarm in the Firth of Forth (448 MW); Dorenell near Dufftown, Moray (177 MW); Kype Muir near Strathaven, South Lanarkshire (104 MW); Middle Muir MW; Tom nan Clach, Cawdor Estate, Inverness-shire (39.1 MW); Solwaybank near Langholm, Dumfries & Galloway (37.5 MW); Sneddon Law community windfarm near Moscow, East Ayrshire (37.5 MW); Coire na Cloiche near AIness, Easter Ross (30 MW); Bad a Cheo near Spittal, Caithness (29.9 MW); Tralorg, Girvan, Ayrshire (20 MW) and Achlachan, Watten, Caithness (10 MW).

### WINDFARM UPDATES

**Angus:** Eneco Wind UK Ltd has applied for permission to build 18 turbines in two distinct groups at Macritch Hill, near Backwater Reservoir, Kirriemuir. The land owned by Scottish Water. The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) says that the northern group of seven turbines will cause unacceptable harm to the landscape of nearby Munros.

**Dumfries & Galloway:** Burcote Wind's 30 turbine Sandy Knowe windfarm near Kirkconnel in Upper Nithsdale has been refused by the Scottish Government. Fergus Ewing, the energy minister, said that the landscape could be damaged by a 'coalescence between potential clusters' of wind turbines. He was concerned that the cumulative visual impact of multiple developments could turn the area into a 'windfarm landscape.' Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) had raised serious concerns over cumulative impact and adverse landscape and visual affect the windfarm would

have, but did not object. The local authority had approved the scheme. Buccleuch Estates is applying for eight wind turbines at nearby Glenmuckloch, an old open-cast coal mine [Jul 13].

- Ecotricity has submitted a planning application for the seven turbine California windfarm near Wigtown Bay [Jan 15]. The Scottish Government is still considering its appeal against a ban on building a meteorological mast on the site [Oct 14]. The council had ruled against the mast on the grounds that it would 'result in a loss of amenity and have a detrimental visual impact on the landscape character of the Galloway Hills Regional Scenic Area.'

**Easter Ross:** Black Isle Community Energy is intending to erect a £9.7m, three turbine community windfarm in Millbuie Forest, on Forestry Commission Scotland land. The campaign group, No Black Isle Wind Farm, said: "[This is] a completely inappropriate place for anyone to want to build an industrial-scale windfarm – it's in the wrong place, it will damage the environment for good, and it won't be effective." The development would be sited on the highest ridge on the Black Isle.

**Inverness-shire:** The John Muir Trust (JMT) has asked a Court of Session judge to rule that the Scottish Government's decision to approve the 67 turbine Stronelairg windfarm near Fort Augustus was illegal. The JMT's legal team told the court that the planning decision contravenes planning laws and that wild land would be destroyed [Jun 14]. SNH opposed the proposal, and the scheme was approved without a public local inquiry taking place.

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that, should the project go ahead, Danny Alexander MP has called for the power line from the windfarm to the planned Garva Bridge substation to be buried [Nov 14]. SSE is investigating a viable route for the connection.

- WPD Group's plans to build six turbines at Beinn Mhor, near Tomich, on the edge of Glen Affric will now be examined by Scottish ministers. Highland Council was not able to determine the application, submitted in May 2014, by the date agreed with the developers; bad weather had prevented two planned site visits. The application had attracted more than 1,200 objections from the public, two community councils and the MCofS; planning officials had recommended approval of the proposals. WPD said that it wanted to secure planning permission in time to allow a connection date before April 2017 to take advantage of enhanced subsidy under the Renewables Obligation Scheme. Windfarms are also proposed for nearby Bhlaraidh and Corrimony.

- Badenoch residents in the vicinity of the Allt Duine windfarm were balloted by Kincaird & Vicinity Community Council as to whether they support the application [Oct 14]. 73% were against the development. A decision from the Scottish Government on the public enquiry in 2012 is still awaited. In that time, the government has amended its Scottish Planning Policy, and SNH has expanded its Wild Land map to include the entire site of Npower Renewables' proposed windfarm.

- Vattenfall is proposing the Ourack windfarm on Dava Moor outside Grantown, in partnership with the Reidhaven Estate.

**Scottish Borders:** The local authority has refused West Coast Energy's plans for an eight turbine windfarm near Romano Bridge in Peebleshire. Councillors raised concerns about the windfarm's visual impact on the landscape and neighbouring communities.

**Shetland:** The UK Supreme Court has dismissed Sustainable Shetland's latest appeal against plans to build the 103 turbine 370 MW Viking windfarm after a three-year legal battle [Jul 14]. It ruled that Scottish ministers did have due regard to improving the conservation status of the whimbrel and the limited impact of the development. The court also refused leave to Sustainable Shetland to appeal to the European Court of Justice. Sustainable Shetland said that the ruling was 'distressing' and said: "Our opposition to the windfarm – and its dire implications for the Shetland community and environment – remains undiminished."

Viking Energy hopes to feed electricity into the national grid by 2020, but needs a new, 200 mile, interconnector to export the power to mainland Scotland. The development has always been predicated on there being a subsea interconnector to take all the new green energy from Shetland, wave and tidal as well as wind, to the national grid on the mainland. The interconnector would cost around £300m.

