








	CONSERVATION	1
	FARMING	2
	WOODLANDS	3
	FISHFARMING & FISHERIES	3
	MARINE	4
	POLITICS & PARLIAMENT	6
	GENERAL ENVIRONMENT	7
	ENERGY	7
	RECREATION & TOURISM	8
	NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS	8

SCENES, an independent digest of environmental news in Scotland, was launched in 1987 by Dr James Fenton. Issues 49 to 161 were edited and published by Michael and Sue Scott. It is for anyone with an interest in the land and sea, whether professional or amateur. It is based solely on published material, and contains only news, with no editorial comment or opinion.

SCENES is published monthly, and comes out in the month following the title month.

NOTE: dates in square brackets relate to the most recent reference in **SCENES**.

WEBSITE: www.scenes.scot

DEADLINES: News releases and press cuttings for inclusion in **SCENES** are welcomed from organisations and individuals. Please post, or email, them to the address below, by the end of each month.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: The basic annual subscription is £50. Concessions are available for small firms and charities (£28), individuals, and outworkers with a main subscription (£22), students and seniors (£18) and for extra copies sent to the same address (£12).

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: Individual items may be reprinted freely, with acknowledgement to **SCENES**. *The photocopying or electronic reproduction of complete issues is expressly forbidden.* Additional copies of **SCENES** can be supplied at preferential rates, which compare well with the cost of photocopying. Back copies are also available, at 60p each. **A pdf version is now available; please apply by email.**

DATA PROTECTION ACT 1998: To assist with mailing, the names, addresses and subscription details of subscribers are held on computer: they will not be passed to other parties. Anyone not wishing their details to be held in this way should contact **SCENES**.

SCENES is edited and published by Sue Fenton: Polldoran, Clachan Seil, by Oban, Argyll PA34 4TJ

email: enquiries@scenes.scot

Printed by Printsmith Lochaber Ltd

ISSN 0955-226X



CONSERVATION

SEABIRDS

The National Trust for Scotland's (NTS) annual bird survey showed that the number of occupied black legged kittiwake nests on St Kilda dropped from more than 500 in 1994 to just four this year. In 1994 the occupied nests fledged 394 chicks, but this year there was just one. Numbers have fallen by 90% since 2000. On Mingulay, in the Outer Hebrides, the kittiwake population has halved over the same period. Northern fulmar numbers have halved across NTS sites, with the lowest numbers on record at St Abb's Head in 2015.

CAIRNGORMS PARK

The Herald reported that a major consultation on the future management of the Cairngorms National Park is underway. The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPAs) is managing the consultation on behalf of the Cairngorm and Glenmore Partnership, which is made up of Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Forest Enterprise Scotland as landowners and managers in the area, along with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and The Highland Council.

The *Badenoch & Strathspey Herald* reported that the CNPA proposes to become the sole planning authority within its area; planning powers are currently divided between five local authorities and the park. The CNPA currently has a strategic role and a right to 'call in' difficult applications, leaving the bulk of permissions to the relevant local authority responsible for both planning and building regulations.

BIRDS OF CONSERVATION CONCERN

A report, *Birds of Conservation Concern*, listed curlews as a bird of 'highest conservation concern.' *The Herald* reported that RSPB Scotland said that curlews should be the highest conservation priority bird species in the UK. The UK has 27% of the world's breeding curlews but numbers have fallen by 43% since the mid 1990s. Andrew Douse, of SNH, said: "The drop in curlew numbers demonstrates well a more general issue: a worrying decrease of many upland birds, all of which have large populations across the Scottish uplands. Familiar species such as merlin, whinchat, grey wagtail and dotterel have all declined. These changes likely relate to habitat changes, climate change and in some cases, predation."

Red kites have now been moved from the *Birds of Conservation Concern* Amber list to the Green list, because of the success of the reintroduction scheme since 1989.

MOORLAND STRATEGY

The *BBC News* website reported that the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) said that Scotland needs a 'unified national policy' to better protect its moorland landscapes.

A 34 page report, *A Future for Moorland in Scotland. The Need for a Locational Strategy* by independent ecologist Dr James Fenton, recommends that woodland creation should be targeted on areas where moorland has already been fragmented by forestry.

While 75% of the world's remaining heather is still found in the UK, mostly in Scotland, there never has been unified national policy to retain this 'signature treasure.' An estimated 20% of

heather moorland disappeared between 1940 and 1970, a decline which continues today with new emphasis on renewable energy and woodland expansion. Heather moors attracts tourists, but 'huge areas' of this landscape are being lost to farming and forestry.

The report divides mainland moorland into four categories – core areas, subsidiary areas, fragmented areas and scattered remnants. Core moorland covers 2.7 million hectares, 39% of mainland Scotland, with a further 160,000 hectares classified as subsidiary.

Scotland risks losing its globally renowned moorland landscapes, because there is no government strategy to balance their protection with the Scottish Forestry Strategy, which has a target of woodland expansion from 17% to 25% by 2050, with 25,000 acres of new planting per year. Potentially a further 5,000 km² of moorland will be lost, as trees will have to be planted on open moors.

The report said: "Bearing in mind the importance of moorland to Scotland's landscape, biodiversity and economy, it is surprising that there is no strategic policy guidance available, similar to the Scottish Forestry Strategy for trees and the regional Indicative Forestry Strategies. Although the justification for new woodland has been made strongly, there is no similar justification for the retention of moorland."

Dr Fenton said: "Perhaps because it has always seemed to be common, we tend not to value our moorland in Scotland even though it defines our upland landscapes. Our open moors and hills are our speciality which distinguishes us from our European neighbours. It is surprising, therefore, that there is no strategic guidance for its conservation and that we continue to accept its loss in an *ad hoc* manner. This new document has mapped all the moorland on mainland Scotland and has identified the remaining core areas. It calls for a public debate to discuss and agree where in Scotland we want to retain our open moorland landscapes as the dominant landscape."

Alex Hogg, of SGA, said that the importance of moor habitats should be reflected in the Land Use Strategy 2016-2021 for which the Scottish Government has sought public views. Mr Hogg said: "This report is not a 'no-trees' policy, but a 'where-trees' policy. It acknowledges competing demands on land use and makes sensible suggestions as to where moorland must be retained and where we can afford to lose bits without breaking the whole thing. We need to value these special landscapes again instead of paying lip service, and place them at the heart of our land-use strategy."

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "The recently published draft Land Use Strategy consultation paper proposes that we consider the need for a strategic vision for Scotland's uplands. The report published by the SGA is a welcome contribution to the discussion on this topic and we encourage responses to the Land Use Strategy consultation which is open until January 29."

Jamie McGrigor MSP, in the Holyrood debate on the Land Reform Bill [see below], said: 'I cannot leave land reform without mentioning the Scottish Gamekeepers' excellent document, *A Future for Moorland in Scotland. The Need for a Locational Strategy*. I implore the Scottish

Government to study this remarkable document in detail since it contains much knowledge on Scotland's moorland which makes up such a huge area of our land – in order that the most can be made of this unique asset which Scotland is lucky to possess.'

See: <http://bit.ly/1jLDfgJ>; <http://bit.ly/1ZOU8UN>

GOLDEN EAGLES

The BBC News website reported that the SGA found golden eagles nesting in 58 areas managed for grouse shooting this year, with around 450 breeding pairs. The SGA's last eagle survey was in 2013 and covered the Cairngorms National Park, the Monadhliaths and the Angus Glens; 55 nest sites were identified.

