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CONSERVATION

PEATLAND PLAN

Scotland's National Peatland Plan has been published by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). For the first time, Scotland will have a strategy to secure the sustainable use, management and restoration of peatlands – an internationally important type of habitat and vital natural capital asset. Peatlands are an important part of Scotland's natural capital, making up 20% of the landscape. Peat is found across large parts of Scotland, storing an estimated 3,000 megatonnes of carbon as well as providing habitat for a range of wild animals and plants.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has described peatlands as a 'Cinderella habitat' which has been 'overlooked and undervalued.' Jonathan Hughes, of IUCN UK, said: "Scotland's National Peatland Plan is a vital to tackling the globally important issue of peatland conservation. We urgently need to convert peatlands from a liability to an asset. Healthy peatlands can lock up carbon, support wildlife, regulate water flow and improve water quality – but only if we make an investment to restore them."

Dr Maggie Keegan, of the Scottish Wildlife Trust, said: "To help meet our peatland goals we will also need the Scottish Government to align other policies so that we end commercial peat extraction for horticulture, refuse consent to developments that damage peatland sites and stop burning on peatlands."

The National Peatland Plan is also backed up by a new National Peatland Group. Chaired by SNH, the group will promote, facilitate and monitor delivery of the plan and will include land managers, Scottish Government, NGOs, agencies and representatives from the research community. Measuring progress and undertaking research are seen as important tasks in taking forward the plan's aims as is international outreach to promote Scotland's best practice and share experience with other peatland nations around the world.

See: bit.ly/1KSeq9P

- The Scottish Government has committed a further £3m for peatland restoration this year.

HEN HARRIERS

The Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime (PAW) Scotland's 'Heads Up for Harriers' project has recorded some notable successes in its first full season, with a total of 12 young birds fledging from three successful nests. A further three nests failed, two as a result of bad weather and another due to fox predation.

Five upland estates took part in the project, which involved installing nest cameras to gather evidence of the impact that different factors have on the survival of young birds; illegal persecution, land use changes resulting in loss of nesting habitat and feeding range, and the predation of eggs and young by foxes, crows and other predators are all thought to have contributed to the hen harrier's current situation.

Doug McAdam, of Scottish Land & Estates, said: "Leaving this [why hen harriers fail] to speculation is unhelpful to say the least. After last year's fantastic breeding season – 30 successful nests in the Hen Harrier Special Protection areas alone producing in excess of 100 young

– this season has been much more difficult. We understand that two out of the four monitored nests that produced eggs were deserted and failed, with the most likely explanation being cold wet weather, and underlining why the Scottish harrier population remains fragile."

It is hoped to continue the project next year and widen the scope to include more sites. The British Trust for Ornithology's BirdTrack and local raptor groups pass on sightings of hen harriers from around Scotland.

See: bit.ly/1Pfe4hu

GOLDEN EAGLES

The *BBC News* website reported that golden eagles taken from nests in the Highlands & Islands may be released in southern Scotland. The first releases could take place as early as next summer, subject to checks and consultations.

There are one to three breeding pairs in the Scottish Borders and one or two breeding pairs in Galloway; the birds have had limited nesting success. As many as eight birds will be released each summer over the next three to five years; a report by SNH said that the area could support between 11 and 13 pairs of golden eagles [Jul 14]; however, some experts believe the figure could be higher still, with as many as 16 breeding pairs.

It is thought the relocated birds could eventually help the species extend its range back into Cumbria and Northumberland.

The South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project is supported by Buccleuch Estates, Scottish Land & Estates, RSPB Scotland and SNH.

Dr Adam Smith, of the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, argued that persecution was only one factor in the golden eagles' decline in southern Scotland. He said: "It's absolutely not the only cause. One of the major causes was the amount of forestry expansion. Golden eagles do not use these dark, dense conifer forests effectively." Other factors include the availability of prey, disturbance and weather conditions.

Duncan Orr-Ewing of RSPB Scotland said that the significance of persecution should not be underestimated. He said: "We've certainly had cases of golden eagles being shot and poisoned in recent years. Indeed, this project originated after an appalling incident five or six years ago in which one of the only breeding adults in the Scottish Borders was found illegally poisoned."

The Raptor Persecution Scotland blog states that one of the biggest constraints on golden eagle population recovery in southern Scotland is persecution. Raptor persecution in southern Scotland has definitely not been removed, nor sufficiently reduced. In the last ten years alone there have been more than 150 confirmed persecution incidents (that figure doesn't include the 'probable' or 'possible' cases, nor those that went undiscovered).

The 2014 SNH-commissioned report on the status of golden eagles in southern Scotland also identified several areas where persecution is an ongoing concern, including the Lowther Hills, the Lammermuirs and the Moorfoots (all driven grouse moor areas) [Jul 14]. The report stated that persecution needed to be brought under control in those regions if golden eagles were to thrive in southern Scotland once again.



SEABIRDS

A two year research project was undertaken by the University of Edinburgh, the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and the British Antarctic Survey on shags on the Isle of May National Nature Reserve in the Firth of Forth. Tracking devices were attached to the shags to measure how long they foraged for fish. When winds were strong, or blowing towards the shore, the lighter female shags took much longer to find food than the males. Stronger winds forecast as a result of climate change could affect seabirds by influencing how easily they can feed and have an impact on the wellbeing of females and ultimately the number of their species.

The study was funded by the Natural Environment Research Council and published in the *Journal of Animal Ecology*.

INSECTS

An SNH-commissioned study examined 19 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), and recorded rare species of insects and molluscs. The condition of the SSSI was monitored. The report said: "A common problem encountered throughout this project has been the lack of appropriate consideration of invertebrates during development or management activities. Developments should undertake pre-application surveys for invertebrates, and provide an assessment of potential impacts. Appropriate mitigation or compensation should be detailed and set out in conditions of consent, if the application is successful.

"If translocations are required, these should follow a structured approach based on species ecology, and be monitored for several years after consent."

RARE FLY

SNH discovered a fly, *Okeniella caudata*, in Glen Clova in the Cairngorms. The insect, a distant relative of the yellow dung fly, was previously thought to live only in the high arctic and Scandinavian tundra. SNH now believes they may exist at other remote Scottish mountain locations. Iain MacGowan, of SNH, said: "It was quite a surprise to find several specimens, both males and females, at an altitude of over 850m. These creatures and their ancestors have probably been living there since the last Ice Age, but have remained undiscovered partly due to the remote location of these areas and partly due to the short time which they live as adults. They aren't of high risk of extinction right now, but if the climate warms these insects will be among the first to disappear."

Okeniella caudata larvae were likely to be feeding in the peaty mud beside upland lochs and burns in the high Cairngorms.

SHRIKE

A pair of shrike, regarded as the rarest breeding bird in Britain, has successfully reared four chicks in Shetland. The red-backed shrike was lost as a breeding species in UK in the 1990s. It is believed that the Shetland pair are the only ones to have bred in the UK this year.

RED SQUIRRELS

The Caledonian Forest Wildlife Project has been launched by Trees for Life and the Highland Foundation for Wildlife. The project aims to establish ten new populations of red squirrels in the Highlands over the next three years, with a long-term aim is to boost red squirrel numbers in Scotland by more than 10%. Red squirrels will be relocated from areas of Scotland where they are thriving, such as Inverness-shire and Moray, to forests in the north west Highlands where

there are no squirrels at present, but good quality habitat for them. 40 red squirrels were moved into woodlands at Dundonnell, for example, and have already expanded into a thriving population of around 400, and two further translocations were also very successful [Jan 09].

