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## CONSERVATION

### REWILDING

The John Muir Trust (JMT) has launched a policy statement declaring its support for the principle of rewilding, which could help repair damaged ecosystems and restore natural processes. Stuart Brooks, of JMT, said: "The Trust has taken a rewilding approach to the management of its properties for 30 years, long before the term was coined. Rewilding is about intervening to repair damage and restart natural processes – for example, by managing deer to allow native woodlands to regenerate; or by re-introducing missing species, such as beavers, that perform key functions in our ecosystems. That in turn will ultimately allow nature to take its own course and be more resilient in the face of climate change. It is not about excluding people, imposing unwanted policies on rural communities or damaging peoples' livelihoods. We recognise that rewilding is not suitable everywhere, for example, in areas of high agricultural value. But for other areas it can provide the step-change we need to bring back the full diversity of our natural heritage. Much of our land is impoverished – for humans and wildlife – and we believe that returning nature in these areas to its former glory would benefit everyone.

"Our hills, rivers and seas should be teeming with wildlife that people will want to see and experience. By bringing visitors from all over the world, some of our most fragile communities in our most remote areas could start to thrive once again, as is happening in other parts of Europe where nature has been encouraged to flourish."

The JMT stressed that any moves to bring back lost species would have to be carefully thought out and involve public consultation and support, and that these proposals could include future plans to reintroduce carnivores.

On species reintroduction, the JMT believes that the successful Scottish Beaver trial should be followed up with further licensed introductions of the animals across Scotland and other parts of the UK. In time, and with public consultation and support, the trust hopes to see credible proposals brought forward in the future for trial reintroductions of carnivores, starting with lynx.

### TAYSIDE BEAVERS

The *BBC News* website reported that the Tayside Beaver Study Group has published its final report, which shows that more than 150 beavers living in Tayside waterways had settled in well to the local environment, despite some land management issues [Dec 12]. The beavers have been in the Tay catchment since, at least, 2006, and originated from escapes or illegal releases.

The Eurasian species have been found in rivers and lochs stretching from Kinloch Rannoch, Kenmore and Crieff in the west to Forfar, Perth and Bridge of Earn in the east. They are successfully producing young and still spreading through the Tayside area, and are free from diseases of concern to humans, domestic animals and other wildlife.

A number of methods of protecting trees from being gnawed and felled have proved successful, preventing flooding, but the impact the animals have had by burrowing into flood banks and damming drainage ditches has proved more difficult to manage. The study group said this would need to be addressed if the beavers are to be

left in place, as 70% of reported negative impacts due to beaver activity had a financial cost. David Bale, of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and chairman of the study group, said: "If they were to be permanently reintroduced, efficient, effective and affordable ways of managing and reducing potentially significant impacts on intensively farmed land and other interests would have to be found."

A spokesman for Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) said: "We have been an active member of the Tayside Beaver Study Group and are keen that as much information as possible is available to the minister ahead of the decision on the future of the beaver in Scotland. We are not opposed to beaver ever being reintroduced to Scotland; we simply want to ensure that any reintroduction, whatever the species, is only progressed after a robust assessment and justification process which ensures a competent decision in which impacts on land management have been fully acknowledged and accommodated." See: [bit.ly/1P9eK6w](http://bit.ly/1P9eK6w)

- *The Herald* reported that the environment minister, Dr Aileen McLeod, met Tayside farmers concerned about the impact of the area's escaped beaver population.

The minister was joined by members of the Tayside Beaver Study Group, including SLE, NFU Scotland, the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, the Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board, ConFor and SNH.

Local farmer Adrian Ivory said: "There may be parts of Scotland where beaver can exist without too many problems, but that is not the case on low lying agricultural ground where the increasing water levels they create is a concern. Experience from other parts of Europe tells us that beaver come into conflict with human activity in a number of different ways and they have to be robustly managed to avoid this getting out of hand."

### LYNX

A public survey was undertaken by the Lynx UK Trust, with support from the University of Cumbria [Mar 15]. Over 9,000 people took part in the survey, which returned 91% in favour of a trial reintroduction of lynx to the UK, with 84% believing it should begin within the next 12 months. One of the three proposed trial sites is Grumack Forest, Succoth near Huntly in Aberdeenshire. Up to six lynx would be released at each site and closely monitored via satellite collars over a trial period likely to last for three to five years.

Dr Paul O'Donoghue, chief scientific advisor to the project, said: "This is by far the biggest survey of its kind ever carried out in the UK, with almost five times the feedback of the original beaver reintroduction survey in Scotland which recorded an 86% approval rating. That led to government approval for the trial reintroduction, so we're expecting to see a consistent response from SNH and hope for similar in England and Wales. The UK public have spoken; people overwhelmingly want these animals to be given the chance to come back and we've got an extremely capable team to deliver it. Lynx have proven themselves across Europe to be absolutely harmless to humans and of very little threat to livestock, whilst bringing huge benefit to rural

economies and the natural ecology, including species like capercaillie which face some serious problems in the UK."

A further survey was commissioned following traditional opinion polling techniques canvassing just over 1,000 people which recorded support levels of up to 70% for lynx reintroduction. See: [www.lynxuk.org](http://www.lynxuk.org)

**INVASIVE SPECIES**

*The Sunday Herald* reported that Fred Pearce, writing in his new book, *The New Wild: Why Invader Species could be Nature's Salvation*, said: "Scottish conservationists would love to go back to mythical wilderness, but it's not going to happen. We have changed things too much, including the climate. Efforts at rewilding end up as glorified gardens, constantly tended to keep them 'natural.' What we need is a new idea of nature, in which alien species mingle with the natives, in which the old labels are abandoned. Alien species are nature's go-getters and colonists. In Scotland, as everywhere, we will need them to keep nature in rude health in the 21st century."

He pointed out that native red squirrels live best in non-native conifer plantations, and that native red deer have become 'the curse of the Highlands.'

Dr Paul Walton, of RSPB Scotland, said: "Successful non-native invasive species really are admirable in terms of their extraordinary tenacity and vigour, but this does not make their introduction a good thing for nature. RSPB Scotland never demonises non-native species. But we do recognise their impact as a massive driver of global biodiversity loss – with human actions firmly to blame. This is really about protecting and enhancing the incredible living diversity of our planet." He said that there is a need to be much smarter about how organisms were moved around and develop sensitive solutions.

The SWT accepted that alien species were 'rarely a black and white issue' and that many were benign. But it pointed out that some could do serious harm, warning that unless grey squirrels were stopped they would make red squirrels extinct within a generation. Jonathan Hughes, of SWT, said: "These are complex ecological and ethical questions which, in the view of the SWT, should be assessed on a case by case basis. We shouldn't demonise alien species, but we must be vigilant and take action on those few species which pose a severe threat to our rich natural heritage."

Stan Whitaker, of SNH, said: "Only a small minority of non-native species become invasive, but those that do can have a serious impact on our native wildlife, economy and health. The threat is greater than ever because of the unprecedented rate at which new species are being introduced, largely due to the increase in the global trade in plants and animals. Our focus should be on preventing non-native species becoming established because this is the most cost-effective, least environmentally damaging option."

**SEA EAGLE MANAGEMENT SCHEME**

A sea eagle management scheme has been introduced to continue support for livestock farmers and crofters experiencing impacts across the sea eagle breeding range [Mar 15]. It will be managed by local stakeholder groups and administered, on their behalf, by SNH.

The stakeholder groups include SNH, NFU Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate and the Scottish Crofting Federation. Initially, stakeholder groups have been set up in Argyll & Lochaber, Skye & Lochalsh, and Wester Ross.

The scheme will operate from 2015 to 2018 and will investigate all issues involving sea eagle impacts on livestock. It will also trial prevention measures where required and practical. Support is available through experienced contractors, loan of equipment, and payments to land managers who undertake prevention measures as part of their livestock management.

