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## CONSERVATION

### EU FITNESS CHECK

The Joint Links group, representing 100 voluntary organisations across the UK, published a position statement warning that the European Commission's REFIT 'Fitness Check' of the Birds and Habitats Directives is the single biggest threat to UK and European nature and biodiversity in a generation. The Birds and Habitats Directives exist to protect the most important wildlife species and habitats in the UK and Europe. Natura 200 is a network of protected wild places. However, this EU legislation is now under review and the Joint Links group considers that it is at risk of being weakened by those who mistakenly regard them as a block on business and economic growth. In the current political context any revision of the Directives would expose them to prolonged uncertainty and leave the long-term future of Europe's biodiversity vulnerable to short-term political priorities.

The Joint Links group's response to the EC consultation sets out a huge volume of evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of the Directives in protecting nature, providing huge benefits for people and providing a stable framework for responsible businesses.

A public consultation on the Directives has been launched by the EC. Nature Alert, an electronic tool enabling the public to have their say, has been launched by voluntary groups: [www.wildlifetrusts.org/defendnature](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/defendnature)

### WILD DEER

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has published *2014 Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach* (WDNA), setting out what good deer management can deliver for Scotland. It sets out the Scottish Government's strategy for wild deer from 2015 to 2020, building on the 2008 version. It continues to support the vision that wild deer in Scotland should be sustainably managed to benefit the economy, the environment, people and community.

Red, roe, sika and fallow deer are important for wildlife tourism and country sports. Deer stalking is estimated to generate £100m per year for the Scottish economy, annual venison sales are worth about £2m, and wildlife tourism contributes another £127m. In some areas, wild deer damage crops, forestry and protected natural areas. Without natural predators, deer numbers may not be kept in check so culling is needed. Management may be vital for road safety reasons in some areas, particularly in the Central Belt, where deer numbers are increasing.

Jessica Findlay, of SNH, said: "There are many strong social, cultural and economic reasons for managing deer. In the past through to today, stalking deer has reduced the impact of deer on our woodlands and other natural areas, while also helping to support rural communities. The new WDNA reflects this, showing the hard work carried out by people across Scotland to manage wild deer to the benefit of all."

The WDNA sets out the challenges that deer and land managers should focus on over the next five years. The main priorities are based around collaboration & effective deer management, planning and implementation, healthy ecosystems, lowland & urban deer, economic & community development and training and deer welfare. These

priorities include ensuring deer management planning is robust, contributing to the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity, improving understanding of urban deer population dynamics and ensuring a strong skill base in deer management.

A WDNA Action Plan each year will collect and show the actions which a range of organisations will carry out to help deliver Scotland's vision for its wild deer.

See: [bit.ly/1KUVd9m](http://bit.ly/1KUVd9m)

### RUM DEER

SNH has published *Red Deer Research on the Isle of Rum NNR: Management Implications, a Summary of Decades of Research*. This is the world's longest running research study of a deer population. Since 1972, every individual living in one area of the island has been monitored by a research team, first from Cambridge and nowadays from Edinburgh University.

Professor Josephine Pemberton, one of the report authors, said: "The differences between stags and hinds in their responses to variation in weather and density conditions are truly fascinating. Juvenile stags, in particular, are very sensitive to poor conditions, and this has major implications for managing deer populations."

Some of the other key findings include:

- Reducing deer density, especially hind density, increases calving rates, as well as the proportion of stag calves born, the survival rates of calves and yearlings, and antler size
- Simple models show stag numbers are at their highest when hinds are culled at a rate of 10 to 20%
- The warming climate is causing deer to breed earlier each year, by 12 days since 1980
- Weather effects mean that hind and stag numbers can change unpredictably from year to year, so regular counting and a responsive culling regime is crucial

See: [bit.ly/1AjNQJE](http://bit.ly/1AjNQJE); <http://rumdeer.biology.ed.ac.uk>

### WILDCAT AREAS

Staff have been appointed for six priority areas for Scottish wildcat conservation; the Angus Glens, Strathbogie in Aberdeenshire, Strathavon in Moray and Morvern, Strathpeffer and Dulnain in the Highlands. GPS tracking of tagged wildcats and hybrids – cats which are a mix of wild and feral animals – is key to understanding the cats' movements. The project involves a number of organisations including SNH and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland.

### FAVOURABLE CONDITION

SNH has published *The Proportion of Scotland's Protected Sites in Favourable Condition 2015*. The latest figures show that, of the over 5,000 Scottish natural features on protected nature sites, 79.3% are in favourable condition. This figure represents a 0.5% rise in the proportion of natural features in favourable condition between 2014 and 2015. There has been a 7.9% increase since assessment reporting began in 2005.

There are three broad types of protected features: earth science, which covers geological outcrops and landforms, fossil beds and caves (97.7% in favourable condition, 0.3% increase on 2014); species (76.2% in favourable condition, a 0.1% increase since 2014) and habitats (77.2%



in favourable condition, a 1.1% increase on last year). Of particular note were woodland features where the proportion of natural features in favourable condition rose by 2.5%.

Invasive species and over-grazing are the main challenges to improving condition from unfavourable to favourable. The proportion of assessments recording invasive species as a negative pressure has risen for the past three years to 19.7% in 2014/15. This includes both non-native species, such as rhododendron in woodlands, and native species, such as birch encroaching on to raised bog habitats.

There was a fall in the proportion of assessments recording over-grazing by wild herbivores and/or domestic stock to 18.1%. See: [bit.ly/1B1c3qM](http://bit.ly/1B1c3qM)

**WOLVES**

Chris Packham, presenter of the Springwatch programme on television, said in an interview with the *Radio Times*: “Given that we have 350,000 roe deer in Scotland, reintroducing a predator to have an impact on that population would be good. There have been only two fatalities since 2000, both in the US, and certainly none in Europe. What we would like to move towards is a more tolerant society that understands the fact that to have a sustainable working landscape we need large predators.

“We have lived without them in the UK for such a long time that people are very resistant to the idea of them coming back, which is a shame because we do know better and we do need them, and it would be tremendously exciting. Think of the eagles that we have put back into Scotland. The eco-touristic value of those birds runs into millions of pounds *per* bird. If we did have wolves, which would have to be in Scotland, and lynx then lots of people would pay to go to see them and they would be a great asset.”

Douglas McAdam, of Scottish Land & Estates, said: “Despite being much-talked about, no official proposal has been presented for the reintroduction of wolves but if it did, there are likely to be a considerable number of issues for farmers and land managers. We are sceptical that many in rural Scotland would welcome this.”

**BEAVERS**

Trees for Life said that the reintroduction of beavers to Scotland after almost 500 years is a historic opportunity that could bring major environmental and economic benefits to Scotland, including by generating millions of pounds through eco-tourism. Reintroducing this native animal would allow the UK to play ecological catch-up with other European nations, 25 of which have already reintroduced the beaver with Sweden leading the way as long ago as 1922. The UK is one of only seven countries still lacking an officially-sanctioned wild beaver population.

“The beaver deserves to be welcomed back to Scotland with open arms. These remarkable ecosystem engineers can transform the health of our rivers and forest ecosystems, and could benefit communities through an estimated £2 million tourism revenue annually. We are legally obliged by European directives to consider the beaver’s reintroduction, and – having caused the animal’s extinction – we have an ethical obligation too. Reintroducing beavers to Scotland would be the right thing to do and a historic leap forwards for rewilding – the restoration of our damaged ecosystems.”

• Lindsay Mackinlay, of the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), said: “The beaver is a crucial element in our countryside which plays an important role in the conservation of other wildlife. Conservationists call it a keystone species

because its presence has such a major impact on the natural environment and its wildlife. Scotland is currently much the poorer without it.”

An NTS policy document described the Eurasian beaver as ‘a key element of our native fauna’ and says that its introduction will bring ‘many significant benefits to Scotland’s countryside, in terms of restoring native ecosystems, contributing to biodiversity, enhancing natural wetland processes, and promoting tourism.’