Alan Watson Featherstone, of Trees for Life, said that an increase in red squirrel numbers would also benefit native forests and the many species that depend on them, because red squirrels are nature's tree planters.

The Heritage Lottery Fund has made a grant of over £61,000 towards the project..

NNRs

The SNH board has decided that Glen Roy National Nature Reserve (NNR) should not be de-designated [Jul 15]. Representatives from the Scottish Geoparks Partnership (Lochaber Geopark, North West Highlands Geopark and Geopark Shetland) sat in on the discussions. SNH were impressed by the strength of feeling about Glen Roy, both locally and from the international and academic communities. SNH decided that Lochaber Geopark should be invited to work with them as a partner to manage and develop the visitor experience. See: bit.ly/1zObCvm

- The Great Trossachs Forest NNR, within the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park, has been approved by SNH. It extends from Inversnaid on the east bank of Loch Lomond, through Loch Katrine and Glen Finglas almost to Callander.

Covering 16,500 hectares it will be Scotland's largest reserve, with a variety of wildlife, habitats, and landforms, including some of national or international importance such as ancient woodland, wet woodland and upland wood pasture.

The Great Trossachs Forest is owned and managed by RSPB Scotland, Forestry Commission Scotland (FC Scotland) and the Woodland Trust Scotland. With support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the partners are restoring the ground to a more natural mosaic of open hill ground and woodland.

- A proposed extension to The Flows NNR in Caithness and Sutherland has been approved. The 3,960 hectare extension includes a number of parcels of land that are adjacent to the existing NNR, owned by RSPB Scotland.

FRESHWATER PEARLS

In-stream restoration on the River Dee at Banchory and Sluie/Commonty is taking place as part of the Pearls in Peril LIFE project. 24 large fishing platforms or 'croys' will be broken up to restore habitat for the rare freshwater pearl mussel and for salmon. The croys were constructed in the 1990s from large boulders taken from the riverbed. Once a common practice in Scottish rivers, the hope was that they would create pools for salmon and so increase fish catches. This was not the case, and the croys instead reduced habitat for freshwater pearl mussels, salmon and trout. The boulders will now be redistributed in the riverbed from where they were taken to provide habitat and 'lies' for adult salmon.

The work is being coordinated by SNH working in partnership with the Dee District Salmon Fishery Board and the River Dee Trust.

PENTLAND PARK

The *BBC News* website reported that Scottish Borders Council (SBC) is being advised to oppose proposals to extend the Pentland Hills Regional Park into the Borders and South Lanarkshire. Christine Graham MSP introduced a bill to extend its southern boundary so that the whole

of the Pentland Hills range is incorporated into the regional park [Oct 14].

A report to SBC councillors raises concerns about the staffing and financial implications of the move, drawing 'significant resource' from elsewhere and said that the extension could have a significant impact on the region to the 'detriment of other equally important areas.' They are being advised to seek a review of the potential extension and to formally oppose it in the meantime. The report said: "In conclusion, the bill has been brought forward without proper consideration of its strategic need or likely implications for the park or for its constituent councils. In that light it is proposed that the council objects to the proposal so that its views can be heard by the parliamentary committee."

A parliamentary committee has been set up to consider the proposals and is seeking views before 28 September.

WILDCATS

A new Scottish Wildcat Action (SWA) website has been launched. SWA, supported by the Scottish Government and Heritage Lottery Fund, is delivering the Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Plan, to help bring back viable populations of Scottish wildcats [Dec 14].

A team of staff and volunteers will set up more than 400 trail cameras in wildcat priority areas but public sightings will add valuable intelligence to the standardised monitoring. Hybrid and feral cat sightings are also important to the project, which aims to reduce risks of hybridisation and disease transmission through a co-ordinated trap-neuter (vaccinate) and release programme in the priority areas.

Sightings from wildcat priority areas (Strathpeffer, Strathbogie, northern Strathspey, the Angus Glens, Strathavon and Morvern) are particularly important to the conservation of the species but sightings from across Scotland are also welcomed.

See: www.scottishwildcattaction.org



FARMING

WEATHER

NFU Scotland said that parts of the country saw almost double their normal July rainfall. It warned that many farmers were facing delays in carrying out hay and silage work. The north east and the Highlands have been among areas particularly affected by prolonged wet weather. Silage is being cut wet with decent yields but poorer quality. In the central belt, some farmers started to harvest winter barley in August.

Many farms have seen the ground badly damaged by the wet conditions, and NFU Scotland warned that it could take more than a year for some areas to return to normal. Some farmers have been forced to sell their store cattle earlier than normal to relieve pressure on their farms and fodder; some calves and lambs about to go to market would be of lighter weights.

- The Scottish Government has given the charity RSABI (previously The Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution) £50,000 to help farmers and crofters suffering financial hardship as a result of unseasonably wet weather. The UK government is holding a summit meeting with the Scottish Government, farming unions and industry representatives.

GM

The *Sunday Herald* reported that Scotland is to formally opt out of the European Union's pro-genetically modified crops (GM) farming regime. The Scottish Government is to submit a request that Scotland is excluded from all European

consents for the commercial cultivation of GM crops. Under new EU rules, GM crops must be formally authorised before they can be cultivated in any EU nation; member states and devolved administrations may restrict or prohibit newly approved GM crops within their territories. Countries can also apply to be exempted from a GM maize that has already been approved and six other maize crops awaiting approval.

The rural affairs secretary, Richard Lochhead, said that the GM ban would protect Scotland's 'clean and green brand' and its £14 billion food and drink industry. Banning GM would help protect and enhance the reputation of Scotland's beautiful natural environment and is not based solely on the precautionary principle. He said that decisions 'cannot be based on science alone.' GM research is a fast-moving field and the technology is developing rapidly, and the Scottish Government will continue to receive expert advice from scientific advisers and others. The contained use of GM plants for research will not be affected.

Peter Melchett, of The Soil Association, said: "This is really wonderful news for the people of Scotland, for Scotland's environment and particularly for Scottish farmers. Scotland is joining a growing movement of countries and regions all over the world rejecting GM crops because they threaten the environment, human health and farmers' livelihoods. Scotland's determination to keep out GM crops is good news for the UK as a whole, because it sets a high standard that England, Wales and Northern Ireland must now live up to."

Pete Ritchie, of Nourish Scotland, said: "GM technology is closely associated with heavy use of glyphosate, a herbicide recently classified as probably carcinogenic. Nourish Scotland would encourage ministers to go further and join other governments such as France and Denmark in supporting organic food and farming, as organic livestock products do not rely on imported GM animal feed."

Scott Walker, of NFU Scotland, said: "We are disappointed that the Scottish Government has decided that no GM crops should ever be grown in Scotland. Decisions should be taken on the individual merits of each variety, based on science and determined by whether the variety will deliver overall benefit. These crops could have a role in shaping sustainable agriculture at some point and at the same time protecting the environment which we all cherish in Scotland."

Dr Julian Little, of the Agricultural Biotechnology Council, said: "It is very easy for the Scottish Government to ban GM while there are currently no GM crops available for Scottish farmers. But it will be interesting to see whether their response will change when they find Scottish farmers are at a competitive disadvantage to farmers south of the border."

James Withers, of Scotland Food & Drink, said that the anti-GM announcement was made without any prior consultation with the industry; GM was 'not an issue' and 'never part of the discussion' about the clean and green brand.