Scheme advisors will investigate what sea eagle activity is occurring in the vicinity of the farm; help to gather evidence of sea eagle impacts and record any livestock losses due to sea eagles or other causes; advise on measures to mitigate sea eagle impacts; arrange to loan equipment, where applicable, to use as deterrents or other mitigation and make recommendations to SNH and the local stakeholder group on support for longer term management carried out by the livestock manager.

Lachie Maclean, of the Argyll & Lochaber stakeholder group, said: "Funding for the new scheme has been substantially increased compared to the previous scheme and is another action implemented from the NFUS/SNH joint statement agreed last year. The sea eagle scheme panel are keen to record all incidents of reported sea eagle impacts as the sea eagle population continues to expand into its former range. Only by thoroughly understanding the part sea eagles play in livestock losses can we work together with partners to help develop ways to deal with any losses in the longer term."

Fiona Mandeville, of the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF), said: "The reintroduction of sea eagles has undoubtedly compromised the viability of hill sheep in some areas. We welcome this new scheme as far as it goes. Crofters experiencing losses which may be caused by sea eagles should in the first instance contact their local SNH office, but we are also asking our members to report incidents to SCF via our head office, 01599 530005 or [hq@crofting.org](mailto:hq@crofting.org). We are assured by SNH that they will respond to all reports, and it is very important that they, and representatives of crofters and farmers, have as much information as possible on the extent of the problem."

• A pair of young sea eagles, which have been regular visitors to the island of Hoy, Orkney over the past two years, have now built an eyrie on the island. It is not clear where the pair have come from, but it is possible they may have travelled across the North Sea from Scandinavia. RSPB Scotland said that there was a strong possibility the nesting attempt would fail, as sea eagles do not start breeding usually until five years old; this pair is thought to be four years old. They are the first breeding sea eagles on Hoy for 142 years.

**MOUNTAIN HARES**

A group of ten conservation organisations has called on the Scottish Government to impose a three year ban on mountain hare culling on grouse moors [Mar 15]. The group says that the animals are now being culled on a large scale across Scotland and wants the practice to be banned until safeguards are put in place to allow sustainable management of the species, and ensure international conservation obligations are being met.

Duncan Orr-Ewing, from RSPB Scotland, said: "At present very little is known about their current numbers and population trends. We also don't know what impact these large scale culls are having on mountain hares' wider conservation status which could mean that the Scottish Government may be in breach of its legally binding international EU obligations to this species."

The group claimed that culling of hares has developed relatively recently 'in the belief that it protects red grouse against the tick-borne louping ill virus, despite the lack of scientific evidence to support this claim.'

Last year, SNH announced the beginning of a three year study to trial methods of measuring mountain hare numbers, and announced a voluntary moratorium on culling [Dec 14]. The proposed ban would allow time for all those involved to take stock of the longer-term impacts of large scale culling. Simon Jones, of SWT, said: "Once the results of the study have been published we will then be able to identify the best ways to monitor mountain hare populations and measure the impact that management is having on their conservation status. We believe that grouse moor managers have a duty of care to these important mountain hare populations. The unregulated and seemingly unsustainable culling that is endemic on many grouse moors is a threat to these important populations."

A spokesman for the Scottish Gamekeepers' Association (SGA) said: "Allowing hare numbers to multiply uncontrolled over three years, as suggested, will have huge grazing impacts, including around forestry blocks, where culling currently takes place. The numbers of tick, already a growing problem in the countryside, will escalate, endangering any bird that nests on the ground, not to mention the potential repercussions for human health. It will be bad for birds and bad for biodiversity. The truth is that, away from managed grouse moors, mountain hare populations are at nothing higher than subsistence level yet groups asking for this measure have the power to change this today by introducing management regimes, on their own ground, to benefit hares. Why this is not done is the question which should be asked at the highest level."

The SGA said that calling for a ban is 'environmentally irresponsible.' Tim Baynes, of Scottish Land & Estates, said that a ban would be 'ill-informed and heavy-handed.'

Several of the ten organisations calling for the ban have asked for a meeting with SNH and Scottish Government officials to discuss the issue further.

Ian Elliot, a keeper in the Lammermuirs, wrote in a letter to *The Herald*: "The point being missed is that mountain hares are more abundant on areas managed for grouse shooting because good predator control measures are in place. Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust science has already proved that breeding success of all moorland birds is four times more productive where predator control is taking place and it is the same for mountain hares. In addition culls do not take place annually – like grouse they are only undertaken when there is a sustainable number. This attempt to criticise a well-established practice that has maintained a healthy mountain hare population on grouse moors for many years seems like just another ill-informed swipe at grouse moor management. Perhaps some of the ten organisations who signed up to this should practice some predator control on their own land and measure the four-fold effect it would have on biodiversity?"

**RED ADMIRAL**

Butterfly Conservation reported that monitoring of butterflies showed that the population of the red admiral has increased in the past year; numbers in the east of Scotland alone increased from the two recorded in 2013 to 79 in 2014. In Glasgow and southwest Scotland, only one red admiral was recorded in 2013 but by last year, ten were spotted in Ardochrig Hill. In the Highlands, seven were seen in Castlehill, compared with none the year before.

Butterfly Conservation said it was also an excellent year the pearl-bordered fritillary and the chequered skipper, both priority species. See also:

[www.ukbms.org](http://www.ukbms.org); [www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B424909.pdf](http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B424909.pdf)

## WILDCATS

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) has been given authority by SNH to capture endangered wildcats for breeding in zoos, including the Highland Wildlife Park at Kincaig. Captive breeding forms part of the Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Plan and is backed by 30 organisations including SNH and RZSS [Sep 13]. The plan represents the majority view on conservation actions to save wildcats, and supporters said that the capture of some genetically important at risk wildcats was necessary to conserve the species. The plan aims to halt the decline of wildcats within six years.

The *BBC News* website reported that the Captive Animals' Protection Society (CAPS) criticised the captive breeding plan for wildcats, and instead supports the use of the Wildcat Haven, on the Ardnamurchan and Morvern peninsulas [Feb 15]. Nicola O'Brien, of CAPS, said "Taking animals from the wild to stock zoo exhibits is something which people nowadays see as unacceptable, a throwback to a bygone era where animal collections had nothing to do with animal welfare. Concepts such as using female cats as bait for males or throwing live animals into a cage to be eaten are barbaric ideas that also belong buried in the past. Ignoring the substantial evidence from the Wildcat Haven project that threat-free zones can be effectively created around wildcat populations, this SNH/RZSS plan is unjustifiable, clearly little to do with conservation and everything to do with these zoos stocking their cages."

Emily O'Donoghue, of the Wildcat Haven project, said: "Wildcats living here are safe from any threat and much loved by the entire community. We will strongly oppose any effort to remove wildcats from the haven region, and will be opening several new sites in the hope of protecting other wildcats against these plans."

RZSS said: "The invasive and ubiquitous feral domestic cat is driving the wildcat to extinction through cross-breeding. If we do not bring at least some of the remaining wildcats into the lifeboat that is the 21st Century zoo community, we will lose the species from these islands. This exact same approach was applied to Californian condors, black-footed ferrets, red wolves, Arabian oryx and European bison. All had individuals pulled into captivity, all became extinct in the wild, all have been the subject of reintroduction projects and once again exist as wild animals."

Andrew Bachell, of SNH, said: "This work will use existing captive cats and would supplement the captive cat population with a small number of additional wildcats to avoid inbreeding, and ensure any breeding programme has a robust genetic base. We in SNH will be responsible for issuing licences and ensuring that best practice from similar projects informs the work. The Scottish Wildcat Action Plan steering group has carefully considered the needs of wildcat conservation and concludes that supporting a captive breeding programme is a necessary insurance policy to complement on-site measures to prevent the extinction of wildcats in Scotland." Captive breeding would 'reinforce' populations in the wild.