The NTS supports the conservation of the existing beaver populations in Argyll and Tayside and backs a managed expansion of those populations into other areas. However, it also calls for a ‘national mitigation plan’ which could include culling beavers should that be required.

**RUM RATS**

An SNH commissioned report has highlighted the potential impact of introduced brown rats on colonies of Manx shearwater seabirds on the Isle of Rum. The island is a National Nature Reserve (NNR) managed by SNH and also has introduced brown rats which predate Manx shearwaters, a burrowing bird. Rum has around a quarter of the world’s breeding population, 100,000 breeding pairs.

A project has investigated the impacts of rats in the colony and whether an intensive rat eradication campaign is justified or necessary. The cost of removing rats from Rum is estimated at around £4.6m.

*SNH Commissioned Report 697: The role of brown rat (Rattus norvegicus) predation in determining breeding success of Manx shearwaters (Puffinus puffinus) on Rum.* See: [bit.ly/1F5uDWR](http://bit.ly/1F5uDWR)

**SEA EAGLES**

The *BBC News* website reported that the number of white-tailed (sea) eagles in Scotland has reached 100 breeding pairs. A reintroduction programme began in 1975 and the 100th breeding pair nested on Hoy in Orkney, although the young birds were unsuccessful in raising chicks this year [Apr 15].

**HOUSE SPARROWS**

*The Herald* reported that RSPB Scotland, Glasgow City Council and the University of Glasgow are to try to identify where there are surviving house sparrows, which have virtually disappeared in built up areas. It is hoped to identify the causes of their decline, and to suggest sparrow-friendly gardening suggestions that will also help to improve the environment. Govan High School has been appointed as an ‘ambassador school’ for house sparrows.

 **FARMING**

**RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

The Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2014-2020 has been formally approved by Europe. The programme is co-funded by the Scottish Government and European Union; it will provide £1.3 billion of support for Scottish farming, food production, rural communities and the environment between now and the end of the decade.

Jonnie Hall, of NFU Scotland, said: “The £1.3 billion programme is hugely important to Scottish farmers and crofters, and will be needed to complement the direct support schemes in Pillar 1, where funds under the Basic Payment Scheme are under pressure. The decision taken by the Scottish Government to transfer 9.5% of Pillar 1 funds into the rural development pot means that access to Pillar 2 schemes was a priority for our members. Continuation of the existing Less Favoured Area Support Scheme over the next few

years will be crucial to livestock producers in our vulnerable areas and many will be looking at what the agri-environment package may have to offer.”

See: [www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP)

 **WOODLANDS**

**GLEN AFFRIC CATTLE**

Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland has restocked Glen Affric with 20 native Highland cattle for the summer as part of its conservation grazing programme. It is hoped that the cows will break up the moss and felling site debris, opening the ground up for tree seedlings to establish.

Giles Brockman, of FC Scotland, said: “One of our big conservation objectives is to improve the landscape but one of the main factors that works against us is the uncontrolled browsing of habitats. This is why we manage deer closely in order to limit the amount of damage that can be done. But there is still a place for controlled grazing – and that’s where the cattle come in. Thick ground vegetation can crowd out and greatly slow down woodland regeneration, so the trick is getting that fine balance between too much browsing and not enough browsing. We can very closely control the impact of cattle on the area and ensure that their browsing and trampling are used as essential tools in conservation habitat management.

“Outside the fences, browsing levels are still too high, but we are slowly starting to see tree regeneration taking hold in places, which indicates that our management is heading in the right direction. But control and experimentation is the key to this long term project. For example, the montane willow colonies on the upper crags in Glean nan Ciche are now recognised as one of the best sites in Scotland and we can only continue to protect and enhance them through deer management. However, on the other hand, we also intend to remove fences from one fully developed enclosure, let the deer back in and see how the area reacts. It is only through this sort of active experimentation and testing different management theories that we will be able to find the best solution for maintaining habitats and ensuring a healthy level of biodiversity.”

The main enclosure within Glean nan Ciche has filled up with competing vegetation which has slowed the natural regeneration of woodland.

**ASH DIEBACK**

FC Scotland reported that ash dieback, *Chalara fraxinea*, has been detected in Glen Nant ancient oak woods, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a National Nature Reserve, south east of Oban in Argyll. Glen Nant is part of one of the most extensive oak woodlands in the UK.

Ash trees in two locations in Morvern have also been affected by the disease. The three sites had been designated as ‘sheltered areas’ in FC Scotland’s action plan to control the disease.

The environment minister, Aileen McLeod, has asked FC Scotland to review the *Chalara* Action Plan, with advice from the Scottish Tree Health Advisory Group, to assess what more can be done to promote adaptive action and to consider the appropriateness of current actions within the sheltered and buffer areas.

**FORSINARD FLOWS**

*The Herald* reported that RSPB Scotland has felled around 3,300 tonnes of mixed conifers, mainly lodgepole pine, on 40 hectares on two sites in Forsinard Flows reserve in the Flow Country, Sutherland. Both sites are on RSPB Scotland land but the felling of around 100,000 trees, part of a project to restore bog and peatland, was unauthorised by FC Scotland. RSPB Scotland

failed to renew its logging licence because of an administrative error, and could be liable for a fine of up to £9m as well as being ordered to restore the felled trees; it has now been issued with a new licence and awaits a response on a potential prosecution from FC Scotland.



## FISHPARTING & FISHERIES

### SEA-LICE MEDICATION

The *Sunday Herald* reported that Teflubenzuron, used in food pellets for caged salmon, is due to be withdrawn from the market. Teflubenzuron is used to control sea-lice infestations in farmed salmon. Pharmaq, the company that markets Teflubenzuron under the brand name Calicide, said that marketing in the UK 'would be voluntarily stopped' and the manufacturer, Skretting, said that it 'will no longer be offered in Scotland pending further review with all stakeholders.'

Salmon excrete the chemical, which then pollutes the seabed around fishfarms at levels that can be lethal to marine wildlife.

The Institute of Marine Research and the National Institute of Nutrition & Seafood Research in Bergen, in a paper published in *Science of the Total Environment*, said that high concentrations of Teflubenzuron were found in sediment around a salmon farm; it was estimated that it took 170 days for Teflubenzuron pollution to reduce by half, suggesting that it will persist in the marine environment for years. The drug was found in most of the wildlife tested, including worms, crabs and fish. Teflubenzuron is designed to prevent animals from making chitin, a tough cellulose material vital for renewing shells. Levels in king crabs, shrimp and two species of lobster were high enough to kill them as they naturally shed and replace their shells.

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) stated that environmental quality standards for the drug were breached once in 2011, six times in 2012 and six times in 2013.

The Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisation (SSPO) said that Teflubenzuron was 'not an issue in salmon farming in Scotland today because it is so rarely used.'

Guy Linley-Adams, of the Salmon & Trout Association, warned that the next 'chemical fix' for sea-lice would also be likely to damage marine wildlife. He said: "Fishfarming must be moved into closed containment, where sea-lice can be controlled without toxic chemicals being discharged into the wider environment."

Don Staniford from the Global Alliance Against Industrial Aquaculture said: "You don't have to be a rocket scientist to understand that a chemical designed to kill sea lice also kills other crustaceans. SEPA should now ban all the other toxic chemicals used on salmon farms which kill shellfish. Teflubenzuron is just one of the lethal cocktail of chemicals used by Scotland's toxic salmon farming industry."

Douglas Sinclair, of SEPA, said: "Teflubenzuron has not been used by fishfarms in Scotland since 2013. SEPA recently discussed the residues of Teflubenzuron arising from the use of the medicine in Scotland with the company which markets the product. The company agreed to remove the product from the market in Scotland. Further use is therefore unlikely."

• The *Sunday Herald* reported that the Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre (SAIC) has launched its first research programme [Jun 14]. The 42 month, £4m project aims to reduce the

widespread use of environmentally damaging chemicals to control sea-lice by adding ballan wrasse to salmon cages. Marine Harvest, Scottish Sea Farms and Biomar have part-funded the project, which also has in-kind support from Stirling University.