Professor Douglas Tocher, of the University of Stirling's Institute of Aquaculture, said that oils from GM oilseed crops could provide a sustainable source of omega-3 fatty acids within three years; it would be used to feed farmed fish. There is a worldwide shortage of natural fish oil used in traditional feed to provide omega-3, essential for the health of fish. The crops would not now be grown in Scotland where the oils could be used most effectively. In *Writing on the Conversation*, he said: "While few would disagree that Scotland has a beautiful natural environment

or that seeking to protect it is a good policy, what are the risks that growing GM crops actually pose? The Scottish Government's announcement is rather unclear when it comes to this."

The *BBC News* website reported that Sense About Science, comprising 28 organisations, sent an open letter seeking an urgent meeting with Rural Affairs Secretary Richard Lochhead to discuss concerns about the proposed ban on growing genetically-modified crops in Scotland.

The letter, whose signatories include NFU Scotland, the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Roslin Institute and the European Academies Science Advisory Council, said they were 'extremely concerned' about the 'negative impact' a ban could have.

It claimed that the decision was 'political and not based on any informed scientific assessment of risk.'

The scientists and academics said that outlawing the cultivation of GM crops 'risks constraining Scotland's contribution to research and leaving Scotland without access to agricultural innovations which are making farming more sustainable elsewhere in the world.' The letter cited examples where 'a GM method has a contribution to make' and highlighted ongoing research on things which 'might benefit Scotland's farmers, consumers and environment' including potatoes that can reduce fungicide use and omega-3 enriched oilseeds that may offer a more sustainable source of feed for salmon farming. It said: "[This] risks constraining Scotland's contribution to research an leaving Scotland without access to agricultural innovations which are making farming more sustainable."

Dame Anne Glover, former chief scientific adviser to the UK government and chief scientific advisor to the President of the European Commission, said that she was genuinely perplexed at the Scottish Government's position and that there had not been any consultation with the scientific community on the issue. Dame Anne called on ministers to rethink the decision, and said that they have made the decision not based on scientific evidence.

Richard Lochhead said that he would reassure the signatories that these changes will not affect research as it is currently carried out in Scotland, where the contained use of GM plants is permitted for scientific purposes, such as in laboratories or sealed glasshouse facilities. He said: "However, just because GM crops can be cultivated in Scotland it doesn't mean they should be. Scotland's £14 billion food sector has a reputation for a clean and green image across the world and allowing the cultivation of GM crops could damage that unique selling point."

Professor Neva Haites, of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, said: "Most governments try to get the best advice possible before they make these decisions. In the past we have had chief scientific advisers such as Dame Anne Glover and Professor Calder, who were there to give advice on such subjects. We no longer have such an adviser in government at the moment and the scientific body that usually gives advice has not met for some time. So we are suggesting it is time they actually looked again and sought some very senior advice on this subject."

The National reported that Professor Colin McInnes, of Glasgow University, suggested that 'open-sourcing' GM field trials in Scotland could allow the technology to be put into public rather than private hands.

Professor Muffy Calder, former chief science adviser to the Scottish Government, warned that a ban on GM crops could have 'apocalyptic' consequences and threaten the country's food and

drinks industry. She called on ministers to publish the scientific basis for their decision. She said that key cash crops, such as potatoes, soft fruits and barley, would be left susceptible to disease if GM were not permitted to develop disease-resistant crops using less pesticides

GREYLAG GEES

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is carrying out a three year cull on Lewis and Harris to almost halve the current estimated population of 6,000 birds [Dec 14]. The *BBC News* website reported that some local crofters, seeing ongoing damage to their crops and grassland, have called for full-time hunters to be brought in to control the rising numbers of geese. Currently, volunteer shooters, licences and ammunition are provided by SNH.

FOULBROOD DISEASE

Science & Advice for Scottish Agriculture has confirmed two further cases of American foulbrood (AFB), a disease affecting colonies of honeybees [Jul 15]. One case was found in a beehive at a heather site in Glen Isla, with the source traced back to a second apiary in Coupar Angus in Perthshire. Both apiaries have been destroyed and were also found to contain European foulbrood (EFB). This is a significant development as this disease has previously largely been confined to the commercial sector. To date, there have been 60 cases of EFB and five cases of AFB confirmed in Scotland in 2015.

GREENING

NFU Scotland has asked that the Scottish Government look again at the domestic implementation of greening under Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) regulations to see what further steps might be taken to prevent these costly regulations from compromising food production and the viability of Scotland's growers [Oct 14]. In particular, these steps could include removing the 'gold-plating' of rules – where the Scottish Government has taken the basic EU greening regime and bolstered it with 'unnecessary and onerous' additions.

There is flexibility, available from the EU, to introduce equivalence measures and conversion factors that would help get recognition for current Scottish agricultural practices that meet the general intent of EU greening requirements, but are not currently counted towards each farm's compliance with the new support regime.

Jonnie Hall, of NFU Scotland, said: "Like every other sector, our growers are currently toiling under volatile prices and challenging weather. However, they have the additional burden of carrying much of the greening responsibility for Scotland under the terms of the new CAP schemes. That has added cost and complexity to our growers' businesses and Scottish Government is in a position to ease the pressure. Commissioner Hogan's simplification agenda will be limited in its scope to improve the current CAP. That is why it is imperative that the Scottish Government looks again at domestic implementation of greening and cross-compliance to see what further steps might be taken to prevent these from further compromising food production and the viability of the cropping sector."

"We know that greening, as an important element of CAP, is here to stay, but the Scottish Government has the opportunity to ensure that any measures it introduces are compatible with profitable agriculture. Scotland's greening package contains elements of gold-plating compared to European requirements – the rules around the management of nitrogen fixing crops are a good example – and these need to be stripped out. The introduction of equivalence measures would benefit both farmers and those Scottish Government's

Rural Payments & Inspections Directorate staff charged with delivery and inspection of greening rules. Similarly, we continue to question the legality of new cross-compliance rules restricting the cultivation of land within two metres of a hedge. Looking forward, growers want straightforward and clearer guidance that can be better understood so they can cope with the twin challenges of greening and declining market returns. Going into any season, it is crucial our growers know what their options are and can work within their own farming systems to ensure the impact of greening on our abilities to produce food is minimal."



WOODLANDS

INVERNESS WOODLAND

The *Press & Journal* reported that a public appeal has been started to fund conservation work in Aultnaskiach Dell near Inverness city centre. The 4.6 acre (1.9 ha) woodland extends from Drummond Road to Island Bank Road on the River Ness. The owners of the wood have offered to gift the site to a community trust. Funding has been received from the Inverness Common Good Fund, FC Scotland, Highland Council and Highlands & Islands Enterprise. A tree survey, ten-year management plan and practical conservation work have been undertaken.



FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

SALMON CONSERVATION

The *Herald* reported that the Scottish Government is consulting on a prohibition on killing any salmon outside river estuaries, in an attempt to make an accurate assessment of wild salmon stocks to ensure European environmental directives are being observed. This is in addition to proposed conservation measures which would ban the killing of wild salmon except under licence [Jul 15].

The Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland (SNFAS) claims that netters will suffer persecution if the proposed ban on their activities is implemented. It believes that it would tantamount to the nationalisation of their heritable netting rights and argue that it would constitute a breach of the European Convention of Human Rights which could be subject to legal challenge. It said that Scotland's estimated 200,000 anglers, practising catch and release of fish, are still responsible for more deaths amongst the wild salmon stock, than nets. The association predicts such a move would herald 'a major poaching epidemic in Scotland' because the main legal source of Scottish wild salmon would be closed. It also claims that while they catch a few thousand fish per year, seals and other predators eat thousands of tonnes per year, so are confused by 'the complete inactivity to curb the furiously expanding seal population around the coast.'