The SGA said numbers of golden eagles were recovering from declines in the 1960s caused by pesticides and that the management of grouse moors, both driven and walked-up, had helped to increase Scotland's population of the large raptors. Ronnie Kippen, of SGA, said: "Legal predator control and heather management by gamekeepers has been proven to help provide a vital food source for eagles such as red grouse, mountain hare and rabbits."

Duncan Orr-Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, said: "We are not sure where the SGA have got their information, however, if correct their survey highlights only 53% occupancy of known traditional golden eagle territories in the central and eastern Highlands, far below the natural carrying capacity and continues to indicate that the species is in unfavourable conservation status in this area. SNH's Golden Eagle Conservation Framework 2008, the most thorough scientific evaluation of the health of our golden eagle population, suggests that, in the absence of human killing, the golden eagle population should be increasing rapidly in this area."

PENTLAND PARK

The BBC News website reported that the Scottish Parliament's Pentland Hills Regional Park Boundary Bill committee has recommended that a bill to extend the boundaries of the Pentland Hills regional park is rejected [Sep 15]. The park currently covers 45% of the Pentland Hills range. The committee said that there was little demand for the expansion and would not provide the protection sought by Christine Graham MSP; changing the boundaries would lead to an increased financial burden on councils, spreading available funding even more thinly.

NATIONAL PARKS

The Scottish Campaign for National Parks and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland are concerned that there continues to be no specific action from the Scottish Government, despite a 2011 SNP manifesto promise to work with charities 'to explore the creation of new national parks' [Mar 15]. They are now lobbying all five parties to include a commitment to more national parks in their 2016 Scottish Parliament election manifestos. The estimated cost of £7m to set up a national park would be outweighed by the economic and environmental benefits.

Dr Aileen McLeod, the Environment, Climate Change & Land Reform minister, said that cost was an issue. She said: "Substantial cuts to the Scottish Government's budget mean that ministers must consider how any new designation may impact on our ability to support existing parks where resources have been focused to ensure that they continue to deliver a first class visitor experience."

A government spokesman said while it was committed to working with communities over new national parks, this would only be

appropriate 'where there was strong support from communities and evidence to justify the case.'

FRESHWATER PEARLS

SNH said that a new survey has confirmed that freshwater pearl mussels are absent in 11 Scottish rivers where they were previously recorded, and that pearl mussels appear to be declining nationwide. Illegal pearl fishing, low numbers of host fish, climate change, poor water quality, and river alterations are thought to be to blame.

The report said, however, that 114 rivers and burns in Scotland continue to support many of the world's most important remaining populations of freshwater pearl mussels; the majority of these continue to show signs that the pearl mussel populations are breeding. These are the sites where conservation efforts are actively being focused.

SNH and the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime Scotland have created maps identifying 33 incidents of criminality from 2010 to 2014, and hotspots; Police Scotland is now focusing its efforts on these areas.

See: <http://bit.ly/1QPgkyp>; <http://bit.ly/1k4MvwA>

KNOYDART DEER

The Press & Journal reported that the John Muir Trust (JMT) culled 86 red deer stags, the majority of which were left to 'rot on the hill' at Li and Coire Dhorrcail, on the north-west coast of Knoydart.

The Knoydart Deer Management Group said that the JMT was 'disrespecting' convention by failing to remove most of the carcasses, and was jeopardising local shooting estates by killing such a large number. In recent years, the JMT has applied for a licence to cull deer on Li and Coire Dhorrcail, outside of the legal seasons, under authorisation by licensing body, SNH. There are estimated to be 7,000 deer in Knoydart; indicative deer counts showed 14 stags at Li and Coire Dhorrcail.

Lester Standen, of JMT, said: "The figure for last year's cull, which was completed over two months ago, is significantly higher than usual because we can no longer rely on close season authorisations. In the past, this allowed us to target stags in the winter months when they come down from higher slopes to the regenerating woodland. Unfortunately, SNH has removed that option, and advised us instead to 'maximise the cull in season.' That, by necessity, means taking out more stags than would come down to the control area during the winter close season. Clearly there are differences of opinion over deer management between traditional sporting estates and those who strive to repair the ecological damage caused by centuries of overgrazing. But to suggest that the local economy is being destroyed because of the culling of 86 stags is simply scare-mongering. Periodically, hundreds of deer starve to death in the area because the deer population is too high due to insufficient culling."

An SGA spokesman said: "[JMT] has made it their political prerogative that they stand outside of the voluntary code respected by other deer managers in Scotland because they are lobbying to have this replaced by statutory arrangements. The only body which can scrutinise this incident properly to decide whether it is in the best interests of deer, best practice or the local people in Knoydart, therefore, is Scottish Government. The lobbying charity has claimed this is about repairing ecological damage. If a private estate did this, there would be an outcry. Leaving deer in this manner has nothing to do with environmental repair. Deer were extracted from this area successfully before it was managed by JMT.

"The culled animals do not need to be left on open hill. Sometimes a stalker has to leave a deer,

if its condition makes it unfit for consumption. A professional decision may be taken to leave it to feed a bird of prey and it may be placed out of view of those accessing the countryside. However, not at this number. What is considered ethical and decent has been over-stepped. Deer management groups are under close scrutiny by government in context of the Land Reform Bill. It is only fair similar scrutiny is applied to bodies who place themselves outside of existing local engagement processes."

Mike Daniels, of JMT, said: "As the SGA is well aware, many thousands of deer die on our hillsides each winter – including hundreds in the Knoydart area – because deer populations are too high and they are desperately seeking food and shelter. These deaths from starvation and lack of woodland shelter are slow and painful – and are a direct consequence of management practices that aim for high deer numbers for sport shooting regardless of animal welfare or ecology. The number of deer we had to cull between July and October – just over 1% of the total population on Knoydart – was higher than usual. Consequently, extraction of deer carcasses is much harder, especially in one of the most difficult and inaccessible corners of Scotland. Where possible, venison was taken from any remaining carcasses, with the rest left for other wildlife.

"The SGA's accusation of lack of engagement by the JMT is without foundation. The trust was part of the Knoydart Deer Management group for many years where we tried unsuccessfully to get a resolution to high deer numbers. More recently, we have been an active member, along with our neighbours, in the West Knoydart Deer Management Group. We are also a partner of the community-owned Knoydart Foundation which has played a major role in the social, economic cultural and ecological transformation of the peninsula over the past 20 years. We suspect that the main motivation for this attack from the SGA is to deflect attention away from Scotland's unsustainably high deer population, which is coming under increasing scrutiny as land reform climbs up the political agenda."

GREY SQUIRRELS

The Press & Journal reported that a grey squirrel has been spotted in Elgin, Moray, the first to be seen in the area. The Save Scotland's Red Squirrels group has laid a trap to kill the squirrel, so that DNA tests can be performed to ascertain where it came from. Greys can carry the squirrelpox virus which is lethal to the native red squirrel. However, a number of wildlife groups, co-ordinated by the Interactive Centre for Scientific Research about Squirrels, has arranged for the squirrel to be re-homed at an animal sanctuary in Elgin if caught unharmed.



FARMING

GREENING

The Rural Affairs Secretary, Richard Lochhead, said that the three crop rule must be front and centre of the European Commission's forthcoming review of Greening [Oct 15]. Greening is a new element of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), where a third of the direct farm payment budget is ring-fenced for environmental schemes.