One study has claimed that the cost to the industry of dealing with sea-lice is between 7 and 10% of total production value. The Scottish Government puts the mortality rate for the 40 million salmon put to sea in 2013 at 9.2 million, or 23%. However, there are no figures for the number of those that die from sea-lice infestation [Dec 14].

Professor Herve Migaud, of Stirling University, said that a preliminary study carried out over the last three years using wild wrasse established that the fish can co-habit with salmon in the same pens. It was, for example, established that salmon and wrasse have their own feeding patterns and do not eat each others' food. However, the large-scale use of wild wrasse would not be sustainable and so farmed wrasse are being used in the second stage study.

The project will focus on developing wrasse hatcheries, establishing good husbandry, promoting fish welfare and improving understanding of the biology and life cycle of the wrasse.

Heather Jones, of SAIC, said that the cleaner fish project could help the Scottish aquaculture industry reach its target, set in 2009, of increasing farmed fish production to 210,000 tonnes by 2020, a 30% increase from the 162,000 tonnes estimated to have been harvested in 2014.

Scott Landsburgh, of SSPO, said: "We as an industry can't eliminate sea-lice as they are endemic in the wild so we will continue to use mitigation measures, such as using cleaner fish and washing fish in hydrogen peroxide at a low concentration to get rid of lice. If the project is successful it could lead to higher yields at fishfarms and that would make them more productive."

### WILD FISHERIES

The Scottish Government has published a paper which will result in a sustainable management system of wild fisheries and sets out the Scottish Government's response to the independent Wild Fisheries Review [Oct 14]. It commits to developing a national wild fisheries strategy for the management of all freshwater and migratory fish species.

A consultation seeks views on a number of broad policy options including the balance of functions between local and national levels, funding, science and skills, regulation and compliance and promoting access and opportunity and careers in fishing. The consultation concludes on 7 August. See: [bit.ly/1ELBnZK](http://bit.ly/1ELBnZK)

### OUTER HEBRIDES SHELLFISH

New conservation measures to ensure the long-term sustainability of shellfish stocks in the Outer Hebrides have been introduced. The minimum landing size of key species has been increased: brown crab from 140mm to 150mm; velvet crab from 65mm to 70mm and lobster from 87mm to 90mm. The landing of female lobsters larger than 145mm, and those missing one or both claws, will also be restricted. Local fishermen land catches worth an average £2.7m per year.

### SALMON NETTING

Following negotiations between four fishery boards and the Usan Salmon Company, commercial salmon and sea trout netting in the Ythan Estuary in Aberdeenshire and on the coast to the south will not take place during 2015 [Apr 14]. The netting rights had been purchased by

Usan in 2014, but have not been exercised since 1997. There was concern amongst local anglers that renewed netting would do significant damage to already depleted salmon and sea trout stocks.

Mark Andrew, of the Ythan District Fishery Board, said: "Usan, appreciating the sensitivities regarding netting in the Ythan, offered to refrain for the whole of the 2015 season if a compensation payment could be agreed. Following a successful negotiation we have now paid the company a considerable sum. In recognition of the mixed stocks nature of the fishery, four fishery boards have contributed – the Ythan, the Dee, the Don and the Spey."

• The *Press & Journal* reported that the Ness & Beaully Salmon Fishery Board said that the two largest net and coble operators in the Ness district have agreed to keep their operations closed for a third successive season, through to May 2016. The netters are paid compensation not to fish.

### EEL DEATHS

The *BBC News* website reported that a number of eels have been found dead, or dying, by anglers on the River Dee and the Spey. Tests on the eels are being carried out at the Marine Scotland Science laboratory in Aberdeen to determine the cause of death. Anglers throughout Scotland have been asked to look out for dead eels; river managers fear that the eels had an illness which could transfer to salmon as the affected eels have noticeable patches or lesion on their skin.

### SHELLFISH

Marine Scotland Science has published the *Scottish Shellfish Farm Production Survey 2014*. The publication details statistics on the employment, production and value of shellfish from Scottish Shellfish Farms.

The production tonnage of mussels rose by 14% from 6,757 tonnes in 2013 to 7,683 tonnes in 2014. This is the highest level of mussel production ever recorded in Scotland. The production of Pacific oyster shells increased by 79% from the 2013 total. Pacific oyster production for on-growing has increased by 9% from 6,216,000 shells in 2013 to 6,792,000 shells in 2014. Employment levels increased by 4% from 2013, with 345 full, part-time and casual staff employed in 2014. The overall estimated value of the industry increased from £8.9m in 2013 to £10.5m in 2014.

See: <http://bit.ly/1JVkAZV>

### SHETLAND FISH

The *BBC News* website reported that figures compiled by NAFC Marine Centre in Scalloway showed that the value of fish landed in Shetland in 2014 rose by 4% to £76.2m. More than 300,000 boxes of whitefish (16,306 tonnes) were landed at Lerwick and Scalloway, an increase of 8% on the previous year. A total of 60,149 tonnes of pelagic fish were brought ashore.

The volume of shellfish landings fell in 2014, although their value increased to give a turnover of £3.9m. Turnover from whitefish was up 8% at £27.15m, while pelagic landings rose by 2% to £45.16m.

Brian Isbister, of Shetland Fish Producers' Organisation, said that many fish stocks were currently more abundant around Shetland than they had been for many years and their quality was very high.

### FISH LANDINGS

Scotland's chief statistician has published *The Provisional Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics, 2014* which show that the quantity of fish landed by Scottish registered vessels in 2014 increased by 31%, and the value of fish landed increased by 19%, the highest value in the last ten years.

Scottish registered vessels landed 480,400 tonnes of fish with a value of £513m, with 61% of the total volume and 72% of the total value being landed in Scotland.

2014 saw the highest value and volume of pelagic landings for the last ten years. The total value of pelagic landings increased, by 44%, to £220m and there was a 63% increase in the volume of pelagic landings to 330,400 tonnes. Mackerel is the most valuable stock to the Scottish fleet, at £195m it accounted for 38% of the total value of Scottish landings. The volume of mackerel landed by Scottish registered vessels in 2014 was 239,500 tonnes, 79% higher than in 2013. Of the total volume of mackerel landed by Scottish vessels in 2014, 49% was landed abroad, higher than the previous year in which 45% of the volume of mackerel landed abroad.

The average price of mackerel landed abroad decreased 19% to £808 *per tonne* in 2014, whereas the average price of mackerel landed in the UK decreased 8% to £819 *per tonne*. In 2014, the volume of herring landed by Scottish vessels increased 6% to 61,000 tonnes. The value of herring to the Scottish fleet was £18m, 19% lower than in 2013. This was due to a 24% fall in the average price to £301 *per tonne*.

The total value of demersal landings increased 3% to £143m even though there was a 13% decrease in the volume of landings to 88,700 tonnes. This decrease in volume is mainly due to a 59% decrease in the volume of 'other demersal' species landed in 2014, in particular the volume of boarfish and sand eels landed, both of which decreased by 99%. There were 50 species of 'other demersal' fish landed, compared to 67 in 2013.

Haddock, monkfish and cod are the most valuable demersal stocks to the Scottish fleet. The value of haddock increased 9% in 2014 to £42m, despite a 12% decrease in the volume landed to 30,000 tonnes. This increase in value was due to a 23% increase in the average price to £1,381 *per tonne*. The value of monkfish landings was £25m, a 21% increase from 2013. The volume of monkfish landed increased 26% to 9,000 tonnes, however the average price decreased 4% to £2,831 *per tonne*. The volume of cod landed in 2014 was similar to the volume landed in 2013, although the value of cod increased 3% to £22m and the average price increased by 2% to £2,024 *per tonne*.