Keith Allan, of SNFAS, wrote to Richard Lochhead, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food & Environment, and his minister Aileen McLeod, seeking an urgent meeting. He said that if Mr Lochhead proceeds: "Netsmen would be victimised as their entitlement in law to the peaceful enjoyment of their fishing rights would be removed completely. In addition to the obvious loss of income by the closure of our members' businesses, the other form of interference would be total loss of capital value of their heritable rights. We would regard this as unfair, disproportionate and illegitimate and, therefore, clearly open to challenge."

Such a step would be completely imbalanced and would favour one sector (angling) over another, without achieving any noticeable benefit to the conservation of stocks. SNFAS accepts there is virtually no scientific evidence on the question of wild salmon stocks and sustainability, but questions how a complete ban on netting can be promoted as a fair and balanced conservation measure.

Mr Allan argued that if anglers are granted new kill licences, they retain their right to run their businesses with little or no economic disturbance, whereas netsmen would be closed down completely and unfairly. He said: "Even if their right to fish was restored in three years' time, their businesses, gear and markets would be long gone. On past records, the anglers' annual catch is around 100,000 salmon and, even if they are not allowed to retain any of these fish, they will still kill at least 18% being a conservative estimate of the mortality on release *i.e.* 18,000 fish *per annum*. It is highly unlikely that Scottish netting would come near that figure."

The Salmon & Trout Association (Scotland) warmly welcomed the Scottish Government's 'trailblazing salmon conservation proposals.' A spokesman said that the association didn't accept the 18% mortality rate quoted by the netters as applying to catch and release. He said: "Many studies show that mortality is less than 10%, some considerably less than 10%."

SALMON NETTING

George Pullar, of Usan Salmon Fisheries Ltd, was fined £7,000 at Forfar Sheriff Court for nine breaches of salmon conservation legislation. The company admitted the charges in relation to failing to remove leaders, which help guide salmon into nets at sea, before the weekly close time at 1800 on Friday. Under the Salmon Fisheries Scotland Act the leaders can then be reinstated at 0600 on Mondays. Mr Pullar said that on each occasion, the leaders were not removed because of dangerous conditions at sea.

John Robins, of Animal Concern, has asked the Scottish Government to remove Mr Pullar from the Stakeholder Reference Group, established to advise ministers on proposals for new legislation to manage and protect wild fisheries in Scotland [May 15]. The environment minister, Dr Aileen McLeod, was also asked to immediately revoke the licences which allow Usan to kill seals near salmon netting stations.

SALMON FISHING

The *Herald* reported that salmon fisheries in Northumberland could be penalised as a result of the new Scottish salmon fishing policy [Feb 15]. The River Tweed Commission currently raises a levy for angling associations along the Tweed on both sides of the border, with about one third coming from England. The traditional 'tax' could be redistributed by the Scottish Government and might not all go back to the Tweed.

SEA-LICE

Glasgow University has developed a way to protect farmed salmon from sea-lice, *Lepeophtheirus salmonis*. A new protocol to breed resistant fish has been developed, along with a mathematical model to predict outcomes, as resistance to chemical treatments is increasing. The results indicate that fish respond quickly to selection and resistant fish populations will require substantially fewer treatments to control lice. In some instances as few as ten generations may produce fish that naturally control infection and seldom require treatment.

Professor Michael Stear said: "Sea-lice infection is a major threat to the health of farmed salmon

and to the fishfarming economy. Our research has produced a practical tool for quantifying resistance to sea-lice and shown that selection could substantially reduce the need for drug treatments. Selective breeding for sea-lice resistance should reduce the impact of sea-lice on fish health and thus greatly improve the sustainability of Atlantic salmon production."

The study is published in the Royal Society journal *Interface*.

- The Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre, funded by government and industry, is working with the University of Stirling and Marine Harvest to breed cleaner wrasse at a hatchery on the Mull of Kintyre [May 15]. The ballan wrasse feed on sea-lice.

NET TRIALS

The *BBC News* website reported that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation has secured funding from the European Maritime & Fisheries Fund and Marine Scotland to trial new fishing net designs. From January this year, boats had to start landing unwanted herring and mackerel which were caught in their nets. Discards had increased due to strict EU quotas on which fish could be landed in a bid to conserve stocks. A European discard ban begins next year [Jan 15].

NORTH SEA STOCKS

The *Press & Journal* reported that the NAFC Marine Centre at Scalloway in Shetland worked with fishermen to deliver information on key commercial stocks in the northern North Sea. The two-year project provided a new insight into ling, monkfish, lemon sole, plaice, hake and megrim populations. When there is little known about the state of any given fish stock, the European Commission adopts a 'precautionary approach' that can result in annual quota reductions. The Shetland data will now be made available to the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) for stock benchmarking exercises and assessments.

MPAS

The *BBC News* website reported that fishermen are warning that jobs and lives will be at risk with the proposed designation of 30 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) [Jun 15]. Restrictions would be put in place at the most important sites to prevent damage to the marine environment by scallop dredgers and prawn trawlers.

Calum MacLachlainn, of Isle of Mull Scallops, said: "If they take away our winter grounds, we'll be forced out into areas which are more exposed. The way the Scottish Government is going with the MPAs and listening to the anti-fishing lobby, I think we'll see funerals before someone changes their mind."

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF) warned that the economic impact of the measures could result in 'clearances' of west coast fishing communities. Bertie Armstrong, of SFF, said: "It could be, and I'm choosing my words carefully here, devastating. If you want to take a local community and result in a clearance, this is the right way to go about it. If you take down small businesses when there's only a small number there, then you will devastate a community."

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Richard Lochhead said: "We believe our restrictions we are proposing to protect these precious marine features are proportionate. Indeed, if you look at the mobile fishing sector, we reckon it's between 1% and 1.6% of the cumulative revenues of the fleets affected. Of course, hopefully some of these vessels will be able to fish outside of these MPAs."

Calum Duncan, of Scottish Environment LINK, said: "The more diverse and complex the seabed is, the more productive it is. We all need cool heads.

We all need to look at where these habitats are distributed, and manage our activity with the grain of that ecosystem. It is that ecosystem that is providing all the employment and all the benefits which the coastal communities enjoy.”

The Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation (SCFF), which represents the majority of boats on the west coast, said that it was time for the seas to be allowed to recover from decades of industrial bottom-towed fishing.

Alistair Sinclair, of SCFF, said that the introduction of MPAs is simply the 'start of a process' and describes any comparison with the Highland Clearances as an affront. He said: "The reason we are where we are today is the fact that we have had poor governance as far as fisheries are concerned. I am glad to say that Richard Lochhead and Marine Scotland have actually grasped the nettle. They've decided there has to be a change here if there's to be a future."

WESTER ROSS MPA

The Scottish Government introduced an urgent marine conservation order to cover the Wester Ross Marine Protected Area (MPA) with immediate effect, following damage to maerl by a scallop dredger [Nov 14]. Dredging in the MPA, which includes Loch Ewe and areas around the Summer Isles, was to have been banned from November this year.

The Scottish Environment Secretary, Richard Lochhead, said that the scale of the damage had left him with no choice but to bring forward the timing of the ban. He said: "It's very disappointing that a scallop dredger has breached the voluntary fishery management measures in this MPA which is considered vital to the recovery of maerl beds. The seabed shows signs of damage consistent with a pass of scallop dredging gear. Maerl beds can take centuries to grow back and further risk of damage to these precious habitats cannot be allowed."

The order will not affect other fishing activity in the Wester Ross MPA, including hand diving for scallops.