## SHIANT ISLANDS

Black rats are threatening seabird colonies on the Shiant Islands in the Minch off the Outer Hebrides [Jun 14]. They are thought to be the descendants of rats from an 18th century shipwreck. RSPB Scotland has launched a £345,000 appeal to combat the non-native rats. The Shiant Islands have 10% of the UK population of puffins and 7% of UK

razorbirds. It is hoped to remove the rats by the summer 2016 seabird nesting season.

• A rare lichen, belonging to the genus *Teloschistes*, has been recorded on the Shiant Islands in the Minch. SNH said that the lichen had not been seen in Scotland since the 1830s and was last recorded on Ailsa Craig in the Firth of Clyde. The lichen is classified as vulnerable in Great Britain and is extremely sensitive to sulphur dioxide air pollution.

## BLACK GROUSE & WINDFARMS

ScottishPower Renewables is to tag and track black grouse at the sites of their windfarms, to build a detailed picture of the birds' movements and the impact of windfarms on them. Cruach Mhor windfarm, on the Cowal Peninsula in Argyll & Bute, will be the first trial site for this project; the area is known to have one of the highest black grouse populations across the company's windfarms. Turbines are not built closer than 500 yards to a black grouse lekking area.

Doug Shapley, of RSPB Scotland, said: "Black grouse are a red list species meaning they are of the highest conservation priority in the UK. Numbers have declined throughout Argyll and this is one of the few areas of Cowal where black grouse still occur, albeit at a lower population level. Habitat management is really important to helping these birds and we're interested to see what the tagging might reveal about how they use the landscape at these sites."

## GEDDES AWARD

*The Sunday Herald* reported that Dick Balharry was awarded the Royal Scottish Geographical Society Geddes medal for his outstanding contribution to conservation. See: [bit.ly/1Dgvl7Q](http://bit.ly/1Dgvl7Q).

Speaking after his presentation, he accused traditional sporting estates of maintaining artificially high numbers of deer in order to make more profit from shooting them. Too many deer damage native Caledonian pine forests by eating saplings and preventing natural regeneration. He also criticised landowners for erecting fences to protect native woodlands from marauding deer. This damaged the landscape, inhibited public access and deprived deer of shelter. He said: "I see this as a major injustice. If people wish to manage land exclusively for the benefit of the few without regard to the wider public interest then they will never have my support. To those who argue that fences are required to make sport shooting economically viable I would simply say that you are inviting society to question the legitimacy of your ownership model - one that places trophy stags higher than the long term interest of the public and the planet."

Keeping deer numbers high meant that more die every winter, for which landowners tried to evade responsibility: "Traditional sporting estates cannot stand on the moral high ground of estate ownership as they have tried to claim for over the last 200 years. Rather they embody the selfish greed of a Victorian era, outdated and ludicrous ... The moral high ground of the future will be for those who wish to hunt deer in a natural environment, free of fences, where deer have access to the food and shelter they require; where there is a natural tree line and the public are welcomed."

Douglas McAdam, of Scottish Land & Estates, said: "He has long expressed trenchant views on deer management and, whilst many in the sector hold different opinions, the debate itself has focused attention on the way ahead. Many private landowners, including the example of Glenfeshie, are forward looking and committed to delivering a range of public goods including the conservation of the natural heritage."

## CAPERCAILLIE

A report, *Correlates of Capercaillie productivity in Scots Pinewoods in Strathspey*, has been published by SNH. It looks at data collected over ten years, and is the result of a partnership comprising SNH, RSPB Scotland and the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA). The report reaffirms the complex relationships between the success of capercaillie in rearing young and habitat structure, predator activity and weather during the egg-laying and brood rearing period across key woods in Strathspey.

A weak association between breeding success and a measure of pine marten activity needs to be explored further in order to fully understand the relationship. One new finding was that blaeberry leaves, a key food item, had a better defence against herbivores through their chemical composition in old-growth Scots Pine forest than in younger plantations. Adult capercaillie and chicks depend heavily on blaeberry leaves and their associated insects as food. However further work will be needed to test this finding and assess whether forest management could help to increase the quality of blaeberry in forests for capercaillie.

Scottish capercaillie have declined to as few as 1,000 individuals since the 1970s. 75% of those are found in Strathspey.

Justin Prigmore, of CNPA, said: "Strathspey is the most important area in Scotland for the species and is the only area where numbers have remained relatively stable. It is essential that we do all we can to ensure their long-term survival here. This work shows that it is a complicated picture but helps direct where we need to focus effort for the future and will further inform the Cairngorms Capercaillie Framework which is working across this landscape scale." See: [bit.ly/1aPvxhe](http://bit.ly/1aPvxhe)

## PEAT

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that SNH is consulting on proposals to detail and protect carbon-rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitats, all carbon stores [Mar 15]. SNH is to publish a map in June and it is thought that it will include much of the Western Isles, Skye and the western Highlands. Mairi Maciver, of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, said: "[The authority] has previously stated its opposition to further mapping or environmental constraints that could potentially impeded, limit or constrain development and would wish to reiterate this position in relation to this consultation on carbon-rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitats map. The coverage of classes one and two soils in particular in the Outer Hebrides is extensive and the comhairle would express caution over the potential that these areas are perceived as 'no go' areas for development.

"The comhairle recognises the significance and historical use of the islands' peatland assets, but would seek to ensure that the management of these resources are balanced with sustainable economic development. Peat and peatland are a historical and critical part of the culture and the economic fabric of the Outer Hebrides. Peatlands have provided grazing, fuel, fisheries and opportunities for leisure and cultural activities. They provide an underpinning for industries such as tourism and used appropriately have provided locations for well-sited renewable energy developments. SNH requires to be clear in its intentions for the use of the maps and should be clear that these maps will not be interpreted or allowed to be interpreted as 'no go' areas for legitimate development."

Ms Maciver said that SNH's definition of deep peat at 0.5 metres was unrealistic in the islands, where a more credible interpretation would be two metres. It was also out of step with the Scottish Government's own guidance of 1.5 metres.

An SNH spokesperson said: "The importance of peatlands for their biodiversity, as grazing land, for controlling water quality and as our largest terrestrial carbon store is now widely recognised. We are therefore clearly interested in making sure that peat and peatland habitats are managed sustainably. A recent consultation exercise about mapping carbon-rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitats was undertaken specifically to enable planning authorities to guide windfarm developments to less sensitive areas. This consultation has no bearing on domestic peat cutting or on any other land uses affecting peat."

The comhairle's sustainable development committee wrote to SNH and the Scottish Government with their concerns, and questioned the scientific rationale behind the proposals. The committee said that they were totally opposed to any further extensions of designations relating to peat; it is a resource which has been used in the Hebrides in a sustainable and responsible way by the crofting community and any further designations would threaten activities on the moors in the future. See: [bit.ly/1HRpbeg](http://bit.ly/1HRpbeg)

**WESTER ROSS PEARL MUSSELS**

A Riverwatch scheme has been launched in Wester Ross to help protect freshwater pearl mussels [Sep 14]. Natalie Young, of the Pearls in Peril Life Project, said: "Freshwater pearl mussel populations on the west coast are extremely vulnerable to pollution and illegal fishing. The Riverwatch scheme aims to raise awareness of the threat to pearl mussels from illegal exploitation and to train volunteer Riverwatchers how to spot and report pearl mussel crime. Freshwater pearl mussels have historically been fished for the pearls they may produce. However, they rarely contain pearls and they are fully protected under the law – it is a crime to kill, injure, take or disturb them."