The volume and value of landings of plaice, saithe and whiting in 2014 all fell compared to 2013, whereas the volume and value of hake increase. The volume of ling landed in 2014 was similar to 2013, however value of ling decreased by 8% to £4m. This was due to an 8% decrease in the average price to £1,236 *per tonne*. The value of megrim in 2014 was similar to that in 2013, despite an 8% fall in volume landed because the average price increased 9% to £2,605 *per tonne*.

The total value of shellfish increased 9% to £150m, while the volume of shellfish landed decreased 1% to 61,400 tonnes. Nephrops (Norway lobster/langoustine) are the most valuable shellfish stock, accounting for 50% of shellfish landings, and the second most valuable stock overall, to the Scottish fleet. In 2014, the total value of nephrops has increased 15% to £75m. This is due to an 11% increase in volume landed to 20,000 tonnes and a 4% increase in average price to £3,647 *per tonne*. The value of other shellfish stocks has increased from 2013, except for queen scallops. The volume of queen scallops landed was 7,000 tonnes, a 32% decrease. The value of queen scallops decreased by 36% to £3m and the average price decreased by 7% to £462 *per tonne*.

The number of active Scottish-based fishing

vessels in 2014 was 2,029, an increase of nine vessels from 2013. The number of over 10 metre vessels fell to 583, 11 less vessels than the previous year. The shellfish sector makes up 63% of the over 10 metre fleet and had an increase of one vessel, to 368 vessels; the pelagic sector decreased by two vessels and the demersal sector decreased by ten vessels.

There were 1,446 10 metre and under vessels in the Scottish fleet, an increase of 20 vessels. All 10 metre and under vessel groups saw an increase in the number of vessels; five vessels came in to the nephrops trawl sector, 11 vessels came in to the creel fishing sector and the other 10 metre and under vessels increased by four vessels.

The uptake of quota was over 101% for West of Scotland mackerel. North Sea mackerel and North Sea herring both exceeded 97% and West of Scotland herring was under 92%. Quota uptake was 98% and above for the key demersal fish stocks in the North Sea, with the exception of North Sea whiting (under 94%) and North Sea monkfish (92%). Uptake of North Sea plaice was just under 66%. West of Scotland quota uptake for haddock was over 100% while monkfish was 98% and saithe 85%. Quota uptake for North Sea nephrops was just under 81%, while uptake for West of Scotland nephrops was 76%.

See: [bit.ly/1RIKCD5](http://bit.ly/1RIKCD5)

#### GREY SEALS & COD

The *BBC News* website reported that research by the University of Strathclyde has shown that grey seals are compromising the recovery of cod stocks off the west coast of Scotland. Grey seal populations increased significantly after the passing of conservation laws in the 1970s but, more recently, their numbers in the west of Scotland have levelled off at around 30,000 to 40,000. The seals are believed to consume nearly 7,000 tonnes of cod each year off the west of Scotland, where landed catches now amount to only a few hundred tonnes. The study concluded that the amount of cod being eaten by seals was preventing stocks of the fish from recovering, although cod form only around 10% of the total weight of fish eaten by seals.

Dr Robin Cook, who led the study, said: "It appears that fishing played a major part in the decline of the cod but increasing predation by seals is preventing the stock from recovering, even though the amount of fishing has reduced. Fishery managers face striking a difficult balance. With high predation by seals, the cod stock will struggle to improve and the recovery plan may not deliver the expected results. We may have to live with smaller cod stocks if we want to protect our seals."

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that an EU plan to aid recovery of cod stocks placed strict restrictions on the amount of time fishermen can spend at sea as stocks fell to 5% of what they were in 1981 but the researchers are now urging a change in the plan. In some years before the recovery plan was in force, fishing accounted for around 50% of the total weight of the cod stock but the study found that, although fishing has now halved, predation by seals has rapidly increased, with the animals eating up more than 40% of the total stock.

Dr Steven Holmes, of the European Commission Joint Research Centre, who co-authored the report, said: "Seal populations have increased on the west coast of Scotland and they also seem to be able to find the cod just as easily, even though the stock is now small. This makes the remaining stock very vulnerable to predation."

Duncan MacInnes, of Western Isles Fishermen's

Association, said: "Commercial fishermen have been suffering the pain of cod recovery measures for many years, with large sea closures to the north of Lewis for over ten years. In addition, fishermen have only been allowed to land cod as a 1% by-catch.

"Clearly, the increase in grey seal populations over the years has resulted in them being out of balance with recovering cod stocks, to such an extent that they now consume cod valued at over £14m – which is more than the value of all annual landings at any of the ports in the west of Scotland. Landings into the Western Isles are in the region of £10m and support around 400 fishermen and 200 onshore jobs, showing the extra employment that could be created if additional catching opportunities were available to the fishing industry. The problem with depleted cod stocks on the west coast will continue until the government addresses the seal population and introduces some management measures to control seal numbers and accepts that stocks will never recover by simply reducing activity by fishing vessels."

The research has been published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*.



## MARINE

### GREAT WHITE SHARKS

The *Herald* reported that an expedition is to try to find Great White sharks off the Outer Hebrides. Richard Pierce, of the Shark Conservation Society and the Shark Trust, is convinced that Great Whites are 'occasional vagrants' in Hebridean waters and believes the conditions down the west coast of Scotland are perfect for the species; shoals of bluefin tuna, regularly turning up off the islands, makes it likely that the predator will be following the prey [Mar 15].



## POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

### LAND REFORM

An analysis of the land reform consultation has been published [Feb 15]. The analysis showed that 75% of respondents agreed with the proposal to set up a Land Reform Commission; 87% of respondents agreed with the proposal to introduce a land rights and responsibilities policy; 88% of respondents agreed with the proposal to improve information on land, its value and its ownership and 71% of respondents agreed with the proposal to remove the exemption from business rates for shooting and deerstalking.

The minister for Environment, Climate Change & Land Reform, Dr Aileen McLeod said: "Through the Land Reform Bill, one of our key aims is to remove barriers to communities' sustainable development by ensuring greater collaboration between communities and land owners."

The land reform consultation set out a range of proposals around the future of land governance in Scotland, including establishing a Land Reform Commission; seeking views on modernising how Common Good should be managed, used and transferred; improving transparency and accountability of land ownership; the removal of business rate exemptions for shooting and deerstalking estates.

See: [bit.ly/1QPFR64](http://bit.ly/1QPFR64); [bit.ly/1JN1AdN](http://bit.ly/1JN1AdN)

Scottish Land & Estates (SL&E) has concerns over the proposed new powers for Scottish ministers or another public body 'to direct private landowners to take action' if they are preventing sustainable development in a local area, if necessary by forcing them to lease or sell their land. David Johnstone, of SL&E, said at an Edinburgh conference on

delivering public benefit from private land, that landowners were already meeting the challenges set-down by government head on, but that more needed to be done to cut through 'time worn stereotypes' to demonstrate the benefits to all of private landownership.

He said: "There is very compelling evidence right across Scotland to demonstrate the public benefit that private landowners deliver. It is there for all to see in tourism, energy, housing, conservation and a host of other sectors, many of which provide no commercial return for landowners. The challenge we face is to break down the stereotype image that is so convenient for those who are critical of the very existence of estates. They do not wish to acknowledge what is happening on the ground and what can be achieved in the future."

Mr Johnstone said that at a local level, there was a great deal of recognition of the contribution of landowners and their businesses. He claimed that, in the national political debate, local recognition 'is often overshadowed by arguments rooted in ideology.'

Dr Aileen McLeod, giving the keynote speech at the conference, said: "Our vision for land reform is that Scotland's land delivers the greatest benefit to all the people of Scotland. We fully recognise the expertise and role of landowners in managing land. But we want to see greater collaboration between communities and landowners, with agreement over how priorities and benefits should be delivered from land. I believe that the reforms proposed in the land reform bill will benefit all those with a stake in the future of land ownership and land management in Scotland."

**CARLOWAY**

The residents of Carloway Estate on Lewis have officially taken control of 11,400 acres (4,600 ha) of land where they live and work [May 14].