SOLWAY COCKLES

The Scottish Government has published a report by Marine Scotland on the fisheries management trial conducted in Solway Firth cockle fishery. The report is based on the Solway Cockle Fishery Management Study that took place in 2013-2014, an innovative initiative to test a new approach to cockle fishery management [Aug 14].

The management study developed and tested a range of harvesting controls; a training scheme to improve health and safety awareness; a new method of end-product analysis on seafood entering the food chain and raised awareness within local communities and conservation organisations of the potential for a low-impact sustainable fisheries model.

The study found that the management approach, which used a single distribution centre, offered a number of benefits for improving compliance and providing the opportunity for full product traceability. However, disappointing harvest weights meant that the study was unable to test the full range of management approaches to the harvest of a commercial volume of cockles over a sustained period of time.

A further scientific study will be undertaken later this year. See: www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/05/8287

RAZOR CLAMS

The Galloway News reported that Police Scotland is investigating claims that two boats have been electro-fishing for razor clams in Fleet Bay and Carrick Bay in Dumfries & Galloway [Jun 15].



MARINE

SEALS & FISHFARMS

The caged salmon industry, backed by the Scottish Government, attempted to keep the identities of the individual fishfarms and companies that killed seals secret. However, a freedom of information request was successful [Jul 15]. The government has now complied with the Scottish Information Commissioner's request, releasing 250 documents showing the number of seals reported shot by 75 salmon farms from 2013 to January 2015.

The *Sunday Herald* reported that the Global Alliance against Industrial Aquaculture (GAAIA) analysed the data. Scottish Sea Farms has killed the most seals since 2013, 56 in total. Grieg Seafood Hjaltdland shot 36, and the Scottish Salmon Company shot 29.

The individual farm with the record for killing the most seals was run by Grieg at East Voe Laxfirth in Shetland. It reported shooting 20 seals between February and July 2013, and four in May, July and August 2014.

A total of 84 seals were shot by Shetland fishfarms, almost half of all those shot by farms across Scotland. A salmon farm operated by Scottish Sea Farms at Veantrow Bay, Shapinsay, Orkney reported killing seven seals in 2013, and six in 2014.

Don Staniford, of GAAIA, claimed that many of the seal carcasses were not recovered or collected for analysis. John Robins, of the Save Our Seals Fund, said that shooting seals was cheaper than installing nets to deter them: "Our government must close every salmon farm which refuses to use seal exclusion nets."

Dr Jonathan Wills, a Shetland councillor who runs a local wildlife-watching business, attacked multinational companies for growing 'battery farming salmon.' He said that naming those that killed seals enabled the public to avoid buying their salmon.

Scott Landsburgh, of the Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisation, said that the number of seals shot by salmon farmers was falling year on year, and was fewer than those shot by salmon netters and river fisheries. He said that the 84 seals shot by salmon farms in 2014 were from a total population of 148,000: "The Scottish Government licenses fishermen, netting stations and fishfarmers to shoot seals to protect fish in the event that other methods to deter them are unsuccessful. A very small number of seals can be persistent killers, resulting in the slow and painful deaths of thousands of fish."

Sigurd Pettersen, of Grieg Seafood in Shetland, stressed that the number of seals it had shot had dropped significantly since 2013 because it was installing extra, stronger nets to protect the salmon: "By autumn 2016, all our sites will be fully protected by anti-predator nets."

The Scottish Salmon Company, which operates more than 40 sites around the west coast, said it applied 'rigorous measures' to deter seal attacks. A spokesman said: "The action highlighted was taken as a last resort under a government licence over a two year period, when rogue seals persistently interfered with the integrity of nets."

The *BBC News* website reported that the number of seals shot at Hjaltdland Sea Farms reduced drastically from 32 to six between 2013 and 2014. A spokesman said: "Seals attack our cages, killing and damaging salmon and tearing nets which may end in salmon escaping." He said that the company lost £3m of salmon due to seal attacks in 2013 and 2014. The massive reduction in shooting was because the worst-affected sites had been equipped with predator nets: "Where

we installed predator nets or the new net types, seal attacks and seal losses stopped."

A spokeswoman for the Scottish Government said that the number of seals shot by salmon farms had decreased 66% between 2011 and 2014. She said: "All fishfarms which have applied for a seal licence already employ at least one, and many a range of, non-lethal alternatives, with shooting to be used only as a last resort."

- The *BBC News* website reported that the Sea Mammal Research Unit at the University of St Andrews calculates the number of individual seals that can be removed from the population without causing a decline in the population, the Potential Biological Removal (PBR). This figure is then used to determine how many licences may be issued each year, and how many seals may be legally shot.

The number of grey seals killed declined from 79 in 2013 to 56 last year but there was a slight increase in the killing of the more rare common (harbour) seal (16 to 25).

However, both these totals were below the PBR limits for grey and common seals (3,002 and 617 respectively) for 2014.

JELLYFISH SURVEY

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS)'s national jellyfish survey shows that the number of jellyfish spotted around the Scottish coastline has risen significantly this year. Barrel jellyfish have appeared in record numbers for a second consecutive year while the lion's mane has been reported in Scotland in great numbers, with about 100 to 150 per sighting, particularly around the Ayrshire coast. Large numbers of moon jellyfish have also been seen in good numbers in Strontian at the head of Loch Sunart on the west coast and at Rosehearty in Aberdeenshire. The blue and compass jellyfish were also in Scottish seas.

MCS said that more dedicated research and monitoring is needed to understand these apparent increases and what they mean for the state of seas.



POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

LAND REFORM

Sarah Speirs of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Scotland, in response to a call for evidence on the Land Reform Bill [Jul 15], said: "RICS is fully supportive of the Scottish Government's aims to modernise and rejuvenate Scotland's rural landscape. However, RICS believes that in order to achieve the government's aims [for land reform], more clarity is required on a number of the Bill's parts and provisions. At present, many are too subjective and inclusive. Coupled with the tight timescale, which will only lead to insufficient scrutiny and consideration, it is likely that this legislation could be too vague and will be dependent on regulations which will be deduced after the passing of the bill. We believe that the introduction of legislation could have a substantial impact on Scotland's land and property markets and urge the Scottish Government to consider undertaking a full impact assessment before any provisions are implemented."

- The *Herald* reported that Scottish ministers are being urged to adopt measures to encourage the resettlement of some of the 'human deserts' created by the mass evictions of the Highland Clearances. There are no provisions in the current bill which would help do this.

Russell Smith, of the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF), in its submission to the Holyrood's rural affairs committee on the bill, said: "There are welcome provisions within the bill to allow existing and newly-formed community bodies to buy land

from private owners to put it to community use. But this assumes there is a community. There are vast tracts of rural land that no longer have a resident community, it having been cleared centuries ago. It seems that a very important part of the policy intention is being missed out.

"For centuries the wealthy and the powerful have cleared communities off the land that supported them and it is time the land went back to supporting many families rather than the few. SCF therefore suggests consideration be given for Scottish ministers to be able to force the sale of privately-held land where the land is being neglected or misused, on behalf of the public in order to restore the land to community benefit. The necessary use of compulsory purchase is shameful for the large land-owning entities that have shown no interest in helping to bring communities back by re-creating crofts on the land that they control."

Community Land Scotland has also proposed that ministers should have the power to ask the question whether the ownership of a particular area land is in the public interest, and act if necessary.

Professor Jim Hunter said: "Too many see the uninhabited land of the Highlands and Islands as somehow being in its natural wild state. But that is wide of the mark. In Strathbrora, for example, there were 62 different townships cleared in the second and third decades of the 19th century. So out of the last 50 centuries, this part of Sutherland has been lacking people for only the last two. It would be of tremendous symbolic importance if we could see communities grow again on Highland land cleared of its people."