Michael Rieley, of Scottish Renewables, said that while the islands hold some of the UK's most powerful renewable energy resource: "What we lack is the ability to bring that power from Shetland, Orkney or the Western Isles to population centres on the mainland where it could be used. We urgently need to see a commitment to connect all our islands to the GB electricity grid, which would allow them to contribute to the cleaning-up of our energy sector, while benefiting from the jobs and investment that would follow."

He said that UK and Scottish governments had already said they were working towards this, but that Ofgem and Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission Ltd had to commit as well. Meanwhile developers would also have to proceed with projects to produce the electricity which would be transmitted making the interconnector viable. Every step depended on the previous one being in place. The Viking project would produce more than 16 times the amount of electricity needed within Shetland.

Energy minister, Fergus Ewing, said that the court's decision now established the case for connecting Shetland for the first time to the mainland national grid. He said: "It paves the way for more exports and further renewable energy opportunities for the islands, including community projects and marine energy developments."

The Scottish Wild Land Group said that Shetland came third equal in a National Geographic Traveller magazine rating of islands to visit worldwide. A spokesman said that Shetlanders' have 'extremely high integrity in all aspects of heritage and ecology.' He said: "In spite of the widespread opposition among Shetlanders and on the part of the Council's own planning officers, that reputation has surely now gone. There is a real danger that no longer will visitors be attracted by the natural unspoilt beauty of Shetland."

Helen Todd, of Ramblers Scotland, said: "The proposed Viking windfarm is such a huge development that it will have major impacts on the Shetland landscape and its wildlife, not to mention the damage it will cause to its peatland habitats."

**South Lanarkshire:** Hargreaves Resources has secured planning permission for two windfarms on recently reinstated coalfields. The 15 turbine Dalquhandy and three-turbine Poniell projects total 50 MW. Hargreaves is developing the windfarms alongside the Scottish Mines Restoration Trust.

**Sutherland:** A demonstration was held to show support for the 47 turbine Strathy South windfarm application. A public local inquiry is to be held. SNH and RSPB Scotland warned that the farm could impact on birds such as the hen harrier [Jun 14].

• MCoFS claims that the tourism potential of the north west would be damaged by a proposed 20 turbine windfarm at Caplich. David Gibson, of MCoFS, said: "Time after time we see developers simply cut and paste the same out of date information and erroneous conclusions concerning tourism impacts from one proposal to the next. There is a complete lack of up to date and impartial research. Mountaineering alone is worth at least £600m a year to the Highland economy, and our research indicates that 40% of respondents would avoid areas with windfarms. The area available to people who wish to avoid vistas of windfarms is shrinking rapidly; this development would reduce that further, discouraging more visits by those seeking to experience wild, open mountain landscapes."

Peter Marshall of Muirhall Energy said: "Caplich windfarm is not within the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area (NSA). Those parts of the NSA which will have visibility of the windfarm include the summits of Ben More Assynt, Canisp, Cul Mor and Suilven. All of these summits are more than 10 km distant from the nearest turbine. The windfarm site is immediately between two very large forestry plantations, both more than 3,000 acres and characterised by straight boundaries and a uniform population of Sitka spruce. In addition to this, the presence of other man made features including cultivated grazing land, tracks, roads and electricity lines mean that the windfarm will be seen within a working landscape."

**OFFSHORE WIND**

Beatrice Offshore Windfarm Limited plans to install a further 110 turbines in the Outer Moray Firth [Apr 14]. However, Moray Offshore Renewables Limited did not receive a contract for its offshore windfarm which would have guaranteed the price at which it sold electricity for a 15 year period [see above].

**HYDRO SCHEME UPDATES**

**Harris:** The *West Highland Free Press* reported that the North Harris Trust is planning a new hydro power scheme on the Maraig river now that Scottish Water has withdrawn plans for a water treatment plant on the river which would have been in conflict with the hydro scheme. The size of the scheme is being curtailed to a maximum of 50 kW due to constraints in the local electricity grid; many developments are currently on hold awaiting the outcome of lengthy and complex discussions surrounding a new sub-sea cable across the Minch.

**Crianlarich:** A £8.5m, 2 MW, run-of-river hydro electric scheme is to be built on the River Allt Coire Chaorach, near Crianlarich. It is the first to benefit from £60m of funding for community-scale green initiatives led by the UK Green Investment Bank.

The bank estimates there is capacity for an additional 800 MW of new hydro-power projects across the UK; about 80% of this is in Scotland.

**Morvern:** A 465 kW small-scale hydro scheme on the Morvern Peninsula in the Highlands has been completed [Feb 14]. Morvern Community Development Company and Morvern Community Trust invested a total of £30,000 in Green Highland Renewables' run-of-the river project on the Abhainn Shalachain, on land owned by Forestry Commission Scotland.

**Wester Ross:** An application has been made to Highland Council for the construction of a 2 MW run-of-the-river scheme on the Ardesie Burn on the boundary of the Dundonnell Estate in the Wester Ross National Scenic Area, within the An Teallach Site of Special Scientific Interest.