The Riverwatch scheme works in collaboration with Police Scotland, landowners, local communities, fishery boards and river users.



**WOODLANDS**

**ASPEN**

New aspen woodlands are to be established in the Strathspay area which will help to ensure that the older woodlands become more connected. Coille Alba set up a seed orchard in Highland Aspen Group's nursery at the Highland Wildlife Park and more than 1,000 aspen seedlings were grown last year. RSPB Scotland has been working with Coille Alba to identify suitable sites for planting and has identified 'gaps' where aspen is missing. Craigellachie National Nature Reserve, managed by Scottish Natural Heritage, supports only a few very small stands of aspen; 100 seedlings have been planted in the reserve.

**ESKDALE FOREST**

The Upper Eskdale Development Group has applied to buy part of a forest at Twiglees near Eskdalemuir, Dumfries & Galloway under the National Forest Land Scheme administered by Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland. It is hoped to use the land to create affordable housing and also to develop an existing barn on the land for small-scale commercial use.

**TULLOS HILL**

The *Press & Journal* reported that 430 people have signed a petition asking Aberdeen City Council to reconsider plans to cull roe deer on Tullos Hill and to survey the deer population [Jul 12]. The measures to control the deer population were brought in as part of a scheme to plant

80,000 trees in the area. Objectors also asked for information on the cost of the culling over an eight year period.

The council said that a review of deer management practices was already being carried out, and that the concerns of the campaigners would be given consideration. A report is due in October.

**KIRKTON WOODLANDS**

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Kirkton Woodland Group, operating as Lochcarron Community Development Company, has now bought 93 hectares from FC Scotland with support from the Big Lottery and the Scottish Land Fund [Sep 14].



**FISHFARMING & FISHERIES**

**SALMON & SEA TROUT**

Scotland's chief statistician has published the *Salmon & Sea Trout Fishery Statistics for 2014*.

The total reported rod catch (retained and released) for salmon for 2014 was 45,175. Since 2012, the total has dropped in each subsequent year and 2014 was the second lowest year on record, 53% of the previous five year average. 93% of rod caught spring salmon were released, as was 82% of the annual rod catch (37,139).

The reported catch of spring salmon has generally declined since records began, and although there is some indication that catch has stabilised in recent years, it remains at a historically low level. Overall catch of salmon and grilse in later months has fallen sharply since 2010.

Reported catch for the fixed engine fishery was 13,343 and 4,435 for net & coble fisheries.

The total reported rod catch of sea trout (retained and released) for 2014 was 22,058. Catches have declined over much of the period since 1952, when records began, although they appear to have stabilised in recent years with the 2014 catch at 98% of the previous five year average.

The proportion of the rod catch accounted for by catch and release was 80%. The catch for both fixed engine and net & coble fisheries remain at historically low levels. Reported catch in each fishery was 2,380 and 3,728.

The data were collected and collated by Marine Scotland Science. A stock status report stated that salmon runs are at risk of being depopulated unless moves are made to help the fish populations thrive.

Hughie Campbell Adamson, of the Salmon & Trout Association Scotland, said: "Salmon runs are fickle and clearly conditions can impact on rod catches but it would be irresponsible not to take heed of the significant downturn in the last two years that is mirrored across the North Atlantic. The figures underline why Scotland needs a robust system in place to ensure any exploitation is limited to those stocks that have a discernible surplus."

See: [bit.ly/1Oo1DmG](http://bit.ly/1Oo1DmG)

**SALMON**

Fishermen on rivers across the north and northeast of Scotland have noticed a downturn in salmon numbers since the season opened at the start of April. Richard Gledstone, of the River Dee and Dee District Salmon Fishery Board, said that catches were significantly lower on the Dee than in previous years. He said: "Whereas we used to get 40 returning fish out of 100, we are now getting five or six ... We suspect, not just on the

Dee but all across the northeast, that we are losing fish at sea."

Low water temperatures caused by the snowmelt may be a factor, along with other factors such as predation, climate change and natural fluctuations in the productivity of the feeding grounds.

• The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Rob Gibson MSP called for smolt release on rivers to improve salmon numbers. The technique is already being successfully used on the River Carron in Wester Ross and the River Lochy in Lochaber. He said: "As climate change takes effect there are fewer salmon in Scotland's rivers and a new approach needs to be looked at. It is incumbent on the Scottish Government to assess the viability of smolt release potential. Although it would have to be done rigorously, nevertheless if this is a way to increase the number of salmon in rivers then it should be considered. The government has draft recommendations from the wild fish review under consideration [Oct 14]."

**SEAL PATROLS**

Sea Shepherd UK is to patrol the coastline in the Gamrie Bay area of Aberdeenshire over the summer, in a bid to cut down the number of seals killed by the salmon industry. Over 200 seals were shot last year under licence from Marine Scotland. However, many animal welfare groups fear that the actual figure for the number of seals killed in Scottish waters could be much higher. Volunteers in the seal defence crew will mount land and sea-based patrols.

A spokesman for Sea Shepherd UK said: "[This is] the first phase of our 2015 campaign to prevent Scotland's iconic seals from being killed illegally by coastal netting fishing operations, fishfarms or indeed anyone else in Scotland. The licenses issued by Marine Scotland which specify numbers of seals, locations and conditions under which seals can be shot remains open to abuse by some fishing/fish farm companies with a complete absence of any government monitoring."

**BALLACHULISH CRAYFISH**

The *Herald* reported that Highland Council and Lochaber Fisheries Trust have confirmed that monitoring has shown that the eradication of North American signal crayfish in Ballachulish Quarry appears to have been successful [Jun 12]. Pyblast was added to the Ballachulish ponds. The site is 60 miles from the species' next nearest habitat – the River Kelvin, near Glasgow – and scientists believe that specimens may have been taken there illegally by someone hoping to provide a food source for fish or to harvest them. The discovery in Lochaber was the first time the crayfish had been found as far north on the west coast.

**CLYDE FISHERIES**

The *Herald* reported that the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust (SIFT) is seeking a Regulating Order to ban certain fishing operations in designated areas of the Firth of Clyde to allow stocks of finfish such as whiting, haddock, herring and saithe to replenish. SIFT proposes that some areas of the firth would be closed to boats using mobile (trawling) gear; some would be a no go area for those with static gear (creels and pots); while others could be closed or open to both.

Charles Millar, of SIFT, said that the trust was founded in 2011 not as an environmental organisation or a pro-angling lobby, but as a group committed to improving the sustainability of local fishing through such 'spatial management.' He said: "There are some fishermen who are worried that we are trying to close the fishery down. But that is exactly the opposite of what we are trying to do. We are trying to diversify the fishery because it basically relies on scallops and prawns. We think

if it was managed in the right way, we would be able to bring back commercially viable species of finfish." SIFT has published a consultation document.

Kenny McNab, of the Clyde Fishermen's Association, said: "If [the order] went ahead in its present form it would be devastating. With certain areas being closed off, it would end fishing in Tarbert for about 50 men working in the mobile sector on trawlers and dredgers."

He said that the existing proposals would also hit creel fishermen and that the proposals wouldn't help the return of finfish as fishermen were not catching them. The Clyde 2020 group had produced an action plan to address the Clyde's problems which was now being implemented. Mr McNab said: "So SIFT is jumping the gun, because they don't think things are going quickly enough."

The Firth of Clyde once supported a profitable fishery which produced substantial landings of finfish such as cod, whiting and herring.

But the finfish fishery declined rapidly in the decades following the mid-1970s. The Clyde fishery now has to rely on shellfish; in 2013 over 99% of the firth's landings were shellfish, 89% of which were scallops and prawns.

SIFT said that relying so heavily on shellfish means that the fishery lacks resilience and could be undermined by disease, contamination, climate change, foreign competition or changes in consumer taste. If these fisheries decline there is no substantial alternative stock left to fish for. Sensitive seabed habitats, known to be nursery grounds for finfish, should be protected.