He said that nowhere else in the developed world would it be thought acceptable for just 432 owners to have possession of half a country's privately owned land.

A government spokeswoman said: "Of course, the bill is not an end in itself and, in establishing a permanent land commission, future reforms beyond those in the bill can be pursued."

Scottish Land & Estates said: "Perpetuating an out of date and divisive picture distracts from the core debate of how land is best used. Private landowners – regardless of scale – make a very significant social, economic and environmental contribution to rural Scotland. That contribution has been verified in a range of studies. We support a variety of ownership models including community ownership and the reality is that private and public landowners can and already do coexist in a constructive and productive manner. Also, the Scottish parliament has just passed the community empowerment act which includes measures to deal with abandoned and neglected land."



GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

GRANTOWN INVERTEBRATES

The Strathspey & Badenoch Herald reported that a proposed Highland craft, heritage and cultural centre is proposed for the former Grantown East railway station on the Revack Lodge Estate. The Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group has written to the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) calling for a wider range of wildlife surveys to help inform the decision; *Phasia hemiptera*, a fly rarely seen in Scotland, has been found to be present and not recorded before in the national park. The group said that the site supports habitats and plant species of value to invertebrates. The plans have been called in by the CNPA.

GREENBELT

The Scottish Government has overruled the advice of its own reporter and gave planning permission for the construction of Mossend International Railfreight Park on greenbelt land in Bellshill. PD Stirling appealed to the Scottish Government last year after North Lanarkshire Council rejected a planning application for the development amid over 1,000 objections from residents that the noise, pollution and disturbance would adversely impact their quality of life and erase Bellshill's last significant area of open space.

The Scottish Government reporter concluded that the council had been right to refuse consent. However, the application was called in by the Scottish Government in December 2014 on the grounds that the £260m infrastructure was an 'issue of national significance' that should be decided directly by ministers.

AN CAMUS MÒR

The Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group, the Cairngorms Campaign and the Scottish Campaign for National Parks have withdrawn an appeal against the development of the new town, An Camus Mòr, at Rothiemurchus in the Cairngorms National Park [Jul 14]. The groups argued that such large-scale housing does not conform with the principles of a national park and lodged an appeal with the UK Supreme Court after losing their earlier Court of Session appearances. They have had to pay the CNPA £38,000 towards costs, in addition to their own legal costs. The legal challenge has cost the CNPA in excess of £170,000 in legal fees since 2011.

Grant Moir, of CNPA, said: "I am obviously delighted that this is now the end of the matter but disappointed that it was not brought to an end sooner. The significant legal fees are not the only issue; we've invested a considerable amount of staff time and energy defending the appeal over the last few years. It's frustrating to think that this is time and money that would have been better targeted towards conservation projects in the Cairngorms National Park."

Gus Jones, of the Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group, said: "The reason for our challenge terminating at this stage is because the Supreme Court refused to limit our liability to the CNPA's legal costs. No charity could proceed on the basis of unknown costs. The incredible level of public support we have received demonstrates the deep and far-reaching public concern that exists about the Park Authority's unsustainable and developer-driven approach to planning taken in their local plan."

Roy Turnbull, of the Cairngorms Campaign, added: "History will judge our efforts. If, in years to come, people look back and see the reality and the scale of development that we tried to prevent, I suspect many will regret the failure of the courts to uphold our complaint."

Ian Lawson, also of the Cairngorms Campaign, said: "Many people feel outraged about excessive development in the park that includes an entire new town."

In a letter to the *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* Ross Anderson, of the Scottish Campaign for National Parks, said: "I have always been of the view that the merits of what we were advocating would only be fully recognised if the case had gone to Europe and particularly to the Commission where the practicalities of applying European regulations on the environment would have better reflected our concerns. These regulations are still in place and the CNPA's actions in relation to the housing development, and particularly its effect on water quality in the River Spey, should still be viewed in that context ... The proposal to allow

developments of the scale of An Camus Mòr in a national park setting remains something that we find incomprehensible and unacceptable. Not to put it too forcibly, the park authority has been cavalier in allowing this and other developments to progress this far without due regard to the effect on one of its major assets, the River Spey."

ALYTH FLOODS & BEAVERS

SNH asked the Royal Zoological Society for Scotland (RZSS) to survey the extent of beaver activity in the Alyth area and identify if beaver activity could have contributed to the recent flash floods [Jul 15].

The RZSS survey found that all of the beaver dams on the Bamff Estate (three large and 12 small dams) were structurally intact with no evidence of significant material being washed out. There was no evidence of any collapsed or washed out dams and the slow release of water was still occurring. There have been no signs of beaver activity recorded in the Den of Alyth or above Alyth for the last three years, including felled timber. Although most of the flood debris had been removed from Alyth and therefore couldn't be checked, the remaining debris had no evidence of beaver gnawing.

Perth & Kinross Council and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency are currently investigating the causes of the flooding and have conducted a series of site visits to assess rainfall levels, timber debris, land drainage and other contributing factors which could have exacerbated the flood event.

INVERGARRY BATS

500 soprano pipistrelle bats that have been preventing staff at Invergarry hydro power station in the Highlands from using their new canteen building for three years are to be relocated. The canteen is used as a summer roost. Bat boxes are being constructed on Loch Oich. It is believed to be one of the largest pipistrelle colonies in Scotland.

Scotland tends to have larger roosts than England – it is not known why but is likely to do with either differing weather conditions or a lack of roosting opportunities. Surveys at the existing bat roost at Invergarry have been undertaken to help design an effective mitigation approach for this species.

GIFT OF GROUSE

A year-long campaign, the *Gift of Grouse*, has been launched by the Scottish Moorland Group to highlight the benefits provided by the management of Scotland's grouse moors.

Tim Baynes, of the group, said: "We have often not been vocal enough in letting people know how vital the sector is. All too often, there is a deliberate misconception that moorland owners are the only ones to benefit solely from the tourism that grouse shooting provides. That is simply not true, as we can see through the magnificent conservation work that goes on across our hills and glens every day ... we want to make it more accessible, this is not just a sport for the very rich, it can be enjoyed at all levels from being driven to a walk-up shoot – and it is available to a whole range of people."

The campaign will focus on four key areas – tourism and leisure, employment, environment and conservation, and accessibility. Tourism, employment and conservation all directly benefit from grouse-shooting. Shooting and stalking generates £200m for the Scottish economy each year, with much coming from grouse shooting. The sector is estimated to support 2,640 full time jobs, costing more than £30m in wages. An RSPB Scotland spokesman once again called for licensing of grouse moors. He said: "We propose a set of minimum standards that grouse moors should adopt, which would incorporate all of the reasonable requirements currently subject to law. We would like to see a regulated system where if there are any

breaches of this licence, as with other professions, there would then be penalties levied that would ultimately lead to the withdrawal of the licence to operate."

GROUSE

OneKind, formerly known as Advocates for Animals, has called for a ban on driven grouse shoots. It argues that shooting grouse for sport is dependent on intensive habitat management. It claims this is damaging to protected wildlife sites and increases water pollution, flood risk and greenhouse gas emissions. OneKind also underlined the link to the illegal persecution of raptors such as the hen harrier, now in serious decline. This has been linked to driven grouse shooting due to the perceived threat the harriers pose to red grouse through predation.