**SHETLAND WAVE POWER**

The *BBC News* website reported that Aegir Wave Power's plans to install a small wave farm around the southern tip of Shetland have been abandoned. Ten generators were proposed. Vattenfall, one of the main shareholders in the development, said the timescale for securing commercial wave power was uncertain and has decided to focus its investment in wind energy.

**OPEN CAST COAL**

The *BBC News* website reported that Hargreaves Services, the company that runs most of Scotland's remaining opencast coal mines, is to half its output next year. Hargreaves said that it was losing money on some Scottish operations due to falling coal prices and 'exceptionally challenging' market conditions.

The price of coal, £39 per tonne, is £16 lower than the price when the company acquired its Scottish surface mines in spring of 2013 and is at a nine year low. With gas prices down, it said there was 'a significant and unexpected reduction in coal burn by UK power stations.' Hargreaves expects demand from the power sector to fall and said it was possible that some power stations would buy no more coal this calendar year while they were burning through existing stocks.

The planned 2 million tonne production target for 2015 will be reduced to 1 million tonnes to mitigate losses, focussing on the contribution from higher-priced speciality coals.

**FRACKING**

The UK government has 'agreed in principle' not to award any more fracking licences in Scotland as part of the 14th licensing round [POLITICS Jan 15]. UK ministers will, however, consult with companies which have already applied for licences before any final decision is made.

The *BBC News* website reported that anti-fracking groups have called on the Scottish Government to extend its moratorium on the development of unconventional gas to include underground coal gasification (UCG) [Jan 15]. Campaigners claim that UCG raises similar environmental and public health concerns to shale gas and coalbed methane techniques. There are already plans to exploit remaining coal reserves deep beneath the Firth of Forth and the Solway; Cluff Natural Resources has estimated there are up to 335 million tonnes of coal under the seabed of the Forth alone. Cluff wants to build the UK's first deep offshore UCG plant to exploit the coal seams.

The groups, including Friends of the Earth, the Unison union and the Women's Environmental Network, have written to energy minister, Fergus Ewing. The letter expressed their grave concern that UCG is not currently covered by the scope of the Scottish Government's moratorium. The letter said: "While we are disappointed that Coal Authority licensing is not proposed to be devolved to Holyrood under the Smith Commission, we note that the means of imposing a moratorium on unconventional oil and gas developments – ensuring that no planning permissions or environmental permits are granted for these developments – could equally be applied to underground coal gasification."

A government spokesman said: "The moratorium is specifically about onshore unconventional oil and gas developments, including fracking – further to confirmation by the UK government that it would devolve onshore licensing powers for these types of development. Many of the relevant powers relating to underground coal gasification remain with Westminster and the licensing regime is not being devolved, though we will work with SEPA and all relevant regulators to ensure we

have the appropriate controls and regulations to protect the environment. The Scottish Government will continue to take an evidence-based approach to the development of new energy technologies, which should give security and confidence to the people of Scotland that such resources would be developed in an environmentally safe and satisfactory way."

**CHAPELCROSS**

The *BBC News* website reported that the Chapelcross Site Stakeholders Group, an independent liaison group, is opposed to plans to use the former nuclear plant at Chapelcross in Dumfriesshire to store radioactive material from decommissioned Navy submarines.

Chapelcross is one of five locations in the UK being considered by the Ministry of Defence. In its official response to the MoD consultation, the group said that it believed that the plans had 'virtually no socio-economic benefits to the local area.'

**GALASHIELS WASTE ENERGY**

Scottish Borders Council has cancelled its £4.2m plans for an integrated waste management facility at Easter Langlee near Galashiels. The council said that it had made the decision after significant changes to Scottish waste policy and regulation, and had also run into technological and funding problems.



**RECREATION & TOURISM**

**LEVEL CROSSINGS**

Ramblers Scotland has called on Holyrood to resolve confusion over the public's right to use railway level crossings [see POLITICS above]. Convener David Thomson said that the right to roam laws are working well but there is a lack of clarity over so-called 'private' level crossings. Thousands of walkers, cyclists and horseriders are reliant upon level crossings as important routes in some locations.

He said: "Until 2004, access by non-motorised users over these crossings was tolerated by Railtrack and its predecessors. Since then, despite no legislative change having taken place, Network Rail has insisted that anyone who is not the specified authorised user would be committing criminal trespass by using any such level crossing. In rural areas the nearest point people can cross could be many miles away and therefore these private crossings have immense importance both to local communities and also to those enjoying outdoor recreation. We believe the position taken by Network Rail is based on a misunderstanding of the basis on which access is taken in Scotland, and instead is based on their perception of the England and Wales rights of way legislation.

"The current Scottish Government consultation on land reform is an opportunity for the Scottish Parliament to resolve this situation by amending the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 to specify that statutory rights of public access apply across all private level crossings where there is a right of access to land on either side of the railway."



**NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS**

**RAMBLERS SCOTLAND**

Jess Dolan has been appointed as Director Scotland of the Ramblers.



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