The Scottish Government had hoped that a reasonable and workable alternative could be introduced for 2016 which would benefit the environment. Scottish equivalence proposals would have allowed farmers to have stubble or cover crops on 25% of their arable land over the winter months instead of meeting the crop diversification requirement. However, the European Commission said that stubble is not an acceptable form of winter soil cover, and that a new crop would need to be planted on 100% of the arable area.

Mr Lochhead said: "The three crop rule does not work for Scotland, and has already resulted in a fall in barley production. The very reasonable and workable alternatives put forward by the Scottish Government are based on advice from Scottish environmental organisations and research institutes that the ecological benefits would be the same as or even better than Europe's standard crop diversification measures."

Mr Lochhead further clarified the detailed implementation rules for Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs). Farmers don't have to plough EFA green cover for it to count as greening – other methods of incorporation can be acceptable – and field margins for EFA nitrogen fixing crops can be delivered around the boundary, rather than around each crop.

NFU Scotland's priorities for changes to greening rules and simplification are that the Scottish Government should remove additional requirements imposed on the Nitrogen Fixing Crop EFA option. It also wants the government to take advantage of the flexibility available under the existing legislation to make full use of the conversion factors for field margins and buffer strips, and the option to allowing buffer strips to be grazed.

CEREAL HARVEST

Scotland's chief statistician has released the final cereal harvest estimates which show that Scotland's 2015 cereal and oilseed rape harvest has not been the record breaker that had been expected [Oct 15]. Initial estimates from the October Crop Report meeting suggested that 2015 would see the best cereal harvest in 20 years in terms of yields. However, the Cereal Production Survey shows yields are 5% lower than anticipated.

The 2015 harvest was late to start and, once underway, was halted several times by poor weather conditions, with more fields whole-cropped than usual, which is likely to have impacted on yield estimates. Long periods of wet weather prevent farmers from harvesting cereal grain. Often, the whole of the plant was cut instead and used as animal feed. When this happens yields cannot be measured.

The area of cereals planted fell by 4%, an expected reaction to crop diversification rules in the new CAP. As a result, total cereal production also fell by 4% to 3.1 million tonnes, including almost 2 million tonnes of barley and 1 million tonnes of wheat.

The average overall yield for Scottish cereals is estimated at 7 tonnes *per* hectare. Cereal yields range from 5.9 tonnes *per* hectare for spring barley to 9.3 tonnes *per* hectare for wheat. Oilseed rape yields are estimated at an average of 4.1 tonnes *per* hectare. The average cereal yield for the last ten years is 7% higher than in the previous decade.

Scotland's largest cereal crop, spring barley, saw a 9% fall in production over the year, to 1.5 million tonnes. There was also reduced production for oats, which fell to 152,000 tonnes.

Compared to last year, wheat, winter barley and oilseed rape production has increased. Wheat production is estimated at one million tonnes, the highest wheat production on record. 406,000 tonnes of winter barley were produced and 148,000 tonnes of oilseed rape. See: www.gov.scot/stats/bulletins/01195

BEE CONSULTATION

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is consulting on a plan, *A Pollinator Strategy for Scotland 2016-2026*, to protect pollinating insects in Scotland. The insects need greater protection because of their role in pollinating crops, fruits and other plants. There are growing concerns that environmental

pressures are leading to declines in the number, diversity and geographic range of pollinators. SNH aims to build on work that has already begun on creating flower-rich habitats and control diseases. Scotland has 23 bumblebees, 79 solitary bees and the honey bee in addition to wasps, hoverflies, other flies, beetles, butterflies and moths. The consultation runs until 14 March.

See: <http://bit.ly/22pLNNZ>



WOODLANDS

WOODLAND RESTORATION

The Herald reported that the Woodland Trust Scotland has surveyed 11,000 hectares, of what was once ancient woodland, in the Great Glen & the Three Firths and in the Cairngorms & Hinterland. 1,000 hectares of forest are now being restored, with further plans for 2,200 hectares of restoration.

Tree cover is thinned and native trees encouraged to colonise areas, along with bushes and undergrowth species. These thrive once the blanket of shade, a hallmark of conifer plantations, recedes.

The restoration project has been made possible through help from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Scottish Forestry Trust and the MacRobert Trust.



FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

SEA-LICE

The Control of Sea Lice on Fish Farms in Scotland 2013-2015 has been published by Salmon & Trout Conservation Scotland (S&TCS). The industry-wide problem with sea-lice appears to be increasing and is 'certainly not under control.' The report shows that these threats are not being addressed by effective Scottish regulation and control, with wild fish populations already significantly reduced.

Analysis of the control of sea-lice on Scottish fishfarms is severely hampered by the lack of farm-specific sea-lice data. S&TCS has analysed the available data published by the Scottish Government's Fish Health Inspectorate, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisation covering 2013 to 2015. Regions representing almost 60% of Scottish production were over the voluntary Code of Good Practice threshold of 0.5 adult female lice *per* fish in May 2015; this is at the peak of the wild smolt migration run, when wild fish are at their most vulnerable to infestation with sea-lice emanating from fishfarms.

The report makes a number of recommendations for action from the Scottish Government, including:

- requiring the immediate publication of farm-specific sea-lice data
- tougher regulation and inspection of fishfarms
- a government-led review of the current voluntary code of practice, replacing it with a statutory code, as provided for in the Aquaculture Act 2007
- introducing an 'upper-tier' sea-lice threshold above which an immediate cull or harvest of farmed fish is required by law
- amending Scottish legislation to protect wild fish from potential damage caused by fishfarms, with inspectors given a legal duty to control sea-lice on fishfarms in order to protect wild fish populations

- ordering the closure and/or relocation or persistently poorly-performing fishfarms

- signalling that the fish farming industry will be required eventually to move to full closed containment, to ensure a complete 'biological separation' of wild and farmed fish.

See: <http://bit.ly/1TTEPK1>

SEALS & FISHFARMS

Marine Scotland has published figures which show the percentage of fishfarms making use of anti-predator nets to deter seals has risen from 13% in 2011/12 to 79% in 2014/2015 [Oct 15]. The percentage of those that made use of seal blinds, to prevent seals seeing fish that they can prey on, has fallen from 29% in 2012/13 to 18% in 2014/15. There has been a decline in the number of seals killed from 241 on 235 individual fishfarms in 2011 to some 80 across 214 farms in 2014.

However, salmon farming has been responsible for the shooting of 49 seals in the first half of 2015 – eight more than the same period the last year. Licences are issued which allow seals to be shot to protect fish stocks. Salmon farmers say that they kill seals as a last resort to prevent them attacking nets and eating fish. However, campaigners argue that better nets and 'seal-scarers' should eliminate the need for killing.

The RSPCA has welfare standards for farmed Scottish salmon, which need to be complied with to become RSPCA approved. RSPCA Assured scheme members must report any incidents of seals being shot within 72 hours. If a member cannot demonstrate that any lethal action was taken only as a last resort, and that all required non-lethal deterrents were in place and fully functional, then the member will automatically be suspended from the scheme.

The Global Alliance Against Industrial Aquaculture said: "The leap in use of anti-predator nets shows how easy (albeit expensive) it is to take steps to avoid shooting and killing seals. These figures blow out of the water the industry's claim that seals are shot as a 'last resort'. Even now, one in five salmon farms still don't use anti-predator nets. The RSPCA, who certify over 70% of Scottish farmed salmon as 'welfare friendly', must now tighten the net on salmon farms who shoot seals first rather than as a 'last resort'."