Marine Scotland will undertake a consultation and assessment of SIFT's submission before any decision is made on whether to support it; Regulating Orders are subject to parliamentary approval.

See: [www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00453873.pdf](http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00453873.pdf)

### SUBMARINE RANGE

The British Underwater Test & Evaluation Centre (BUTEC) works in an area of sea in the Inner Sound between the Island of Raasay and the Applecross Peninsula on the mainland. It is used to evaluate the sensors and aural emissions of British submarines and is operated on behalf of the Royal Navy and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) by QinetiQ. Fishing is currently banned in the range over an area six miles by three miles and to a depth of 200 metres. But the MoD wants to significantly increase the area [Mar 15].

*The Herald* reported that Rob Gibson MSP believes that there are plans to increase the BUTEC range to four times its present size. He said: "Local fishermen have calculated that around 70 small fishing craft could be affected. That could involve the livelihoods of over a hundred local people and their families both on the Ross-shire coast and Skye if the torpedo testing range is extended, even to double the size at present. The coast of Wester Ross is a real success story for sustainable and environmentally friendly fishing. Entire communities thrive as a result of it. They assure me that winter and spring fishing is essential to make their livelihoods and access to the parts of the Inner Sound today already puts pressure on boats from Kyle all the way to Portree and Gairloch."

### DISCARD BAN

Following negotiations in Brussels, a new deal on fishing quotas and industry rules was reached. Scotland's fishermen have been given a two-year delay to implement the ban on throwing unwanted fish back into the sea before facing penalties [Mar 15].

Bertie Armstrong, of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, said it was a very important move towards a more workable system and denied that it was backsliding on a key conservation measure.

The discard ban came into force in January for species such as herring and mackerel, and will take effect in January 2016 for cod and haddock.



## MARINE

### BASKING SHARKS

Ten basking sharks were seen off Coll at Easter, a surprising sighting for so early in the year [Feb 15]. It is thought that good feeding conditions has brought the creatures back to the Hebrides earlier than usual.

### COMMON DOLPHINS

A substantial increase in common dolphin numbers off western Scotland is to be studied by Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust (HWDT) in a new season of marine research expeditions. HWDT said that its encounter rate with common dolphins has more than doubled over the past 12 years. Common dolphins were once only occasionally seen in the Hebrides, preferring more southern waters generally warmer than 10°C. With climate change causing sea surface temperatures in the Hebrides to rise at a rate of 0.5°C per decade, it appears that such warmer water species are starting to colonise new areas in the north or closer to shore. However, new opportunities for common dolphins may be generating competition for food with other dolphin species or seabirds.

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



## POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

### WILD GEESE

The Scottish Crofting Foundation petitioned the Scottish Parliament on the control of wild goose numbers. The petition called on the parliament to urge the Scottish Government to address the problems created by increasing populations of wild geese in the crofting areas as a matter of priority; reassess its decision to stop funding existing goose management programmes, and assign additional resources to crop protection and adaptive management programmes to ensure this threat to the future of crofting is averted.

The parliament's rural affairs, climate change & environment committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government seeking additional information.

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Rob Gibson, chair of the committee, stated that the Scottish Government should consider asking the European parliament for a derogation to allow increased culling of geese. At present, culling is limited to two four-week periods at the start of spring and the end of summer.



## GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

### ENVIRONMENTAL COURT

The Faculty of Advocates supported calls by Friends of the Earth Scotland (FoES) and the Environmental Law Centre Scotland for a more effective forum for deciding environmental cases in Scotland [Dec 14]. Responding to a consultation paper, which also called for the court to sit at venues around the country, it said that it was 'desirable' for Scotland to have a dedicated

environmental tribunal or court: "It is important that issues of legality, including issues arising from environmental law, in relation to proposed developments should be dealt with in a timely efficient and cost-effective manner, so that proposals which are not lawful are not implemented but also so that, if a development proposal is lawful, it is not delayed unduly by the legal process."

The Lord President had suggested an Energy & Natural Resources Court within the Court of Session but which could sit outside Edinburgh as required. The Faculty said in the consultations: "That proposal has been welcomed by FoES and is supported by the Faculty. Given the close link between energy and environmental issues – evident most obviously in the context of renewables – it would be natural to include environmental law within the jurisdiction of that Court."

FoES said that the court would allow individuals, communities and NGOs have more involvement in planning decisions which affect the environment. The move would be a step towards compliance with the Aarhus Convention, an international treaty that enshrines rights of participation, information and access to justice in environmental matters. Under the Aarhus Convention, countries are required to have processes to assist challenges to decision-making which are 'fair, equitable, timely and not prohibitively expensive' and which provide 'adequate and effective' remedies.

FoES has said that legal aid should be available to community groups, rather than to individuals within community groups, which was also supported by the Faculty of Advocates. The Faculty also suggested that in cases of significant public interest, an individual or community group should be able to recover expenses from a developer or public authority, even if they lose the case.

### AIR POLLUTION

*The Herald* reported that the Supreme Court has ordered the UK Government to take immediate action over levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) in breach of EU limits in 16 cities, including Glasgow, and to produce new air quality plans no later than 31 December 2015. This follows a five-year campaign by ClientEarth [Jul 14].

The Scottish Government is responsible for enforcing EU air quality targets in Scotland. Average levels of nitrogen dioxide in the Glasgow Urban Area this year will be 74 micrograms per cubic metre at the most polluted spots. The legal limit is 40 micrograms. Emissions from diesel vehicles are a major source of the gas.

Councillor Alistair Watson, of Glasgow City Council, said: "We know that the main source of air pollution produced within the city is from road traffic and one of the biggest culprits is buses. Therefore an action we would like to explore with the Scottish Government is re-regulating buses as without this our ability to make any real improvement is hampered ... The issues around air quality are often directed towards local authorities, but the really big policy drivers are in the hands of central or devolved government. Councils need to be given the appropriate powers and resources to address these issues."

### BIRD OF PREY DEATHS

A dead buzzard was discovered in the Millcroft area of Strathaven in South Lanarkshire. Specialist police wildlife crime officers are appealing for information following the discovery.

- One of last year's young satellite-tagged hen harriers from Langholm Moor is missing. The last signal from was from South Lanarkshire.

- *Fife Today* reported that a man has been charged, with attempting to kill a sparrowhawk in Ravenscraig Park, Kirkcaldy.

• Forensic tests have shown that a red kite, found dead near Castle Douglas in January, was killed by rat poison. The bird was found on a road near Townhead of Greenlaw and was at first thought to have been hit by a vehicle. However, tests have now shown that it had ingested a rodenticide.

#### T IN THE PARK

The *BBC News* website reported that the police are examining a video purporting to show an osprey attempting to rebuild an old nest near the proposed T in the Park site at Strathallan Castle [Feb 15]. The video was made by the Strathallan T Action Group (STAG). However, festival organisers DF Concerts said that the video did not correspond with reports from their ornithologist monitoring the site. It had been hoped to encourage the birds to move to a specially constructed new nest further away from the festival site, but the organisers had been unable to gain access to remove the old nest entirely.

A spokeswoman for DF Concerts said: "We can confirm that ospreys have returned to Strathallan, but the expert opinion of our ornithologist is that they have not yet nested. The RSPB believes that the previous nest is active and as such, close monitoring via the cherry picker has been removed and we will continue to liaise with the relevant organisations to ensure the protection of the birds. In the meantime, we'd also like to assure fans that the music festival will go ahead. The decision on our planning application will still be made in May and we remain confident that the event will take place at Strathallan."