**PAIRC ESTATE**

People living on the 26,775 acre Pairc Estate in Lewis have finalised a community buyout of the privately-owned estate [May 14]. Residents launched Scotland's first hostile buyout four years ago, before an agreement was reached with landowner, Barry Lomas, late in 2013. Funding of the £500,000 purchase was provided by the Scottish Land Fund, Highlands & Islands Enterprise and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

**HORTICULTURAL PEAT**

A motion raised in the Scottish Parliament by Rob Gibson MSP, that the damaging practice of horticultural peat extraction should end, received cross-party support.

Commercial peat extraction is damaging and destroying some of Scotland's valuable raised bogs with applications for commercial peat extraction continuing in the planning system. Peat-free composts are commercially available and peat is not essential for successful horticulture.

 **GENERAL ENVIRONMENT**

**COLL CONSTRUCTION**

The Herald reported that Gallanach Green Generation Ltd has permission to build a wind turbine a short distance from Gallanach Beach on the island of Coll in the Inner Hebrides. An appeal to allow machinery and equipment to be taken to the site on a single track road was rejected last summer. A landing barge has now arrived on the beach to unload construction machinery and aggregate and rock pecker machines began to build an alternative road to serve the turbine site.

The beach is a breeding area for seals. Argyll & Bute Council served an interim interdict on the landowner, Neil Smith, a director of Gallanach Green Generation Ltd, ordering the work to stop.

**RUM MOTH**

The BBC News website reported that the rare belted beauty moth was recorded by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) staff at the Rum National Nature Reserve after a ten year absence of the species from the island. Butterfly Conservation said that the species is only found at a very few sites in western Scotland, England and Wales.

**T IN THE PARK**

Perth & Kinross Council has approved the proposal to move the T in the Park music festival to Strathallan Castle from Balado [Apr 15]. The event will take place in July, and has been approved for the next three years, so its impact locally can be fully assessed.

Councillors discussed a report from development quality manager Nick Brian, who had recommended they give approval to the event only in the short term. During that period the impact of the festival on the area will be assessed in detail, informing a decision on its longer-term future at a later date.

The report included a list of 45 conditions which would need to be met in order for the event to go ahead. One of the stipulated conditions was the implementation of a detailed Osprey Management Plan, including monitoring of the nests, banning the use of fireworks at the festival and any use of access tracks adjacent to the nests. Protection plans for animals including bats, otter and red squirrels have also been put in place. Setup or clearing work should not take place at night, and there are restrictions on the amount of light and noise overnight which could disturb animals nearby. No statutory consultees had raised a formal objection to the proposals.

Two public consultations on the application were held, with some environmental groups and local residents critical. The local authority's development management committee said that it reviewed the consultation responses and that the development complies with the relevant provisions of the development plan.

A Survation poll, commissioned by T in the Park, found that 62% of people living around the proposed site for the music festival, wanted the planning application for the popular music festival to be approved.

86% of those polled said that the festival would have a positive impact on the local economy, while 80% thought that TV and press coverage during the event would be good for the wider area. 62% felt that sufficient steps could be taken to protect wildlife and the environment.

**POLLUTION PROSECUTION**

SITA UK Ltd pled guilty to breaching licensed conditions on leachate volume at the Binn Landfill site in Glenfarg, Perthshire and was fined £20,000 at Perth Sheriff Court. Leachate is a potentially polluting liquid.

**OVERBURNS QUARRY**

The Sunday Herald reported that Patersons Quarries is to submit a further planning application for phased extraction of 3.3 million tonnes of sand and gravel at Overburns Farm near Tinto Hill, South Lanarkshire. Patersons' applications have been rejected four times since 2009 by the local council, the Scottish Government and the Court of Session. The new application is much the same as previous ones, except that one side of a loch created by the quarry would be designed to look

less artificial. Patersons contended that was the key reason the last application had been turned down.

The Clyde River Action Group fears that the quarry will cause pollution in the River Clyde, damage wildlife and ruin the landscape.

Clare Symonds, of Planning Democracy, said: "This is planning permission by attrition and it's not acceptable. What sort of planning system forces individuals and groups into an endless battle to prevent an unwanted or controversial development, because the developer is able to simply submit another application again and again and again?"

Claudia Beamish MSP urged ministers to strengthen the law to protect communities. She said: "I am deeply troubled by the conduct of the developer in this case. It simply cannot be right for developers to use the planning system to wear down opposition until they get their way."

Kemp Lindsey, of Patersons, argued that it would be unfair to bar companies from resubmitting applications for rejected developments. The Overburns quarry was needed to replace its existing operation at Cowie near Stirling, which was due to run out in two years. The new quarry would have 'minimal environmental impact' and there were previously no objections from statutory environmental agencies. The quarry would be active for ten or 11 years only and then would be restored to become a nature reserve.

**PLANNING DEMOCRACY**

The campaigning charity Planning Democracy held a conference, *Planning: The People's Perspective*, focused on the demand from communities and environmental charities for an overhaul of the Scottish planning system to allow for Equal Rights of Appeal.

Helen McDade, of the John Muir Trust (JMT), said: "Those objecting to a development – whether an incinerator, a wind farm, an open-cast mine or a major housebuilding programme – have no redress other than to take legal action, which is prohibitively expensive for most groups. In contrast developers have an automatic right appeal if their application is rejected. This is fundamentally unfair, and it is to the credit of Planning Democracy that they have managed to pull together a diverse coalition of groups to call for level playing field ...

"We believe the Shetland example illuminates a wider problem with the system [Feb 15]. Shetland Council is joint developer with a huge stake in the Viking windfarm application. Hardly surprisingly, they failed to object to an application in which they had a major financial interest. This meant there was no obligation on the Scottish Government to hold a Public Local Inquiry. And when the government approved the application, those in the community objecting to the application had no right of appeal. Thus the biggest the windfarm north of the Central Belt was approved with no opportunity for public scrutiny. The JMT believes that there can be no social or environmental justice until communities and environmental charities have the same rights as developers."

**A9 DUALLING**

The Strathspey & Badenoch Herald reported that hairy wood ant nests are to be translocated from three sites along the Balavil/Dalraddy stretch of the A9, during the upgrade of the Inverness/Perth trunk road. A receptor site has been chosen which has no existing wood ant colonies, and supplementary feeding will be provided. However, the Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group (BSCG) is concerned that unmarked nests may have been overlooked by Transport Scotland's ecologists.

Dr Gus Jones, of BSCG, said: "Translocation experiments for wood ants in Strathspey have a

poor track record. Monitoring of the outcomes has been seriously inadequate and needs to be much better this time. There are precious few hotspots for wood ants. Wood ants with other vulnerable wildlife could readily benefit from investment in appropriately designed green bridges across the upgraded A9."

### CAIRNGORMS HOUSING

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) has agreed to the one modification directed by the Scottish Government regarding Tulloch Homes' plans for housing in Carrbridge [Mar 15]. Both the Boys Brigade Field and adjacent woodland is to be included within the boundary of housing allocation in the new Local Development Plan, against the planning committee and Scottish Government Reporter's recommendations.

Tulloch had brought forward three planning applications for 96 or 117 houses on the site, all of which had been rejected despite the area having been designated for housing in the CNP Local Plan, now superseded by the Local Development Plan. The CNPA said that a challenge to the modification would delay the adoption of the plan by another year, without guarantee of success.

The CNPA and five local councils working within the Park's boundaries will now, for the first time, work to a single development plan for the whole National Park. Dr Gus Jones, of BSCG, said: "This development plan contains some deeply inappropriate allocations that should have no place in any Local Development Plan, let alone a National Park. The plan unnecessarily opens the way for the destruction of significant habitats such as woodland on the Ancient Woodland Inventory, bog woodland and long-established flower-rich meadows. The plan takes remarkably little notice of detailed public concerns on conservation issues raised during what many considered to be a highly unsatisfactory consultation process."