The Scottish SPCA does not certify salmon farms.

RAASAY RANGE

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that the North West Inshore Fisheries Group commissioned an economic survey of fishing in the Ministry of Defence (MoD)'s proposed exclusion zone around the torpedo testing range between Raasay and the mainland [Sep 15]. The survey showed that 18 boats caught 80 tonnes of prawns and a smaller tonnage of other shellfish within the affected area between December 2014 and November 2015, with a value of £947,500. Fishermen said that the area surrounding the proposed expanded closure is already fished to its maximum sustainability by the static gear fleet, with no potential for adding the displaced gear from a further 3-5 boats.

The plans for new bylaws to extend the BUTEC testing range will double the Inner Area closed to fishing from 25 km² to 54 km². However, the MoD also states that the outer area will be closed for up to three days at a time for specific exercises and this will mean no fishing in 104 km². Two meetings of the recently created consultation group are to take place in February and March 2016.

Ian Blackford MP tabled an early Day Motion in the UK parliament to protest against the MoD's failure to carry out an economic impact assessment on the proposed bylaw changes, and also asked the

Defence Secretary to postpone the consultation. He said that the MoD seemed 'uncompromising in its imperial attitude.'

OUTER HEBRIDES CONSULTATION

Marine Scotland has initiated a consultation on the future management of inshore fisheries in the Western Isles. The consultation has been prompted by the Outer Hebrides Inshore Fisheries Group's belief that some of the restrictions are outdated; fishing in the areas is prohibited either seasonally or all year round.

Duncan MacInnes, of Western Isles Fishermen's Association, said: "Seasonal closures and creel prohibition areas have played a key role in managing inshore fisheries in the Outer Hebrides for the last 30 years. We welcome the opportunity for further consultation on amending some of those measures to reflect the changes that have occurred in fishing and marketing practices during that period. The amendments, if implemented, will enhance shellfish stocks around the Outer Hebrides as identified in the Management Plan developed by the Outer Hebrides Inshore Fisheries Group."

See: <http://bit.ly/1Bw6Rm>

QUOTAS

The annual December Fisheries Council EU fish quota talks in Brussels have resulted in larger catch limits for 16 out of 23 Scottish fish stocks.

A 15% rise in the quota for North Sea cod has been agreed, a 47% increase for North Sea haddock with 30% increases for Rockall haddock. Quota increases for west of Scotland haddock (30%), hake and monkfish (20%), megrim (26%), North Sea herring (16%) and west coast prawns (16%) were agreed. Quota for North Sea whiting and lemon sole remain unchanged, whilst the North Sea prawn total allowable catch was reduced by 23%. West of Scotland herring was not given an allocation for 2016.

Fisheries minister, Richard Lochhead, said that it was disappointing that there was a late and unexpected deal between the EC and Norway on blue whiting, against scientific advice. This 'behind doors' deal resulted in Norway gaining a disproportionate share (50,000 tonnes) of the blue whiting quota of 776,391 tonnes, a reduction from 2015.

- From 1 January 2016, the Common Fisheries Policy discard ban will apply to demersal (bottom-dwelling) stocks such as haddock, langoustine, sole, plaice and prawns. A complete discard ban for all quota species will be in place by 2019.

GEAR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The Scottish Government has developed a long-term plan, following consultation, to tackle the longstanding and complex problems associated with conflicts between mobile and static gear. This plan includes applying tracking technology to vessels fishing inshore waters to help deter gear vandalism; introducing spatial pilots within gear conflict hotspots; testing technology to improve understanding of fishing vessels' operations; establishing a working group with industry to look at good practice; possible legislative changes to the marking and visibility of static gear within 12 miles, and considering legislative options for Marine Scotland to take a more direct role in gear conflict.

See: www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/12/4724

EU/FAROE FISH

Richard Lochhead said that the future level of Faroese access to EU waters to fish for mackerel must be open to review at next year's negotiations [Nov 15]. Negotiators claimed that in 2014 the level of access to mackerel for

the Faroes was fixed at 30% for the full five year duration of the agreement. This was not made clear to EU delegations at the time and was not recorded anywhere. As a result, mackerel access between the EU and Faroe has been taken off the negotiating table until 2019.



MARINE

MPAs

The Scottish Government designated 30 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in 2014 and subsequently consulted on the associated management measures for a total of 20 sites [Nov 15].

However, until now the areas have been at risk of potentially irreversible damage from some fishing activities. New proposals for fisheries management in the MPAs will help move the most damaging activities away from sensitive habitats. Following feedback from stakeholders, a further consultation was undertaken on the proposed measures in four of the larger MPAs to consider further representations.

In response to that consultation, the fishing minister, Richard Lochhead, announced a further consultation (until 17 January) for three specific sites – the Small Isles, Wester Ross, and Loch Sunart to the Sound of Jura. The government said that the decision to consult again on what types of fishing can be done in them follows feedback from the fishing industry and changes to the MPAs' boundaries. Management measures for all other sites consulted on will remain unchanged.

The MPA network covers 4% of Scottish inshore waters, and it is estimated that the direct economic impact on the fishing industry will be very low – around 0.25% of its combined earnings. To help minimise any local impact, Mr Lochhead has announced a three point plan including:

- an environmental monitoring strategy, including opportunities for vessels to participate with funding of up to £500,000 over three years
- resources for diversification will be an early priority for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
- a commitment to undertake a robust economic study in a year's time to assess the impact on coastal communities

Mr Lochhead said: "We have received a range of different views on our proposals from communities, stakeholders, and the fishing industry – including many in the static sector who support our proposals whilst others have expressed concern. As a result, I have made changes where I can to reduce any potential economic impact while still protecting the integrity of our initial proposals and desire to protect and conserve the marine environment for future generations. It's important that our management measures differentiate between high and low impact fishing activities. While our analysis tells us the overall impact on fishing will be low, at around 1.7% of affected vessel landings, I have put in place measures to help mitigate any impact. We must balance the interests of protecting Scotland's marine environment with wider interests, particularly those of the fishing industry. However, failure to protect coastal areas would result in permanent damage to habitats and the fish stocks they support – that is the real risk for our coastal communities."

Calum Duncan, of Scottish Environment LINK's marine taskforce, said: "We welcome the proposals as the first step toward protecting many important areas, enabling ecological recovery and helping to secure healthier Scottish seas for future generations, although concerns remain about some places where bottom-towed fishing

will still be permitted. These nature conservation measures must also be part of a broader and more progressive approach to spatial management of fisheries throughout our seas."

Stuart Housden, of RSPB Scotland, said: "Though we are pleased to see these proposals, we also note the absence of similar areas to protect our internationally important seabirds and harbour porpoise. We hope that Scottish Government will act to protect these species at sea in order to meet its international commitments and provide a healthy environment for all."

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Duncan MacInnes, of the Western Isles Fishermen's Association, said: "The figures produced by Marine Scotland are completely wrong and have massively underestimated the negative economic impact on the islands. For example, in the waters around Mingulay, the figures are wrong by a factor of ten but they have closed this area without any further consultation. In St Kilda, they even got the method of fishing wrong but still closed the grounds, barring our boats from catching crayfish which is the most valuable shellfish species in Scottish waters."