An RSPB Scotland spokesman said: "This old nest is closer to the T in the Park event arena and the risk of disturbance to the birds is therefore higher. If the birds do settle and nest here it doesn't necessarily preclude T in the Park happening, but it does make it much more challenging to accommodate without risk of causing a disturbance to the birds."

RSPB Scotland urged Perth & Kinross Council not to grant planning permission for the event without strict safeguards being secured. It called for a series of measures to be put in place, including restrictions on the use of fireworks and lighting, and permanent 'no go' buffer zones around the active osprey nest. These zones would measure 500 metres until after mid-June – this covers the period when the birds are likely to lay eggs, incubate them, and raise small chicks. RSPB Scotland also asked for an ornithological clerk of works to be appointed who will be able to overrule others on site to stop any activities that may cause disturbance. Some T in the Park infrastructure, like the big wheel and funfair should also be moved 500 metres away from the osprey nest.

Stuart Housden, of RSPB Scotland, said that it was unfortunate that issues are still not fully resolved at T in the Park at this very late stage.

• DF Concerts' environment consultants said that they were aware of a possible otter holt on the site and monitored it for eight days before concluding that it was not being used, being too small for an otter holt, and had bricked it up.

Dr Paul Yoxon, of the International Otter Survival Fund, said DF Concerts should have monitored the site for a longer period using cameras or the organisers risk a fine of up to £6,000.

#### GALASHIELS HOUSING

Building on Persimmon Home's site at Easter Langlee in Galashiels, Selkirkshire, has been suspended by Scottish Borders Council as bore hole investigations revealed methane and carbon dioxide. 118 houses were built as phase one of the development. Phase two, for a further 396

properties, was given planning permission in 2012. Persimmon have submitted a report to the council with plans to mitigate the gas risk with a gas membrane and have also requested permission to continue building on parts of the site which have not shown signs of gas.

#### GREEN BELT

Residents of Maryhill and Summerston want to block plans by Glasgow City Council to re-zone a greenbelt space and build housing on a site bordered by Blackhill and Balmore Roads.

#### GREAT-CRESTED NEWTS

A special underpass for newts is being planned as part of proposals for Banks Property's new housing development in Glenboig, North Lanarkshire. The underpass is to run under a new proposed link road for the development. Great crested newts would be relocated during the construction phase and then reintroduced to a nearby nature reserve. Banks has been granted a Great Crested Newt Development Licence by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). Long-term mitigation measures will be implemented along with habitat compensation and long-term management.

#### WILDFIRES

Firefighters dealt with a major wildfire near Dornoch in Sutherland. Five appliances attended a grass and gorse blaze. Crews were also called to heath and grass fires near Shawbost on Lewis and Onich in Lochaber. There was also a major blaze in grassland on the Glenrinn Estate near Keith in Morayshire.

Fire appliances attended two different wildfires on Lewis. Burning heather on high ground at An Ard, Ranish, North Lochs damaged over 133 acres of heather and threatened grazing land. In a second incident, three fire crews extinguished a wildfire at Keose, South Lochs.

A wildfire occurred on grassland at Ashie Moor, near Loch Duntelchaig southwest of Inverness. Wildfires also broke out at Daviot Wood south of Inverness and near Fort Augustus.

The Scottish Fire & Rescue Service and the Scottish Wildfire Forum said that dry windy weather and large quantities of dead vegetation, such as heather and pine needles, had heightened the chance of wildfires.

#### NAIRN RADIOACTIVITY

Tests for radioactive contamination will be undertaken at the former Kingsteps Quarry near Nairn following 'word of mouth' suggestions that military aircraft were buried there after WW2. The remains of aircraft instruments, illuminated using radioactive paint, may be present. Highland Council owns the site and said that, if required, appropriate actions would be taken to remediate the area for continued public access.

#### PEATLAND RESTORATION

Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority has been carrying out work to restore wetland areas to Beinn Dubh above Glen Luss and Auchtertyre, near Strathfillan. The new boglands will provide vital habitats for many species, and act as a carbon store.

The authority is working with land managers to protect the blanket bogs that form on the mountain slopes by helping them to hold water by blocking drains and by reducing pressure from grazing sheep and deer. Eroded areas of bare peat have also been re-planted to help stabilise the exposed sections. New forest plantations in the National Park will be planned around the mountain bogs to avoid the deep peat. The authority has worked closely with Luss Estates and Scotland's Rural

College at Kirkton and Auchtertyre Farms; the work was funded by SNH.

#### GREY SQUIRRELS & LYME DISEASE

The *Herald* reported that Glasgow University researchers tested 679 grey squirrels from Scotland and north-east England and found that they frequently carry ticks and could be infected by all four bacteria species responsible for Lyme disease. Around 12% of the collected squirrels were infected, most commonly by a species of *Borrelia* usually found in birds. In the UK, Lyme is caused by four species of *Borrelia* bacteria carried by the deer or sheep tick, *Ixodes ricinus*, and transmitted to humans through its bite.

Birds and rodents are both thought to be the most important wildlife hosts of the bugs, but until now the role played by grey squirrels in their life cycle was unknown.

Caroline Millins, of the University of Glasgow, said: "We found quite different patterns and duration of infection in grey squirrels compared to native woodland rodent species. Grey squirrels become infected with whichever strains are circulating in the local area, and our models suggest that the duration of infection isn't life-long. In contrast, native rodents tend to develop chronic lifelong infections with strains of *Borrelia* that have adapted to these hosts. We can't say from this study whether grey squirrels lead to an increase or decrease in the number of ticks infected with *Borrelia* species in an area, but we have produced comprehensive baseline data that future studies could use to investigate this."

Results from the research are reported in the journal *Applied & Environmental Microbiology*.

#### WADERS ON MACHAIR

A study commissioned by SNH suggests that different species of wading birds favour different areas of machair in North Uist and Benbecula. Lapwings, oystercatchers and ringed plovers tended to be concentrated in the more fertile grassland. Oystercatchers avoided tall vegetation, while redshanks favoured it. Ringed plovers and oystercatchers were also found to prefer areas of farming activity, but redshanks and snipes tended to avoid those areas.

See: *SNH Commissioned Report 411: Population Changes in Breeding Waders on Machair in North Uist and Benbecula and their Associations with Vegetation and Landuse*; [bit.ly/1HjxReR](http://bit.ly/1HjxReR)

#### ABERDEENSHIRE GOLD

Major gold and silver deposits have been found in the Dalradian trend near Towie in Aberdeenshire. Exploration is being undertaken by GreenOre Gold, together with Koza Altin Isletmeler.

#### SEIL SEWERAGE

The *Oban Times* reported that the £11.7m wastewater treatment works, completed on the Isle of Seil in 2009, is to be decommissioned. 130 homes have their waste treated to a high standard, as Seil Sound is shellfish water. However, not all houses were connected to the new system; six houses discharge raw sewage into the Sound and a further 26 properties have septic tanks that discharge direct to Seil Sound. Scottish Water now proposes to spend a further £1.7m to pump the waste a mile over a hill to a septic tank on the other side of the island, treat it to a lesser quality and discharge it into the Firth of Lorn Special Area of Conservation.



#### ENERGY

##### WIND ENERGY

WWF Scotland reported that wind output has jumped 16% year on year and now provides more than enough to power all of Scotland's homes and

57% of Scotland's entire electricity demand. Analysis shows that last month's figures revealed an increase of 161,322 MWh in wind-powered electricity compared to March 2014. However, more support is needed to boost energy storage and reduce demand.

- RenewableUK has published a study by Biggar Economics which reports that Scotland gains over £7 billion of economic benefit from the development of onshore windfarms. Almost £250 million of the total goes directly into local communities as a result of the turbines erected in their area.