• Reidhaven Estates has lodged an appeal against the CNPA's decision that planning permission had expired for 93 houses in woodlands at Dalfaber near Aviemore [Feb 15].

### PESTICIDES

The Scottish Government scheme to dispose of illegal pesticides which could be used to poison wildlife closed at the end of the month [Feb 15]. The pesticides disposal scheme allowed safe and confidential disposal.

86 requests for collection and disposal were made and 99 substances accepted; the most common requests were for sodium cyanide and strychnine. There were also five requests for disposal of mevinphos, which has been banned since the early 1990s and five requests for disposal of carbofuran, with more than 80 kg accepted for collection so far.

The scheme is supported by the British Association for Shooting & Conservation (Scotland), Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, NFU Scotland, Scottish Association for Country Sports, Scottish Crofting Federation, Scottish Gamekeepers Association and Scottish Land & Estates.

### HEN HARRIERS

The Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime Scotland (PAW Scotland) has asked for any sightings of hen harriers to be reported as part of the Heads Up for Hen Harriers project. Scotland has an estimated 500 hen harrier pairs; illegal persecution, habitat loss and also predation by foxes and crows have been blamed for a fall in numbers. Several national surveys of hen harriers have found that they are doing well in some areas,

but declining or absent all together in others.

Contact: email: [HenHarrier@snh.gov.uk](mailto:HenHarrier@snh.gov.uk);  
telephone: 07767 671973

### UNDERSTANDING PREDATION

A new study, Understanding Predation, is being carried out for Scotland's Moorland Forum. The project has been commissioned to achieve the following objectives by January 2016: review the published scientific evidence of predator-prey interactions in the Scottish context; establish stakeholder knowledge and management experience of predator-prey interactions and to identify and explore the reasons for uncertainties and gaps in comparisons between scientific and local knowledge.

An online questionnaire is being used to gather local ecological knowledge. See: [www.moorlandforum.org.uk](http://www.moorlandforum.org.uk); [www.jottercms.com/showpage.php?id=12411](http://www.jottercms.com/showpage.php?id=12411)

### ROCK CLIMBING & RAPTORS

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) has set up a new system to protect cliff-nesting raptors. There have been a number of incidents where rock climbers have inadvertently intruded on nesting birds of prey during climbs. This may lead to nests being abandoned, eggs failing or chicks falling from the nest.

MCofS already has a 'traffic light' system on its website, which informs climbers which crags have nesting raptors and should be avoided, and which ones are safe to climb. However, it relies on up-to-date reports to be effective. Now, the Scottish Raptor Study Group (SRSG) provides MCofS with regular updates. Climbers are also encouraged to report any raptor sightings to MCofS, which in turn are passed on to the SRSG to add to their records.

See: [www.mcofs.org.uk/nesting-bird-warning.asp](http://www.mcofs.org.uk/nesting-bird-warning.asp)

### BIRD OF PREY PROSECUTION

The *BBC News* website reported that a gamekeeper on the Cardross Estate in Stirlingshire used a gin trap to catch a buzzard. This type of trap has been illegal 'for decades.' James O'Reilly was ordered to carry out 240 hours of unpaid work after having pleaded guilty to four charges under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 at Stirling Sheriff Court, including the use of leg-hold traps and illegal use of snares. The bird of prey had to be humanely destroyed days later.

Sir Archie Orr-Ewing, owner of Cardross Estate, said in a letter to the *The Herald*: "The reputation of the estate has been unjustly tarnished by the publicity around these court proceedings. The estate does not have any involvement whatsoever in the sporting management of the land in question. The area of land where these offences occurred is let on a long-term lease to a third party who has full rights and responsibilities for the management of sporting activity. The gamekeeper is employed by the third party and has never been employed by the estate.

"Having co-operated fully with the authorities during their investigation and having been asked to be a prosecution witness, I am bitterly disappointed that the Crown Office did not see fit to clarify the estate's position in its public statement following the case. Cardross Estate is an estate that takes its land management responsibilities very seriously and is a business focused on the local community and the delivery of sustainable rural enterprise. In particular, we are committed to contributing to the tourism offering of the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park."

### RED KITE

The *BBC News* website reported that a seriously injured red kite was found illegally trapped on

'moorland west of Stirling.' The bird had to be euthanised due to the severity of its injuries. A Police Scotland spokesman said: "This was clearly an intentional act with the sole purpose of trapping this kind of bird of prey."

A poisoned red kite has been found in the same area [Jan 15] and a peregrine, also poisoned by carbofuran [Feb 15]. Ian Thomson, of RSPB, said: "This area of Stirlingshire is becoming a black hole for raptors, with offences involving poisoning and illegal trap use going back a number of years. The Argaty Red Kite feeding station near Doune attracts many visitors wanting to admire this spectacular bird, and it is appalling that there are still criminals who wish to deprive the public of such opportunities."

### HABITAT MAP

*The European Nature Information System (EUNIS) Land Cover of Scotland*, a map of Scotland's land and freshwater habitats has been published by SNH. The map, adopting the European classification standard, is designed for use at national and regional scales as an aid to managing both land and freshwater in Scotland.

Ed Mackey, of SNH, said: "We now have a consistent baseline for policy applications such as ecosystem health assessment, natural capital accounting and habitat network analysis. We are also on the way to filling in local-scale detail, including mapping our most prized habitats of European importance: 51 habitats listed on Annex I of the Habitats Directive, including blanket bog, oakwood and the flower-rich machair of the Western Isles – plus eight in our surrounding seas. The adoption of European standards means that the map can be accessed and used by anyone, anywhere. This makes it easier to work together, saves money, and helps Scotland to fulfil international commitments to safeguard wildlife by 2020."

See: <http://bit.ly/1KZ7A48>, subject to an Ordnance Survey Public Sector (Scotland) End User Licence; also <http://bit.ly/1lydMQZ>

EUNIS and the Annex I habitat map will connect with the existing EUNIS SeaMap, providing the first complete habitat map of Scotland's land and seas. See: <http://bit.ly/1PDXZka>

### WATER VOLES

*The Herald* reported that water voles have been recorded in Easterhouse, in the east end of Glasgow, some two miles away from the River Clyde and the North Calder Water. It is not known how they arrived there. Robyn Stewart, from the University of Glasgow, calculated that there are up to 150 per hectare in the area, almost four times the average found on riverbanks. She said: "Water voles are considered a species for pristine wetland habitats. They are thriving in an urban environment."

### FAIR ISLE MIGRATION

The Fair Isle bird observatory has recorded bird migration at its station between Shetland and Orkney since 1938. The Fair Isle Migration Project, a collaboration between the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust and the University of Aberdeen, has now analysed records from 1955 which show that spring migration has happened much earlier in recent years for many species; swallows arrive up to three weeks earlier than they did in the 1950s, for example. For other species, such as the willow warbler, spring migration has occurred much later.

Dr Will Miles said: "The natural world is changing, including the timing and numbers of birds on migration and a crucial challenge facing scientists is to identify and understand these changes and their causes. It's too early to say for sure why some birds are arriving so much earlier on Fair Isle, while others seem to be delaying their arrival. Possible causes include changing climate and weather patterns,

also changes in the summer breeding range and population size of many species across Europe.”

The research showed that the number of scarce migrant birds arriving in Scotland from Eastern Europe and Siberia in the autumn has risen sharply over the last 60 years and is continuing to do so. Birds such as the yellow-browed warbler and the barred warbler have also increased in number.

**CONONISH GOLD**

Scotgold Resources said that the total ore reserve at Cononish near Tyndrum was now estimated to be 198,000 ounces of gold and 851,000 ounces of silver, a rise of 179% on the April 2013 estimate. A revised development plan estimated that the life of the mine would be eight years. Scotgold now hopes to complete a feasibility study to estimate costs for the venture by the end of July.

 **ENERGY**

**ENERGY ISSUES**

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has called for a new approach to the UK’s relationship with Scotland on energy issues, with key decisions on energy policy made following a process of consultation and agreement with the Scottish Government.