Louise Robertson, of OneKind, said: "The shooting industry is dependent on maintaining large stocks of grouse which are shot for vast sums of money throughout the season. Legal, although often cruel, methods of control are available to gamekeepers for other species which predate on grouse but this is not the case with birds of prey. Illegal persecution of raptors is blighting the industry with significant levels taking place around driven grouse moors."

The Herald reported that Tom Quinn, of the League Against Cruel Sports, urged restaurants not to serve grouse because of the 'by-catch' of other wild animals it causes – caught in snares to protect the grouse from predators, the shooting of hares over disease concerns and the illegal persecution of birds of prey. He said that people are being given the impression that shooting grouse for the table is healthy, sustainable and environmentally friendly but 'it is none of those things.' He said: "The environment is being devastated by burning grouse moors, and millions of tonnes of leadshot is left to poison the countryside."

Dr Mark Avery, formerly of RSPB, claimed in his new book *Inglorious — Conflict in the Uplands* that grouse shooting is only made possible by 'illegal killing of protected wildlife such as hen harriers, peregrines and golden eagles by some estates.' He has launched a petition calling for the Westminster government to ban the sport in England, but sees the situation as better in Scotland, with some estates offering the likes of as game bird photography as an alternative.

A spokesman for the Scottish Gamekeepers Association said: "Lamentably, this is now indicative of the extreme end of countryside politics which has damaged trust and prevented positive joint initiatives being taken forward which would be to the benefit of Scotland's land, conservation and the communities which depend on it for employment and wellbeing. There are working people and their families busting a gut just now to prepare for something which is a major source of household income and work as well as being part of the life and rhythm of the communities in which they live. While people are entitled to drive their own agendas, they should not forget real working people and families deserve respect."

• The cold summer and heavy rain have badly affected the number of grouse bred this year. Many estates have cut their shooting days, whilst others have declared their moors as gun-free zones to help numbers recover.

WILDLIFE CRIME

Police Scotland has announced that more than 100 police officers will receive specialist training to tackle wildlife crime. The officers will take up Wildlife Crime Liaison Officer posts across all 14 Force divisions [Feb 15].

• A dead hen harrier was found on remote moorland near to Daer Reservoir in South Lanarkshire; a postmortem examination revealed that it had been shot. RSPB Scotland said the young female bird, named Annie, had been fitted with a satellite transmitter as a chick as part of a hen harrier research project on Langholm Moor.

The tracking device suggested that the bird stopped moving in mid-March. After an extensive search involving the police, the bird's body was found at an undisclosed location in late April. The Queensberry Estate later issued a statement saying the bird had been found on its land but said it had no prior knowledge of the shooting. A spokesman said: "We are deeply concerned and mystified by this incident as Queensberry Estate condemns any form of wildlife crime and are very proud of the species and habitat conservation work we undertake. We are aware of several hen harrier nesting sites on the estate and our keepers have been actively working to protect these birds in their habitat."

Tim Baynes, of the Scottish Moorland Group, said: "This bird was found in April and until this morning we – as an active participant in the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime (PAW) – had not been informed about it by any authority."

Alex Hogg, of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, said: "We are disappointed not to have known about it, as a PAW partner, until now, given the discovery was made in April. As an organisation, we condemn wildlife crime but it would be wrong to pass judgement on who might be responsible until more is known."

RSPB Scotland issued an appeal for information about the death of the hen harrier.

• Police are appealing for information following the discovery of a dead buzzard in the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park. The corpse was discovered by a member of the public near Gartocharn with a bullet wound in its chest.

• A postmortem on a buzzard, found badly injured in the Borders in July, showed that it had been hit by shotgun pellets in its head and wing; the injuries were so severe the bird had to be euthanised. The bird was found by the side of the road between Heriot and Innerleithen. The Scottish SPCA is appealing for information.

• RSPB Scotland has issued a press release about the discovery of two illegally killed red kites in the Highlands in 2014. One was found shot on a railway line [Jun 14] and the other one was found poisoned on Cawdor Estate [Sep 14]. Both birds had been satellite-tagged.

The RSPB statement said: "Both of these incidents took place in 2014 and are now being made public as the Police have concluded their enquiries." The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog said that the police have 'concluded their enquiries' without appealing for information from the public and without executing a search under warrant on Cawdor Estate; no-one has been charged in connection with the incidents.

A police spokesman said: "Investigating wildlife crime is challenging because of its nature, and the vast areas covered. Police Scotland works closely with partners including the RSPB to tackle wildlife crime, and brings to bear the full range of investigative techniques at its disposal. Our detection rate is increasing. Our aim is to reduce wildlife crime and earlier this year we launched a campaign raising awareness."

Duncan Orr-Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, said: "Since red kite reintroductions began in Scotland in 1989, over 100 birds have been confirmed as illegally killed, with a significant majority of the victims found poisoned. The real figure will be

much higher as the finding of these satellite tagged birds demonstrates."

A total of 16 birds of prey have been recorded as having been illegally killed in 2014.

WILDLIFE PROSECUTIONS

The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog reported that gamekeeper, William Curr, was charged at Forfar Sheriff Court with wildlife crimes alleged to have taken place on the Glenogil Estate in Angus last year. He is charged that he set or failed to check the snare that trapped a deer for more than 24 hours, and that he failed to remove it. It is understood that the animal died. He also faced charges that he failed to keep a record of finding the deer in the snare at Glen Trusta. It is also alleged that he failed to check another snare for more than 24 hours, during which time a fox became trapped and died of dehydration.

• A poultry farmer in Peebleshire shot a buzzard, claiming he had mistaken it for a carrion crow. He was fined £600 at Edinburgh Sheriff Court. Harrison had pled guilty under the Wildlife & Countryside Act to 'intentionally or recklessly' shooting the buzzard in November 2014. He also pled guilty to injuring the buzzard by standing on its wing; the buzzard's injuries were too severe for it to survive and it had to be euthanised.

The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog said that this was a rare conviction for the actual shooting of a protected species. The maximum penalty is £5,000 and/or six month custodial sentence.

• The long-running case against gamekeeper William Dick concluded with a conviction for illegally killing a buzzard. He had been observed by two witnesses, on the Newlands Estate near Dumfries, shooting a buzzard, stamping on it and then striking it with a rock [Apr 14]. He was convicted at Dumfries Sheriff Court and will be sentenced in September.

• A prosecution is underway at Dumfries Sheriff Court against Andrew Duncan, who is alleged to be vicariously liable for the criminal actions of gamekeeper William Dick [see above]. Mr Duncan manages the pheasant shoot on the Newlands Estate where Mr Dick killed the raptor. To date, there has only been one conviction of vicarious liability [Dec 14].

EDINBURGH AIR POLLUTION

Edinburgh City Council plans to extend Edinburgh's city centre air pollution zone by 3.5 km to the south and west of the city. It designates an area where air pollution has broken the Scottish air quality safety standard. Edinburgh has five pollution zones, with the city centre pollution zone first designated in 2000.

GARROGIE HILLTRACK

Scottish Environment LINK has written to Highland Council concerning a planning application for a hilltrack on the Garrogie Estate in Inverness-shire [Jun 15]. LINK considers that the developer has provided a lack of sufficient information to support the application.

LINK points out that the track would be constructed partly in Wild Land Area 20, and so there is a need to demonstrate that any negative impact of the track is mitigated by appropriate siting and design. There is little detail provided on the construction methods to be used over the length of the track, in terms of drainage provision, peat removal, surface material to be used, landscaping requirements, etc. LINK is not convinced that the main use of this track is agricultural and queries whether the estate has provided evidence that the purpose of the track will be agricultural rather than sporting.