There are 2,622 wind turbines already installed in Scotland, providing 4,918 MW of installed capacity. 824 MW are installed in the Highlands, South Lanarkshire has 632 MW installed, and the Scottish Borders has 565 MW installed. A further 2,669 turbines are in the planning process, already consented or are under construction.

## NTS & WINDFARMS

*The Herald* reported that Kate Mavor, outgoing chief executive of the National Trust for Scotland, said: "I do think the impact of change and development on heritage is not considered enough. Either it's not required for people to properly evaluate it, or, as has happened recently with windfarms, there's been environmental assessments done which have strongly suggested this is not a good idea and they have been over-ruled. That's just paying lip service ... There's too much of a rush to one kind of electricity generation, being windfarms. There are many other things that could be done to bring down our carbon footprint which are not being emphasised such as making sure everyone's house is insulated and educating people – that would be first thing to make the biggest dent.

"We also think wind turbines need to be appropriate and proportionate to the landscape – in some ways, they can enhance the landscape but in other places they would be a desecration. The one we did protest against recently, [Stronelairg near Fort Augustus], was bigger than the size of Inverness and visible from miles around in a stunning mountain landscape – that is disproportionate. We don't have to do it that way. We want to make sure that it becomes normal to evaluate the impact on heritage of any change. It's the fact it's not considered that we feel strongly about."

## WINDFARM UPDATES

**Dumfries & Galloway:** Councillors have been recommended to back Falck Renewables' proposals for an eight turbine windfarm development at Mochrum Fell, west of Corsock and north-east of Parton. There have been almost 600 objections, including concerns about the effects on tourism and local wildlife as well as the cumulative impact of the scheme when taken with other consented and proposed windfarms in the area. An earlier plan to build 11 turbines on the site was rejected by the council which said it was out of character with the surrounding landscape. The amended proposals are now said to be acceptable in landscape terms.

- A public inquiry is being held into plans for Wind Prospect's 24 turbine windfarm on moorland at Stranoch, near New Luce. The council objected to the application, expressing concerns about the cumulative impact of the scheme on the area.

- Buccleuch Estates and 2020 Renewables are examining the potential for a 140 turbine windfarm in the Lowther Hills. John Glen, of Buccleuch, said: "We have a structured approach to land management that involves looking at land use from an economic delivery and environment perspective and what it can deliver

for the local, regional and sometimes national interest. It appears to us that this area of land could potentially deliver more both economically and environmentally and provide more benefit to local and regional communities. At that scale the project would be one of Scotland's largest windfarms, making a significant contribution to the Scottish Government's renewable energy targets."

The proposed site is near the Muirkirk & North Lowther Uplands Special Protection Area.

Linda Holt, of Scotland Against Spin, said that the proposed new windfarm has 'no place' in Dumfries & Galloway which already has over 200 operational turbines, with a further 333 consented, 260 awaiting consent and at least another 450 'at scoping.' She said: "Adding another 140 to an area that by any measure is saturated is insane. Scotland will begin to overshoot its 2020 target for 100% renewable energy this year, and the last thing the country needs is more expensive, unsightly and unreliable wind energy. Communities receive peanuts while the landowner and operator trouser huge profits thanks to guaranteed subsidies."

A Buccleuch spokesman said: "Buccleuch's position, which does reflect the Duke's position, over windfarms has evolved over recent years. It has moved from a situation of being opposed to it to being in a situation where if the site was suitable, like a brownfield site, and there was no better use of the land, then it is something they would look at. At one time they would have opposed just about every windfarm. There's a load of other windfarm applications in the area that they no longer object to."

**Inverness-shire:** The Scottish Government has given planning consent for NBW Wind Energy Ltd's 23 turbine, 70 MW Corriegarh windfarm. The approval replaces the existing planning permission granted by Highland Council, which gave consent to 20 turbines on the same site on Corriegarh Estate, near Gorthleck [Jan 10]. The *Press & Journal* reported that the windfarm approval could jeopardise a bid for UNESCO World Heritage status for Loch Ness; a letter has been sent by the European Platform Against Windfarms to UNESCO highlighting the 'catastrophic impact' of 600 turbines, built or planned, within 22 miles of Loch Ness.

Lyndsey Ward said: "The terrible reality is that these windfarms are being consented without the true picture being revealed to the general public of the amount of turbines that are being proposed across Scotland. There are still no up-to-date maps available from any source for Highland region and despite that this government think it is acceptable to keep waving them through. What will it take for them to wake up to what is happening in other parts of the world where the wind industry is being challenged on its claims of potential generation and emissions saving.

- Save Loch Ness, a new campaign group, has been set up to fight against the spread of windfarm developments around Loch Ness. The group says that over 500 wind turbines are either in the pipeline or already approved on land around the loch and wants all windfarm developments to be stopped. A petition has been submitted to the Scottish Parliament, which calls on the Scottish Government to protect Loch Ness & the Great Glen by designating it a National Scenic Area; recommend that a priority application is made to UNESCO for designation of Loch Ness & the Great Glen as a World Heritage Site and to take appropriate steps to discourage further wind turbine developments in the area and support the restoration of all sites therein damaged by wind turbines.

See: [bit.ly/1yq8HzZ](http://bit.ly/1yq8HzZ)

- The Scottish Government has approved RWE Innogy UK's plans for the 20 turbine Glen Kyllachy windfarm near Tomatin, south of Inverness on appeal. Glen Kyllachy is adjacent to the Farr windfarm. Highland Council unanimously rejected the application, saying that the development would have 'a significant detrimental visual impact' [Aug 14].

**Scottish Borders:** Plans have been lodged for a windfarm near Oxton, less than a year after the Scottish Government rejected the 21 turbine Rowantree scheme for the same site because of 'unacceptable environmental impacts.' RWE Innogy UK has submitted scoping plans to the council for the Longmuir Rigg windfarm of up to 11 turbines in the same location. RWE said that its plans for the site take into account the Scottish Government's concerns about the Rowantree development.

**Sutherland:** A Scottish Government reporter has postponed a hearing on how the Strathy South windfarm development would impact on birdlife until June because of a procedural matter [Feb 15]. RSPB Scotland, which has objected to the 39 turbine development in the Flow Country, accused Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE) of causing the delay by changing documentation concerning management of the peatland habitats, a claim denied by SSE.

Aedán Smith, of RSPB Scotland, said: "We first made it clear to SSE over ten years ago that this was a completely unsuitable site for a windfarm. It is one of the best places for wildlife, not just in Scotland, but anywhere in Europe. We continue to urge SSE to concentrate instead on delivering much needed wind power from less damaging sites, but unfortunately SSE have not heeded concerns from others about the damage their development would cause and it seems they have carried this approach into the inquiry. While all other parties have done their best to stick to deadlines, SSE have been late for almost every one."

The public local inquiry went ahead meantime, with impacts on peatland habitats only considered. RSPB Scotland called for the peatland session to also be delayed to ensure sufficient time to consider SSE's new peatland management plans.

RSPB Scotland commissioned an independent expert review of the carbon impacts of the proposed development, which found that while SSE claimed the carbon payback period would be between 0.5 and 4.6 years, it would in fact be much more likely to be between 4 and 16.1 years. In one scenario, where the electricity from the windfarm displaced a mix of energy from the national grid rather than just fossil fuels, it could even be up to 24.8 years.

Aedán Smith, of RSPB Scotland, said: "Most windfarms pose no serious threat to wildlife and we therefore object to only a very small number of proposals each year. However, projects must be sited to both minimise impacts on wildlife and to make the biggest possible contribution to cutting our greenhouse gas emissions – otherwise what is the point? This independent analysis of SSE's Strathy South proposal shows that the benefits from this windfarm could be minimal. The results from this analysis are startling but not entirely surprising given the sensitivity and importance of this peatland site."

He said that SSE should abandon its plans for this site and concentrate on developing sites which could make a bigger difference to Scotland's climate objectives.