The First Minister set out a range of energy policy issues where the Scottish Government is looking for action from the newly elected Westminster Government. These are to:

- Provide reassurance that Westminster will not change subsidy arrangements for onshore wind without agreement from Scottish ministers.
- Provide confidence to the offshore wind industry, ensuring there is sufficient budget to deliver the large-scale deployment and cost reduction seen in onshore wind.
- Consider all possible options to avert the premature closure of Longannet Power Station.
- Ensure an appropriate predictable and stable fiscal and regulatory environment for the oil and gas sector.
- Provide sufficient flexibility and visibility within the levy control framework to allow the renewables sector to invest with confidence and deliver further cost reductions for the long term benefit of consumers.
- Tackle the discrimination faced by Scottish generators on transmission charging beyond the limited redress offered by Project TransmiT and bolster incentives for new clean thermal generation in Scotland.
- Address concerns over small-scale Hydro Feed-In Tariff.
- Progress actions necessary to ensure delivery of island grid connections and ensure the necessary support is provided to take forward carbon capture & storage (CCS) and pump storage schemes.

**HIGHLAND WINDFARMS**

A public consultation, Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance, was extended by two weeks by Highland Council [Mar 15]. 11 main issues are set out for discussion. A ‘strong response’ has been received, with key issues emerging including cumulative impacts. The authority is proposing to address this by examining where strategic capacity for wind energy remains.

David Cowie, the council’s principle planner, said: “Windfarms are an increasingly important issue for the Highland and we need clear guidance on how to handle applications for them.”

**WILD LAND & WIND ENERGY**

The John Muir Trust (JMT) has responded to

the Western Isles Council (Comhairle) Call for Issues for the Comhairle’s Local Development Plan Review and associated review of the Supplementary Guidance for Wind Energy Development. This sets out a vision and spatial strategy for the development of land in the Islands over the next 10-20 years, and is reviewed every five years. JMT raises the importance of the need to integrate recent Scottish Government policy decisions about wild land and, specifically, the Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Wild Land Areas map and increased peatlands protection into the Local Development Plan.

The JMT has also made a submission to the Scottish Parliament’s Economy, Energy & Tourism Committee on issues relating to security of supply in Scotland. Central to the JMT response is a call for a National Energy Commission to be established to advise government, taking an overview of strategic energy policy and energy planning throughout Scotland, with a parallel body in the UK. See: [www.jmt.org/consultation-responses.asp](http://www.jmt.org/consultation-responses.asp)

- JMT has launched a campaign to save Wild Land Area 34 in Sutherland, which has been targeted by three separate energy companies for large scale onshore windfarms. Glencassley and Sallachy windfarms are awaiting a decision by Scottish ministers while the third, Caplich, has still to be considered by Highland Council before eventually going to the Scottish Government. Together, the three applications potentially threaten the Reay-Cassley Wild Land Area with a total of 65 turbines, along with tens of miles of access roads and other infrastructure. The JMT fears that if these developments are given the go-ahead, the entire Wild Land Areas map could be undermined [Jun 14].
- Allt Duine windfarm, which is in Wild Area 20 (Monadhliath), is also awaiting a decision by the Scottish Government. Ramblers Scotland, the JMT, Mountaineering Council of Scotland and the Save Monadhliath Mountains campaign group have written to the First Minister calling for strong leadership on wild land protection, particularly in regard to the Allt Duine application.

**WINDFARM UPDATES**

**Angus:** The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) has formerly objected to Eneco Wind UL Ltd’s proposed 18 turbine Macritch Hill Wind Farm near the Blackwater Reservoir between Glen Prosen and Glen Isla, near Kirriemuir. The windfarm would have a negative impact on the landscape with the nearest turbine being only 1.5 km from the southern boundary of the National Park.

Eleanor Mackintosh, convenor of the planning committee, said: “There are an ever increasing number of windfarms proposed around the Cairngorms National Park and the CNPA has to seriously consider the cumulative impact of these. I am very concerned about the encircling of our National Park by more and more turbines. People come to the Cairngorms National Park to enjoy the views, the stunning landscapes and the sense of wildness. While the National Park itself may be free of windfarms, standing in the park and looking outwards at turbine after turbine will not be very inspiring.”

**Dumfries & Galloway:** 2020 Renewables lodged a legal challenge at the Court of Session against decisions by the local authority and a Scottish Government reporter to refuse planning permission for the 11 turbine Loch Hill windfarm on top of Course Hill and Half Mark Hill at St John’s Town of Dalry [Jul 14].

Council planning officials had recommended approval, but it was rejected by councillors due to

its ‘visual and cumulative impact on the surrounding area.’ After a public local inquiry, a government reporter also turned down the plans concluding that ‘visual harm would be disproportionate to the renewable energy generation benefits.’

In the appeal, 2020 Renewables claimed the reporter did not properly apply policy when considering the decision.

In a written judgement, the appeal judges said: “We reject the criticisms that the decision was irrational, illogical and incoherent – and that any ‘lazy shorthand’ was used. The reporter was fully entitled to conclude that the cumulative impact on visual amenity was sufficient to render the proposal contrary to the development plan, and that, in itself, this justified refusal of planning permission. In short, we can detect nothing which would even suggest that the reporter’s decision is susceptible to a successful legal challenge, hence the appeal was refused.”

**Inverness-shire:** The *BBC News* website reported that the Friends of the Great Glen campaign group took a petition to the Scottish Parliament’s petitions committee concerning the number of turbines around Loch Ness and the Great Glen. 500 turbines have been consented to, or are in the planning stage, within a 22 mile radius of the loch [Apr 15].

James Treasurer, of the group, told MSPs: “Our concern is the multitude of windfarm developments that is being planned and in the pipeline for the Great Glen area and the Loch Ness area. The distressing thing is not even just the wind turbines – because these are at remote locations it is going to involve hundreds of miles of pylons to connect these to the national grid, hundreds of miles of access roads, building of sub-stations. So in fact it is going to be a big industrial complex for about 30 miles on each side of the Great Glen. We are extremely concerned about it and as to whether the planning protections adequately protect this area. If the Scottish Government, together with Highland Council, doesn’t act in the next year to two years it will be too late to save the Great Glen as we know it.”

Friends of the Great Glen wants MSPs to urge the Scottish Government to take steps to designate Loch Ness and the Great Glen as a National Scenic Area and to make an application for the area to be afforded World Heritage protection. The committee agreed to write to Highland Council, SNH, Scottish Renewables, the JMT and the Scottish Government.

• The Scottish Government approved RWE Innogy UK’s Glen Kyllachy windfarm near Tomatin, after it was refused by Highland Council [Apr 14]. Pat Wells, of Strathdearn Against Windfarm Developments (SAWD) said that the campaign group had appealed to the Chief Reporter in the Scottish Government’s Directorate for Planning & Environmental Appeals, to review the conduct of the Glen Kyllachy appeal under the complaints procedure.

SAWD’s letter claimed that the Appeal Decision Notice contained a number of statements which lead them to believe that the decision to uphold the appeal was a political one made before the review process even started. SAWD claimed that this view is endorsed by the Reporter’s refusal to permit an accompanied site visit despite representations from The Highland Council, local groups and individuals and the local community councils.

Mrs Wells said: “Industrialisation of the Highland landscape on this massive scale is a shameful legacy of SNP planning policy. There are nearly 800 wind turbines either operational, under construction, approved or in planning within a 25 mile radius of the adjacent 40 turbine Farr windfarm.”

• Revised plans for Infinergy's Tom na Clach windfarm on the Cawdor Estate near Glenferness have been approved in principle by Highland Council. 13 taller turbines are now proposed [Jun 13]. The proposed site is within the Drynachen, Lochindorb and Dava Moor Special Landscape Area.