The *Herald* reported that the Clyde Fishermen's Association (CFA) has hosted meetings to make the public aware of the effect of changes to the management of MPAs and the Regulating Order [Nov 15]. The South Arran MPA and the application for a Clyde Regulating Order are two separate entities. They are subject to their own due process.

The CFA claims the new rules will economically damage villages and towns dependent on fishing. It is also believed the regulation will increase depopulation in Argyll and Bute, which is currently running at 3.7%. CFA said that the changes could lead to the loss of 700 onshore fishing related jobs across the region and a reduction of £26.6m in GVA, the measure used to value the goods and services produced in an area.

Elaine Whyte, of CFA, said: "At many events the unanimous public support and momentum was both visually and verbally expressed. So many local community members were not even aware of MPAs or the proposed Regulating Order until these events, let alone aware of the impacts they will have on their communities. In respect to science and management, we feel it is unfair for the Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST), the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust (SIFT) and Revive the Clyde to claim that lack of leadership and poor management on behalf of the fishing industry and the Scottish Government have led to the Scottish public no longer eating Clyde finfish. They also point out that finfish stocks are depleted in the Clyde. Clyde fishermen don't have the quota they once did to catch finfish, but they are present and increasing as science is showing."

Charles Millar, of SIFT, which has applied for a Regulating Order, believes it will improve the sustainability of the fishery and bring new jobs. He said: "The Regulating Order aims to boost the Clyde's fishery which used to be rich and diverse, but is now essentially dependent upon prawns and scallops. SIFT believes that if fishery management measures of the sort that other countries have successfully adopted were used in the Clyde, then the fishery would benefit. The economic assessment of SIFT's Regulating Order proposal is that it could bring over 100 new jobs to the Clyde's commercial fishing sector and over 130 more to its recreational sea angling sector."

The COAST newsletter states that MPAs are designed to protect marine species and habitats (many of which are also fish nursery grounds), while at the same time allowing nearly all of the marine activities which already occur in these areas to continue. They are not No Take Zones; for instance,

the Arran MPA would still allow bottom trawling in 36% of the area and in 51% of the Upper Loch Fyne MPA. MPAs will encourage well-managed creeling and trawling, scallop diving, wildlife tourism and eventually, if managed effectively, a return of sea angling – all activities which used to support a far greater diversity and number of jobs around the Clyde than exist now.

Howard Wood, of COAST, said: “The Clyde belongs to us all and must be managed in the public interest, as Marine Scotland is attempting to do. The South Arran MPA trawling restrictions on priority habitats such as seagrass meadows, burrowed mud and maerl beds equal less than 5% of Clyde waters. Big compromises have been made by the government and communities like COAST, yet incredibly the mobile fishing lobby continues to make alarmist and unsubstantiated claims that these modest MPAs will ‘decimate’ communities. Ironically, it was bottom trawling which our predecessors (mainly fishermen) fought hard to get banned in the 1890s – to preserve the viability of fishing communities! They were wise.

“Since bans on bottom trawling in the Clyde were lifted in the 1960s and 80s our white fish stocks have declined to the point of being commercially unviable and sea anglers now go to Norway instead of the Clyde. Poor leadership and a lack of management has cost the Clyde hundreds of jobs and deprived Scotland of an affordable food source. MPAs can play an important part in redressing this situation and Marine Scotland needs our continued support as they finalise management for the entire MPA network ... MPAs are the first glimmer of hope for our inshore waters in decades. Let’s not allow the short term interest of one fishing sector to override the wider interests of west coast and island communities.”

- Scottish Environment LINK’s Marine Taskforce wrote to the Scottish Parliament with the findings of an economic review commissioned by the Marine Conservation Society (MCS). When considering hypothetical scenarios in which bottom-towed prawn fishing and scallop dredging is excluded from Marine Protected Areas, the report concluded that rather than damaging the local economy, such measures could potentially provide substantial net benefits to coastal communities, for example by providing new opportunities for other forms of fishing and commercial marine activities.

The report argues that other analyses have not considered the major commercial significance of the ‘spillover effect’ where fish and shellfish stocks recover within protected areas and move out beyond MPA boundaries, as well as allowing other activities to thrive in areas previously subjected to trawling or dredging.

Calum Duncan, of MCS Scotland and LINK’s Marine Taskforce, said: “Whilst we are not advocating blanket bans throughout all the MPAs, the report MCS commissioned does clearly underline why we must start making management decisions for the long-term health of our seas, all marine wildlife and the coastal communities that rely upon them, instead of locking in short-termism. By looking after Scotland’s seas better, we can safeguard fishing and other economic opportunities now and for the future. A network of well-managed MPAs is therefore a sound investment for this and future generations.”

Dr Richard Luxmoore, of the National Trust for Scotland, said: “For decades we have deployed a form of fishing that drags heavy gear over our seabed. This has undoubtedly contributed to declining marine biodiversity in our inshore seas, whilst we depend on a decreased range of fish and shellfish stocks. Something has to change.

Protecting and allowing the expansion of the remaining pockets of biodiversity in our inshore area is a good start.”

The revised draft Orders can be seen on: <http://bit.ly/1FCKRWt> Further information on all the proposals is on: <http://bit.ly/1YwiVOQ>

MINKE DEATH

A dead minke whale, washed ashore near Inverkip marina in Renfrewshire, had been trapped by fishing ropes. The Scottish Marine Animals Stranding Scheme said that at least three other whales have been killed by entanglement in Scottish waters in the past year.

BASKING SHARKS

The *BBC News* website reported that Basking Shark Scotland said more than 700 sightings of basking sharks were made by its staff and the public between April and October. The majority of the sightings were made off Mull, Coll and Tiree.

Basking Shark Scotland also recorded more than 1,000 cetaceans, including whales and dolphins, plus sunfish and a leatherback turtle. 2015 had been its best year for shark sightings; 172 were recorded in 2013 and 250 last year.

WEST SANDS

A survey by Scottish Natural Heritage has shown that the dunes at the West Sands in St Andrews are recovering well from a storm in March 2010, with new dune-forming plants present for the first time in several years.

The dunes are part of the Eden Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the Firth of Tay & Eden Estuary Special Area of Conservation. The effects of the storm surge were also felt over the Links Courses, adjacent farmland and along large stretches of the north east coast of Scotland.

Access to the dunes is now managed, with sensitive paths closed off, and there are now boardwalks and signed dune paths, providing access to the beach from the car park. Mechanical cleaning of the beach has also stopped, replaced by manual litter picking. The seaweed left behind allows sand to build up and sand dune plants to colonise and expand seawards. The majority of the Out Head section is now closed to vehicles and managed in a more sensitive way, with a conservation grazing herd provided by a local farmer. Dune grasses were planted in some of the more exposed areas of dunes, with the help of The Links Trust, the Fife Coast & Countryside Trust, the St Andrews Community Fund, Fife Council, the University of St Andrews and the community.

The Fife Coast & Countryside Trust has now secured a licence to take sand from the beach at low tide to link the edges of blowouts together, allowing sand to build behind them and the dunes to repair themselves. The trust has published the West Sands Charter, a guide on how to enjoy the beach recreationally and responsibly.

RADIOACTIVE SHELLFISH

The *Sunday Herald* reported that a study showed that radioactive carbon has been found in the shells of shellfish in Scotland. The study, carried out by the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre in East Kilbride and the Scottish Association for Marine Science in Oban, showed that the radioactivity came from the Sellafield nuclear plant in Cumbria.