A spokesman for SSE said: "SSE is confident in our own evidence showing very significant overall environmental gain for the Flow Country and for peatland restoration. It is important to note that no statutory body has objected to the project on

peat impact or carbon payback grounds. [Strathy South will] both generate clean energy whilst restoring and positively managing thousands of hectares of damaged peatland."

The *Herald* reported that Janette McKay, of Strathy & Armadale Community Council, said: "I fear that the voice of communities trying to live and work in this part of Highland Sutherland is often ignored by outside parties like the RSPB. The community council is very supportive of the Strathy South windfarm proposal because it would offer great investment for our fragile rural economy including jobs for our young folk and opportunities for local businesses. SSE is a company we trust that is already providing real benefit to our community through the Strathy North windfarm. We are keenly aware that our Flow Country is so precious and we welcome the major environmental restoration proposal being put forward as a core element of the Strathy South project. The plans would see experts restore and manage 3,200 hectares of long-damaged peatland around the windfarm site, on a scale we could never have dreamed possible, let alone affordable."

George Campbell, of RSPB Scotland, said that he had every sympathy with local people wishing to see investment in their communities: "However, we believe strongly that the development of a windfarm at Strathy South is simply the wrong approach to take. Strathy South lies in the very heart of the internationally important habitats of the Flow Country, a peatland ecosystem important for birds and which is increasingly valued as a carbon store. That is why many conservation organisations including the Scottish Wildlife Trust, Plantlife Scotland and the government's own advisors, Scottish Natural Heritage, are recommending refusal of the application by SSE."

John Low, of the John Muir Trust, giving evidence at the inquiry said: "We have every sympathy with communities who come under pressure to accept money from energy companies out of the subsidies they in turn receive from household fuel bills. But we would ask everyone to stand back and look beyond short term gain and consider the long term future of the Flow Country. This is a landscape of striking natural beauty and international ecological importance. In its Commission of Inquiry into Peatlands, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) concluded that peatlands are 'the single most important carbon store in the UK' and that 'a loss of only 5% of peatland would equate to the UK's total annual man-made greenhouse gas emissions."

"As an alternative to leaving the future of this area in the hands of a profit-driven energy company, we would like to see national investment in the restoration of peatland and other natural habitats in the Flow Country. This would be a more effective way of tackling carbon emissions than building inefficient windfarms on peatland. We believe it would also offer a more secure economic future for local people, and would have the potential to create more sustainable long term employment in the area."

#### FRACKING

A report from Durham University reviewed existing geological data for the 15 UK National Parks and found only four where fracking could be considered. The two Scottish National Parks, Cairngorms and Loch Lomond & the Trossachs have geology which rules out fracking.

#### UCG

The *Press & Journal* reported that Cluff Natural Resources has received a third licence from the

Coal Authority for underground coal gasification (UCG). The new licence is for 30 square miles of the Frances section of the Firth of Forth near Wemyss in Fife. The company already has licences for the Forth off Largo and Kincardine, where it is developing a production test site.

#### SOLAR FARM

BWE Partnership is to build a 9.5 MW commercial-scale solar park at Carmyllie, near Arbroath in Angus [Jun 14]. The solar photovoltaic park will be built on farmland, construction work will start at the end of this year. The New Mains of Guynd solar park will start generating electricity early next year, and will be Scotland's first large commercial solar park.



## RECREATION & TOURISM

#### LOCH LOMOND

The Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority has unanimously approved comprehensive plans to protect the Park's environment following a public consultation [Jan 15]. The core element of the proposals include the creation of four 'byelaw zones' covering 3.7% of the Park's total area, where camping would only be allowed by permit and would be completely banned during some periods of the year to allow the ground to recover. Around 300 camping places will also be created through a mixture of camping permits and low-cost campsites, in the first year in which the new byelaws would be operating. This is in addition to a continued focus on education around responsible camping and promotion of the access and recreation opportunities throughout the Park.

The plans were developed following increasing evidence that the Park is being severely degraded by the relentless pressure from high volumes of campers repeatedly visiting the same popular areas giving these fragile areas no time to recover. Further damage has been caused by the irresponsible behaviour of some visitors, including littering, lochshores being used as a toilet, trees being cut down for firewood, abandonment of entire campsites and summer-long unauthorised caravan encampments in laybys.

Iain Rennick of SNH said: "We agree that a new approach is needed in tackling some of the visitor management issues in the Park, and that this needs to involve a mix of existing and new measures. We particularly welcome the intention to invest in new camping facilities, as this will ensure that the high demand at peak periods is catered for and a better overall visitor experience is provided."

The plans will now go before Scottish Government ministers.

Richard Graham, of St Fillans Community Council, said: "It is quite clear when you look at the transformation at East Loch Lomond, that the legislation works. People who come to enjoy themselves and use the Park for the numerous activities available here, have nothing to fear from these changes. Quite the reverse, these changes mean that visitors will be able to have a significantly better experience. It's heart-breaking to see the damage being done to such a beautiful area, the rubbish being left here and the constant anti-social behaviour."

Andrea Partridge, of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, said: "Many thousands of people will be affected by these proposals, from the climber and walker to touring cyclists and kayakers. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 was a landmark piece of legislation and yet it is

being eroded by a National Park Authority which has a primary aim to promote understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public."

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

- Extensive work has been undertaken in the National Park as part of the park's outdoor recreation plan. 450 miles of existing walking and cycling paths have been linked with new sections at Duncryne Hill in Gartocharn; links on the John Muir Way; links to the forest in Gartmore; a new cycle path in Strathyre and a new off-road path between Drymen and Milton of Buchanan. New bridges have also been installed. Waterbus services on Loch Lomond have been extended to include access to the West Highland Way and other popular trails.

#### THE GREAT TROSSACHS PATH

The 30 mile Great Trossachs Path runs from Callander to Inversnaid has been opened, and has been named as one of Scotland's Great Trails. Two new visitor gateways along the trail have been opened in the Great Trossachs Forest at Glen Finglas and at Inversnaid. The new long distance path forms the spine of a local trail network and links the West Highland Way to the Rob Roy Way.

#### MENIE LINKS

The *Sunday Herald* reported that the Trump Organisation has lodged four planning applications with Aberdeenshire Council for his golf resort at Menie near Balmedie [Feb 14]. These include plans for 850 houses, 1,900 holiday apartments, a further 18 hole golf course, a staff accommodation block and an extension to the hotel. In 2008, Trump was given outline planning permission for a different development; the consent imposed 46 conditions, together with provision for affordable transport, schools and transport. It is unclear how many of the previous conditions will be applied to the new applications.

Planning consultant Debra Storr, a former Aberdeenshire councillor, said: "It looks like he is trying to avoid the controls imposed in the planning permission, and do more of what he wants rather than what the government wanted." Councillor Martin Ford said that nothing had been built under the 2008 planning consent: "The conditions on the outline consent, for example stipulating the order different elements were to be built, are therefore bypassed. So conditions imposed to prevent Mr Trump simply destroying the Site of Special Scientific Interest and cherry-picking the most profitable elements of his package are not going to apply."



## NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS

#### COAST

Howard Wood, co-founder of the Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST), has received a Goldman Environmental Prize, the first time that it has been awarded in Scotland. COAST has fought against the degradation of marine life in the area of sea surrounding Arran, particularly from scallop dredging and bottom trawling. A No Take Zone was established in Lamlash Bay [Sep 08] and sea around the south of Arran was designated as a Marine Protected Area [Jul 14].

Mr Wood said that more needs to be done to protect MPAs and wants to encourage better marine management for the whole Firth of Clyde, following 'decades of mismanagement.' The prize, £117,000, can be spent by the winner 'to pursue their vision of a renewed and protected environment.'