**Perth & Kinross:** Planning officials have lodged a formal holding objection to plans for Eventus BV's 24 turbine Talladh a Bheithe windfarm at Loch Rannoch, calling for outstanding environmental information from the developer [Sep 14].

**OFFSHORE WINDFARMS & BIRDS**

*The Herald* reported that RSPB Scotland brought a legal challenge against the Scottish Government over plans for four offshore windfarms in the firths of Forth and Tay, based on its mortality predictions for seabirds [Oct 14; Jan 15]. 335 turbines are planned, of up to 200 metres high, and there are concerns over birds being displaced and colliding with them; the impact on migrating species and on the birds' commute from breeding sites to feeding areas. The birds most at risk of collision include the gannet, kittiwake, herring gull, lesser black backed gull, terns and skuas.

• The Scottish Government is calling for tenders for a 15 month project entitled, *How high do birds fly?* This will involve monitoring by laser range finders, radar and by boat observers. Linda Holt, of Scotland Against Spin, said that the research should have been carried out years ago, as the offshore projects have been planned for at least ten years.

Dr Richard Luxmoore, of the National Trust for Scotland, said: "Information has come to light which causes us and others very great concern about the Inch Cape, Neart na Gaoithe and Seagreen Alpha and Bravo marine windfarm projects for which Scottish ministers have given permission to be sited offshore from the Firths of Forth and Tay. The farms are to be sited on some shallow sand banks in the western North Sea that are the most important area for sandeels in the whole of Scotland's coastal seas. While the sandeels may be little concerned by wind turbines, they are the main prey item for many of our seabirds, including puffins, kittiwakes and guillemots. As a consequence, these sandbanks through with seabirds during the breeding season and some, intent on pursuing prey for their chicks, will inevitably collide with the turbines and die.

"The science of predicting just how many will die is infancy and exact numbers are hard to predict with any certainty. However, the process commissioned by Marine Scotland to evaluate this is the Appropriate Assessment, which gauged the combined impact of the four windfarms on a number of internationally important seabird colonies in the region, including Fowlsheugh, Isle of May and St Abbs National Nature Reserves, the Bass Rock and other islands in the Firth of Forth. The conclusions were shocking: each year the proposed windfarms are predicted to kill 1,169 gannets, 424 kittiwakes and 1,251 puffins. The assessment also shows that over 25 years this rate of attrition will reduce the breeding populations of these three species in the nearby Forth Islands by 21%, 24% and 25% respectively.

"Given that many of these seabirds are already in difficulties and suffering declining populations, the government's nature conservation adviser, SNH, concluded that these losses were unacceptable, as would most rational human beings. However, by some obfuscating process of mental agility, Marine Scotland has attempted to argue, through deep layers of bureaucratic jargon, that this level of slaughter is acceptable. Many

people in Scotland would not agree, nor would the European Commission, which is charged with overseeing European conservation measures ... If we are to reap the rewards of clean energy we need to be assured that its adverse impacts are mitigated and that the government is prepared to listen to the nature conservation advisers that it has commissioned and paid for."

• The Scottish Seabird Centre is also concerned that insufficient research has been undertaken into the estimated annual mortality of seabirds as a result of the operation of the proposed windfarms, arguing that the Firth of Forth is of international importance for seabirds. The Bass Rock is the world's largest colony of northern gannets with over 75,000 occupied sites, and the Isle of May National Nature Reserve is the largest puffin colony on the east coast with around 46,000 occupied burrows.

See: [www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00460542.pdf](http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00460542.pdf)

**OFFSHORE WINDFARMS & SEALS**

A St Andrews University study has shown that the hearing of common (harbour) seals is affected by laying foundations in the seabed for offshore windfarms. The pulses from pile driving during turbine construction could have serious health implications for marine mammals. More research is needed on how noise affects seals' hearing and into engineering solutions to reduce noise levels.

Dr Gordon Hastie, of St Andrews University Sea Mammal Research Unit, said: "These are some of the most powerful man-made sounds produced underwater, noise capable of travelling large distances underwater. Like most marine mammals, harbour seals have very sensitive underwater hearing at a much broader range of frequencies than humans. Seals probably use underwater hearing during the mating season and to detect and avoid predators. They may also rely on their hearing for navigation and finding prey." He said that very little was known about the impact of the pulsed sounds on seals. However, a wealth of data existed on the effect on humans and other terrestrial species, data which showed that powerful pulsed sounds could damage mammals' hearing.

There are currently 1,184 offshore wind turbines around the coast of the UK, between them generating around 4 GW. More turbines are being installed to generate a further 31 GW. The study is published in the *British Ecological Society's Journal of Applied Ecology*.

**SEAWATER-TO-HEAT**

*The Sunday Herald* reported that Shetland Heat & Power Ltd, in conjunction with Star Renewable energy, is planning to extract heat from seawater in Lerwick harbour. This would add an extra source of heat to the district heating system, which currently heats 1,100 homes and 100 industrial and public buildings. Seawater is already extracted to cool Shetland's diesel-fuelled power station; the seawater-to-heat project will either use this water source or pump ashore seawater from elsewhere in the harbour.

In order to take advantage of the government's Renewable Heat Incentive's subsidy, the project will not be allowed to make use of the hot water effluent from the power station as the rules stipulate that no industrial sources of heat can be used. Instead, fresh seawater would be cooled down from around eight to four degrees, producing an additional 2 MW of capacity for the 6.3 MW district heating scheme.

**WEST COAST OIL**

*The Herald* reported that petroleum geologists visited Skye, exploring the potential for oil

production along the west coast of Scotland.

Dr Nick Schofield, from Aberdeen University, said that a lack of offshore seismic data from the area over the last two decades meant that it was not known whether or not commercial oil production off the west coast was viable. He said that the geologists wanted to investigate what Inner Hebridean basins could tell them about the prospects for commercial petroleum extraction along the Atlantic margin. They also examined the hydrocarbon potential which may remain in the near-shore basins along the west coast of Scotland from the Minch down to the Firth of Clyde.

**EDINBURGH SOLAR**

Edinburgh Council is working in partnership with the Edinburgh Community Solar Co-operative to deliver community-owned solar panels to 25 council buildings across the city. The initiative is believed to be the largest community-owned urban renewable energy project in the UK. Edinburgh's carbon emissions will be reduced by an estimated 855 tonnes a year; it is planned to reduce the city's carbon emissions by 42% by 2020. Any surplus energy will be sold to the National Grid.



**NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS**

**CROFTING COMMISSION**

Susan Walker, head of the Crofting Commission, has resigned as convener, and as a commissioner, after a vote of no confidence in her leadership. Ms Walker was chosen by Scottish ministers; the remaining six commissioners, all directly elected from six geographical areas, now want to appoint their own chair [Apr 12].

**NTS**

Simon Skinner has been appointed as chief executive of the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), taking over from Kate Mavor from June [Jan 15].

**SBIF**

The Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum (SBIF) has launched a new publication, *Making the Most of Biodiversity Data*. It contains case studies that illustrate and promote the use of biodiversity data by researchers and policy-makers, and is intended to be used as an advocacy and promotional document. Its publication contributes to the Forum's Action Plan. See: [www.sbif.org.uk](http://www.sbif.org.uk)

**SSRS**

RSPB Scotland has joined the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (SSRS) project, launched in 2009 [Mar 15]. The project aims to continue to prevent the spread northwards of grey squirrels and squirrelpox via a programme of grey squirrel control in a zone running coast to coast along the Highland boundary fault. It is also mapping priority areas for red squirrel conservation in south Scotland, and co-ordinating the control of grey squirrels.

**TWEED FORUM**

Tweed Forum is the winner of the new £10,000 UK River Prize and the Nigel Holmes Trophy. The trophy was established 'to celebrate innovation and best practice in river restoration and catchment management.' Tweed Forum has been responsible for projects that have protected and improved miles of river; conserved wildlife, increased fish stocks and enhanced rare wetland habitats. It has improved water quality, helped attenuate flooding and controlled giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed over 300 miles of the river and its tributaries.

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