Shellfish were sampled at Port Appin, north of Oban in Argyll, Maidens in South Ayrshire and at Garlieston and Kippford on the Solway coast of Dumfries & Galloway. Mussels were found to be the most contaminated, due to

the surface environment they inhabit and their feeding behaviour. At Garlieston, near Dumfries, concentrations in mussels were almost three times the normal background level, while at Port Appin they were 20% higher.

The Sellafield plant has discharged an average of more than eight million megabecquerels of carbon-14 a year from its pipelines between 1994 and 2013. The levels peaked in 2003 but have remained ‘relatively high.’ The Sellafield discharges are authorised and ‘do not pose any radiological risk.’ Waste fuel from nuclear plants at Torness in East Lothian, Hunterston in North Ayrshire and Dounreay in Caithness will continue to be reprocessed at Sellafield until at least 2018. A Sellafield spokesman said that the site operated within a stringent and highly monitored environmental regulatory regime: “Marine discharges remain at historic low levels. All discharges are well below permitted levels.”

The study is published online in the *Journal of Environmental Radioactivity*.

CROMARTY FIRTH

The *Herald* reported that Cromarty Firth Port Authority (CFPA) has applied to the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA) to undertake ship-to-ship transfers while vessels are at anchor just outside the firth, beyond the Sutors headland. This area, within the larger Moray Firth, is also under CFPA control. The authority already has a licence for ship-to-ship transfers for vessels lying alongside the Nigg Oil Terminal.

The maximum quantity proposed to be transferred in a single operation is 180,000 tonnes at a rate of around four transfers a month to a maximum of 8,640,000 tonnes *per annum*; each transfer operation would take around 24 hours.

Dr Greg Fullarton, an environmental consultant, said: “The main protected area is the Moray Firth Special Area of Conservation, designated for the bottlenose dolphin population. We have the Rosemarkie to Shandwick Coast SSSI, the Cromarty Firth Special Protection Area, the Cromarty Firth SSSI and the Cromarty Firth Ramsar site all within a few miles. They have been designated by government here and in Europe precisely because they need protection. The emergency coastguard tug is based in Orkney so if something goes wrong there is potential to wipe out dolphins, seal and salmon populations not to mention the birds for which the firth is renowned.”

He questioned how robust the Port Authority’s environmental modelling had been as it seemed to be based on one tonne of oil escaping: “Neither does there appear to be any account taken of the fact that the wind can blow from the east for several weeks a year. So any spillage could be blown right up the firth.”

Bob Buskie, of CFPA, said: “This is an addition to the current licence, and is now open to full consultation. This type of ship-to-ship operation has been carried out in the port for many years without incident. The Port of Cromarty Firth (trading name for the CFPA) takes its environmental responsibilities extremely seriously and would be happy to discuss any concerns with interested parties.”

The consultation closes on 21 January.

See: www.cfpa.co.uk/News/Oil-Transfer-Licence-Application.aspx



POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

LAND REFORM

MSPs voted to back the general principles of the Land Reform Bill in the stage 1 debate at Holyrood [Oct 15]. The measures in the bill will increase transparency of land ownership in Scotland; help to ensure communities have a say in how land in their area is used; address issues of fairness, equality and social justice connected to the ownership of, access to and use of land in Scotland and help to underpin a thriving tenant farming sector in Scotland

The Rural Affairs, Climate Change & Environment committee (RACCE) published a 140 page report concerning its scrutiny of the bill in advance of the debate and vote, and set out a series of recommendations. Convener Rob Gibson said that the committee shared the government's aim of delivering radical land reform, but said: "In our view, some parts as drafted require more work to deliver their ambitions. Key issues – such as improving transparency on who owns, controls and benefits from land, making the rent review process fairer and more transparent, and creating a better environment for investment in holdings by both tenants and landlords – require either further consideration or more detailed explanation."

The committee insisted the bill 'must be enhanced and strengthened if it is to achieve its aims' and must provide greater detail; it is essential that the new law states clearly 'that land is a national asset for the benefit of all the people of Scotland.' The committee regretted that Part 3 of the legislation as currently drafted 'is unlikely to deliver the improved transparency about those who not only own land, but control or benefit from land, that the Scottish Government is seeking, and that the committee and many people in Scotland want, and have a right, to see.' Concerns about a lack of evidence on plans to end business rates exemptions for shooting and deerstalking estates were also highlighted, with the report calling on ministers to provide a thorough analysis of the possible economic, social and environmental implications. During its scrutiny, the committee heard fears that the bill could be open to challenge by landowners under European human rights legislation.

However, David Johnstone, of Scottish Land & Estates (SLE), said: "We are alarmed at the lack of clarity, certainty and detail which remains on key issues and this was highlighted in [the] debate by parliamentarians across the political spectrum and underlined by the chairmen of two parliamentary committees. We are deeply concerned that key parts of the bill will undermine property rights and will be vulnerable to challenge under European Convention of Human Rights Legislation ... We are also disappointed that the Scottish Government seems determined to press on regardless with the re-introduction of business rates on shooting rights when RACCE had said there is a need for a much more thorough assessment of its impact."

He said that RACCE had made a very important intervention on some topics, but voiced fears about making the bill 'more radical.' He said: "The Land Reform Bill, as it stands, will have far-reaching and detrimental consequences for land-based businesses across Scotland, which employ many thousands of people and make a major social, economic and environmental contribution to rural communities. There has been so much rhetoric surrounding the bill that has been about 'righting historic wrongs' or 'giving lairds a bashing', that many landowners fear the

bill could be in danger of becoming more about inflicting punitive measures on landowners rather than about meaningful reform to benefit all. We wholeheartedly agree that Scotland's land should be used for the benefit of the many and believe that both private and community ownership have an important role in delivering that benefit."

A spokesman for the Scottish Gamekeepers Association said: "In particular, we back the need for a more robust assessment of economic, social and environmental impacts of ending the exemptions from non-domestic rates for shootings and deer forests. Whilst supporting fully the principle of community empowerment, careful consideration has to be given to maintaining that which is currently a source of resilience in our present communities, particularly in fragile rural areas."

Alex Fergusson MSP said: "Given that the Scottish Government has an inbuilt majority on the committee, this report is remarkably critical of the bill as it was laid before parliament. While there are aspects we can all agree on, such as transparency of ownership, too much detail has been left to future secondary legislation for us to be sure of the impact of some of the measures within it. That has made scrutiny of the proposals – which is the primary role of the committee – extremely difficult."

The RACCE committee believes that the voluntary management of deer numbers by landowners is not tackling the issue of high deer numbers, causing damage to internationally important habitats, ancient woodlands and peat bogs. The committee has urged the Scottish Government to consider strengthening the approach to deer management.

With the backing of the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), RSPB Scotland, Cairngorms Campaign, Ramblers Scotland, John Muir Trust and Woodland Trust Scotland, Michael Russell MSP suggested amendments to the bill which call for giving SNH more powers to ensure that deer populations are better controlled by deer management groups to protect the public interest.

Mr Russell said: "Recent information from SNH confirms that the voluntary system of deer management is not working. It requires considerable legislative strengthening if it is to be an effective way of controlling the ever increasing number of deer across Scotland which in some places is threatening biodiversity and the existence of commercial forestry. In some cases the decision to allow that to happen is taken by owners for entirely selfish purposes but in others it is the result of many years of failed management by competing interests. The Land Reform Bill contains some provisions on deer management but they do not, in my view, go far enough and I am therefore grateful for the help of Scottish Wildlife Trust, RSPB Scotland and others in formulating some initial amendments to start to find an effective way to tackle this serious and growing problem."