ENERGY

JULY WIND

WWF Scotland reported that wind power in Scotland provided 660,117 MWh of electricity to the National Grid in July, an increase of 58% on the same month in 2014 and sufficient to supply the needs of 72% of Scottish homes. This was due to increased capacity and windier weather. Solar photovoltaic panels generated 94% of the electricity need in Aberdeen, 87% in Inverness, 85% in Edinburgh and 79% in Glasgow.

DOMESTIC RENEWABLES

The *Press & Journal* reported that Scottish Renewables and Scotland's Rural College have published statistics on renewables in Scotland. Glasgow has the most solar panels with 35% more installations than Edinburgh. AB51 (Inverurie) and G40 are the postcodes with the greatest number of small-scale renewables. Altogether there are 660,000 solar panels, 2,557 small wind projects, 204 hydro-electric schemes and three anaerobic digesters.

WINDFARM UPDATES

Scottish Borders: Ecotricity is planning to build 16 turbines at Inch Moor near Duns where there is an 'isolated landscape' and 'high wind speeds.'

Dumfries & Galloway: Councillors refused Brookfield Renewable's plans for an eight turbine development at Larbrax Moor, near Leswalt in Wigtownshire; the council's landscape architect claimed that it would have an 'adverse visual impact on the surrounding coastal area.' Scottish Natural Heritage also raised 'significant and serious concerns.'

There are ten windfarms either operational or under construction within 30 km (19 miles) of the site. Scottish Natural Heritage has also raised 'significant and serious concerns' about the impact of the project on the landscape. South Rhins Community Development Trust and Wigtownshire Chamber of Commerce have also objected.

- Councillors approved proposals for Willo Wind's nine turbine windfarm at Gass near Glenluce, 'filling a gap' between the operational Artfield Fell windfarm and the Airies windfarm, which has been approved but not implemented.

Sutherland: Highland Council officers have recommended approval of the 22 turbine Creag Riabhach windfarm near Altnahara. More than 200 objections have been lodged against the planned development. Altnaharra Estate is working with a private local company on the scheme. Bettyhill, Strathnaver & Altnaharra, Durness, Tongue, and Kinlochberrie community councils support the project.

HYDRO SCHEMES

The *Berwickshire News* reported that the Coldstream Community Trust has obtained funding for a feasibility study into a hydropower scheme for Coldstream. The possibility of re-opening an old mill lade on the Leet is being investigated.

- The 3.2 million kWh Merk hydro power scheme in Glen Fyne, Argyll has been opened. Connected to the national grid, it has been developed jointly by four partners, including Here We Are, a community organisation, MEG Renewables, Richard Grubb & family and CRF Hydro Power Ltd.

- RWE Innogy's 9 MW River Pattack hydro scheme has been given planning permission by Highland Council [Jun 15]. A man-made loch will be created on the Ardverkie Estate near Dalwhinnie, with a power station on Loch

Laggan. The scheme, which can retain and store water, will be able to generate electricity on demand. Footpaths to the Falls of Pattack will be created to improve public access.

LONGANNET

It has been announced that Longannet in Fife is to close on 31 March 2016. Owners Scottish Power said that the high cost of connecting to the grid was to blame. The company also announced it is abandoning plans to build a new gas-fired power station at Cockenzie in East Lothian. This leaves Scotland with SSE's gas-fired power station at Peterhead and EDF's nuclear stations at Hunterston and Torness and leads to renewed debate about Scotland's growing reliance on renewables and generating capacity elsewhere in the UK.

Lang Banks, of WWF Scotland, said: "While Longannet has served the nation for many years, it is Scotland's single biggest source of climate emissions and a combination of its age, air pollution rules, carbon pricing and transmission charging have made closure inevitable. The recent Scottish Parliament inquiry into energy security provided ample evidence from the National Grid and other experts that Scotland's electricity supply is absolutely secure without Longannet."

Plans for a new 1000 MW gas turbine plant at the site of the former power coal power station at Cockenzie in East Lothian, approved in 2011, have been abandoned; Scottish Power blamed National Grid's 'disproportionate' transmission charging regime and high carbon taxes. Scottish generators account for around 12% of UK generation but 40% of the transmission costs.

NORTH SEA GAS

The development of Maersk's Culzean gas field off Scotland, the largest field in the UK North Sea since 1990, has been approved by the UK Oil & Gas Authority.

Production will begin in 2019 and continue for at least 13 years with peak production of 60,000-90,000 barrels *per* day. At peak production in 2020/21, it is expected to produce enough gas to meet 5% of total UK demand. The estimated reserve is 250-300 million barrels of oil equivalent.

UCG

The *BBC News* website reported that Cluff Natural Resources (CNR) said that plans to extract gas from under the Firth of Forth have been put on hold until political debate on the method is resolved [Jul 15]. Scottish infrastructure secretary Alex Neil had made clear that he did not see underground coal gasification (UCG) developments as being included in the moratorium on shale fracking as well as coal-bed methane.

Alex Cluff, of CNR, told shareholders: "We have deemed it prudent to await clarity on these matters before committing fully to, in particular, the expense of an environmental impact study. As a result, work on a planning application will likely be postponed until after such time as the political situation is more certain. Preparatory work including site selection studies, modelling and design work are, however, well under way. In our judgment the gasification of the coal contained under these licences would represent a major advance towards Scottish energy self-sufficiency and is therefore entirely consonant with the concept of Scottish independence."

Mr Cluff said that the Scottish Government should take over planning decisions on energy projects from local authorities, warning that a local block would turn some areas into 'industrial wastelands.'

He also challenged the UK government on the spread of offshore windfarms in the southern North Sea, where he said they could impede the development of new gas resources in those offshore areas.

The *Herald* reported that CNR wrote in a letter to MSPs that an exhaustive independent study had been conducted by the UK government which had concluded that UCG offered 'clear benefits' provided that sites were carefully selected and proper monitoring put in place. The letter stated: "The sole stated purpose of the moratorium on shale gas and coalbed methane exploration and extraction is to allow time to collect the scientific evidence to underpin a reasoned debate around the potential risks associated with the emerging shale gas industry. It is neither necessary, nor in the public interest, to repeat this process for UCG."



TOURISM & RECREATION

COUNTRY SPORTS

A report, commissioned by the Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group, said that Scotland is widely recognised as the birthplace of many of the world's premier country sports. More than half of the country sports tourists in Scotland come from the south of England; participants made 270,000 visits resulting in 910,000 visitor nights in 2013 worth £155m to the economy in Scotland each year.

DOG WALKING

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has published *Taking the Lead*, guidance to encourage dog walkers to behave responsibly with regard to livestock and wildlife on farms, estates and crofts. Four million adults visit the 'great outdoors' each year, and 48% of these are accompanied by a dog. See: www.outdoorsaccess-scotland.com



NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK

Peter Argyle is to become convenor of the Cairngorms National Park Authority board for a three year term, following on from Duncan Bryden.

FC SCOTLAND

A plan for Leanachan Forest, between Fort William and Spean Bridge, produced by Forest Enterprise Scotland and Highlands & Islands Enterprise has been approved by Highland councillors. The plan includes lodges, cabins, yurts, a bunkhouse, camping pods and an 80 bed hotel overlooking Ben Nevis.

PEATLANDS PARTNERSHIP

A new research centre is being built for the Peatlands Partnership at Forsinard in Sutherland. The partnership involves several organisations including RSPB Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage. Conservation workers and university groups will use the field centre, which is on land owned by RSPB Scotland.

A new viewing tower, The Flows Lookout, has also been completed at Forsinard.