Dr Maggie Keegan, of SWT, said: "SWT wholeheartedly backs Mike Russell's suggested amendments because in some areas of Scotland, high deer numbers are wreaking havoc on internationally important habitats such as rare Atlantic oak woodland. The lack of progress towards sustainable deer management under the present voluntary system is frustrating and puts at risk Scottish Government ambitions regarding climate change, peatland restoration and woodland expansion targets. For the sake of protecting Scotland's natural capital, we hope the Scottish Government will support Mr Russell's suggested amendments which are part of the

step change needed to help deliver sustainable deer management."

Duncan Orr-Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, said: "In the absence of natural predators, removed by man in previous centuries, the sustainable management of deer is a key issue if we are to prevent further deterioration to some of our most important wildlife sites. We support the provision of new deer management powers to SNH to help deliver our 2020 biodiversity targets, as well peatland restoration, and native woodland expansion."

The suggested amendments can be seen on: www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/BusinessBulletin/95026.aspx

• The Scottish Government announced that the Scottish Land Fund is to increase from £3m to £10m in January 2016 [Jun 15].

COMMUNITY LAND

A report, by the One Million Acre Short Life Working Group, has been published. It recommends proposals to deliver a target of one million acres of land in community ownership by 2020. The strategy includes stimulation of demand for community owned land through raising awareness; capacity building of communities to take land ownership projects forward; improvement of access to support services; development of a network of support providers, and addressing issues around the availability of land and barriers to the supply of land. The report identified 480,000 acres of land already in community ownership, which has recently been increased to over 500,000 acres by the acquisition of land by the Pairc Trust since the report was finalised [see below].

See: www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/12/5735

PAIRC ESTATE

Residents on the Pairc Estate in Lewis have finally taken over the land after 13 years, following a community buyout [May 14]. An outstanding legal case, Scotland's first hostile land buyout under the Land Reform Act, will now be dropped.

26,775 acres (10,835 hectares) was bought from landowner Barry Lomas, including an interposed lease previously entered into by Mr Lomas. Funding towards the £500,000 cost was secured from the Scottish Land Fund, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, the Muaitheabhal Community Wind Farm Trust and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

The Pairc Trust will now own almost the whole Pairc Estate which extends to 11 crofting townships and an extensive coastline.

CAPE WRATH

The *BBC News* website reported that a crowdfunding appeal is to be launched to help fund a community buyout of about 111 acres at Cape Wrath in Sutherland. The Ministry of Defence had previously been interested in buying and adding the land around Cape Wrath Lighthouse [Aug 13]. Durness Development Group hopes to raise enough money to purchase the land from the Northern Lighthouse Board; it has permission from the Scottish Government to make a right-to-buy bid.

GREAT & LITTLE BERNERA

Count Robin de la Lanne Mirlees gifted uninhabited Little Bernera in the Outer Hebrides to the National Trust for Scotland, which refused it because of upkeep costs [Mar 15]. The Count's son has now had the island valued at £500,000, and is intending to sell it on the open market; locals on Great Bernera (which he also owns) would get a percentage of the sale. However, the district valuer said that the crofting land on Little Bernera is worth only £20,000 and the crofts on Great Bernera are worth £50,000. A community group is lodging an application, for both islands, under the Land Reform Act for a registered interest and a right to buy.

GALLAN HEAD

The Gallan Head Trust has been given permission, and funding, to buy a former Cold War surveillance station at Aird Uig on Lewis [Jul 15]. The trust has plans to build a space observatory and a marine research centre. More than £250,000 of funding has been secured from Highlands & Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Land Fund and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

BUDGET

The Scottish Government has announced its budget for 2016, which does not allocate new resources to improving Scotland's natural environment.

Lloyd Austin, of RSPB Scotland said: "... A range of natural heritage organisations urged the Finance Secretary to be bold in his budget and to match the many world-leading environmental commitments the government has made with the necessary resources to really deliver them. This followed the First Minister's comments, at the World Forum on Natural Capital, where she highlighted how investing in the natural world was essential to help create a fairer society, a more sustainable economy and a healthier environment. Critically, she publicly committed the government to be 'looking to make further progress and lead by example'. It is disappointing therefore that this budget fails to do this.

"The draft budget does not propose any significant cuts to environmental spend which is some comfort. However, the budget for agri-environment measures remains static and insufficient to halt the loss of biodiversity. In addition, funding for SNH is cut by £5m and for the Scottish Environment Protection Agency by £2.5m."

**GENERAL ENVIRONMENT****WILDLIFE CRIME**

Graham Christie, owner of Dunmhor Shooting, has been fined £3,200 at Stirling Sheriff Court. The court heard that one of his gamekeepers was 'under pressure' to target the birds; a buzzard had been illegally trapped on the Cardross Estate near Port of Menteith by one of his gamekeepers [May 15]. Mr Christie is only the second person to be convicted under vicarious liability laws that make landowners and managers responsible for their gamekeepers' crimes.

BIRDS OF PREY DEATHS

The BBC News website reported that a 20 year review by RSPB Scotland of the illegal killing of birds of prey showed that 779 raptors died between 1994 and 2014. 468 were poisoned, 173 shot and 76 caught in illegal traps. The figures include 104 red kites, 37 golden eagles, 30 hen harriers, 16 goshawks and ten white-tailed sea eagles. A further 171 incidents are documented where poisoned baits and/or non-birds of prey victims were found, including 14 pet cats and 14 pet dogs which died eating poison left for birds, and a further 134 incidents where no victim had been found but clear attempts to target raptors had been uncovered (e.g. illegally-set traps) and seven attempted shootings.

The report includes a map showing the landholdings of all known persecution incidents during this period. 81% of confirmed poisoning incidents during this nine-year period were on land used for game-shooting; 57% on grouse moors and 24% on land managed for lowland pheasant shoots. 86% of those convicted of raptor persecution between 1994-2014 were gamekeepers.

RSPB Scotland called for stricter controls on shooting estates, including a review of game bird licensing systems. The Scottish Government confirmed that a review into game licensing in other countries is to be commenced.

Tim Baynes, of the Scottish Moorland Group, said: "The most striking fact about bird of prey deaths in Scotland is that they declined over the last 20 years and have fallen dramatically over the last five years in particular ... We are therefore perplexed and disappointed that RSPB has chosen to look backwards and not forwards with their report, particularly in view of the overall positive trend. We would suggest that RSPB would achieve more by working more closely with people on the ground who are responsible for moorland management on a daily basis."

The *STV News* reported that a spokesman for the Scottish Gamekeepers Association criticised the review for its lack of scope, insisting that it does not accurately reflect recent trends of criminality against wild animals in Scotland. He said: "This document is solely about RSPB's lobbying objective of grouse moor licensing. The only concrete evidence in it is the small section on the official figures from 2013/2014 verified by Police Scotland, Scottish Government and Science & Advice for Scottish Agriculture, and used by all agencies, including ourselves, in the fight against wildlife crime ... The rest of this report's figures are taken from historic RSPB Scotland reports with its own context applied on what may or may not have happened, which is unhelpful."

See: <http://bit.ly/1Ru7NIY>

PARK OF KEIR

Judy Murray's plans for a purpose-built tennis and golf complex on the outskirts of Dunblane have been rejected by Stirling Council [Sep 14]. The multi-million pound development incorporated a dozen tennis courts, a small golf course, luxury hotel and 19 homes, reduced from the 100 originally proposed.

However, the development was refused because it was sited on greenbelt land. Councillors also said that there was not enough affordable housing proposed and added the residential element was contrary to Scottish planning policy, because residents would have to travel for basic amenities and services.

GREENBELT

East Dunbartonshire Council has rejected Hallam Land Management's plans to build 140 homes on greenbelt near Torrance. The authority said that the application was contrary to the local plan.

CONONISH GOLD

The *Herald* reported that Scotgold Resources has completed a prospectivity map covering around 250 km², around 6% of the total area which it has under option in Argyll. Six highly prospective targets have been identified within 2.5 km of the Cononish gold mine at Tyndrum [May 15]. A further five are found within the mapped area with only four of the 11 targets inside the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park boundary. Further exploration work is being prioritised for Bein Udlaigh and Arrivain.

MOSSMORAN

Everris Ltd submitted a planning application requesting a ten year license to work peat on a 76 hectare site at Moss Moran in Fife. Fife Council refused the application [Jul 15]. However, Everris Ltd lodged an appeal to Scottish Ministers to overturn this decision [Oct 15]. The appeal has now been refused by the reporter, who recognised that it was contradictory to Scottish Planning

Policy on peatlands which includes a presumption to protect and restore this habitat.

ARCTIC-ALPINE PLANTS

Plantlife Scotland has published new management advice, aimed at ensuring that future generations can enjoy arctic-alpine plants. Key threats facing Scottish arctic-alpine plant communities are muirburn, grazing, changing weather conditions and atmospheric pollution.

Dr Deborah Long, of Plantlife Scotland, said: "These high-altitude Scottish specialist plants are part of our mountain heritage. With climate change, they need, more than ever, the sort of land management that creates and maintains a habitat where they can survive and thrive. What they actually need most is a kind of benign neglect, where there is no burning and a bit of grazing.

"The Scottish public can also help: we require more data on how these plant communities are doing. You can help by taking part in the National Plant Monitoring Survey in 2016 and by visiting a mountain area every year to keep track of how mountain species like blaeberry, ling, cowberry and mossy saxifrage are doing."

See: www.plantlife.org.uk/publications/managing_for_scotlands_mountain_plants

**ENERGY****RENEWABLE RELIEF**

The *Herald* reported that the Renewable Energy Generation Relief Scheme, which currently offers qualifying companies rates rebates of up to 100%, is to be reformed by the Scottish Government. Firms are currently able to apply for every building used for the generation of heat or power from biomass, biofuels, fuel cells, photovoltaics, water, wind, solar power or geothermal sources. The subsidy is to be removed from all but community-owned schemes from April 2016.

RENEWABLE GENERATION

Renewable projects have become the largest generator of electricity in Scotland for the first time. The country produced 49,929 GWh of electricity in 2014, with 18,962 GWh from renewable power sources, 49.7% of the electricity demand.

BEAULY/DENNY UPGRADE

The Beauly/Denny power line has now been 'energised' and is fully operational along its entire length; the first section of the 'power super highway' was switched on in 2013 [Feb 14]. Its 615 steel towers replace more than 800 pre-existing 132 kilovolt towers that were built in the early 1950s.

PYLON DESIGN

SSE has won £6.6m in a competition run by OFGEM to design less intrusive electricity pylons for mountainous areas in response to complaints that new grid lines through the Highlands are unsightly and harmful for the environment.

A T-style pylon has been introduced by National Grid, but it cannot be used where soil is shallow, or at high altitude. Those conditions are common in north and west Scotland, where renewable energy developments have most potential and where new grid connectors are required. The SSE project will try novel materials, alternative insulation for lines and different types of foundations. Costs could be saved from having smaller foundations than currently.

WINDFARM UPDATES

Borders: Airvolution Energy's appeal to overturn the rejection of plans for the seven turbine Muircleugh windfarm in the hills between Lauder and Stow has been dismissed [Mar 15]. Scottish

Borders Council had refused permission on the grounds that its impact on the Southern Upland Way, the Eildons and Thirlestane Castle would be unacceptable.

Highland: Council officials recommended planning consent for Nanclach Ltd's 39 MW 13 turbine Tom nan Clach windfarm on Cawdor Estates, near Tomatin instead of the 17 already consented [Sep 15]. Objectors claim that there would be an adverse visual impact on the Drynachen, Lochindorb & Dava Special Landscape Area, and on the Cairngorms National Park. RSPB Scotland is concerned about a potential reduction in breeding golden plover, and the JMT said that the area is already overloaded with windfarm developments around the National Park. Pat Wells, of Strathdearn Against Windfarm Development, said in the *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald*: "There might be fewer turbines but they are considerably higher and the visual impact will be greater than what they originally recommended refusal for."

- Council officers also recommended approval of RES Ltd's 13 turbine Culachy Wind Farm near the Corrieyairick Pass [Dec 14] but councillors rejected the application.

- The John Muir Trust (JMT) sought a judicial review at the Court of Session into SSE's 67 turbine Stronelairg windfarm. Lord Jones said that ministers had reached their decision on the project 'in breach of environmental obligations' [Jul 14]. He said: "If the ministers did take into consideration SNH's objection in principle to any windfarm development at Stronelairg, they have given no reason for rejecting it, and the decision is defective on that account." He said that the public was also denied an opportunity to comment on a revised planning application for the proposed windfarm, and that the government's decision to give consent should be set aside.

The validity of the separate planning permission for the associated electricity substation at Melgarve, by Laggan, is now being questioned by objectors. With no windfarm to connect to the National Grid, the plant is deemed to be redundant.

However, the Scottish Government and SSE have now confirmed that they intend to appeal against the legal ruling. SSE said that it believed the decision to approve the project was lawful: "Stronelairg is a carefully designed project sited on degraded peatland with the carbon payback estimated to be around 16 months. It will sit in a natural upland bowl, will not be seen from the Great Glen's key tourist routes, and will be entirely invisible from Loch Ness. Stronelairg will utilise extensive existing infrastructure at our Glendoe hydro scheme."

Helen McDade, of JMT, said: "Lord Jones confirmed in his decision that the trust was taking this action for the public good. It is therefore, disappointing that the Scottish Government is spending more public money to defend a planning decision which has been found to be illegal. The government and SSE should show good faith with the public. If SSE wish to progress this scheme they should submit a new planning application and the correct process should be followed, rather than continuing the expensive legal process."

ABERDEEN OFFSHORE WIND

Donald Trump's legal challenge to the planned windfarm in Aberdeen Bay, offshore from his golf development on Menie Estate, has been rejected by the UK's Supreme Court [Sep 15]. The Trump Organisation feared that the turbines would 'spoil the view' from the golf course. Mr Trump is now considering taking the case to the European Courts. However, the Trump Organisation said it

was not planning to withdraw future investment in the north east.

A spokesman said: "This is an extremely unfortunate verdict for the residents of Aberdeen and anyone who cares about Scotland's economic future. The European Offshore Wind Deployment Centre will completely destroy the bucolic Aberdeen Bay and cast a terrible shadow upon the future of tourism for the area. History will judge those involved unfavourably and the outcome demonstrates the foolish, small minded and parochial mentality which dominates the current Scottish Government's dangerous experiment with wind energy."

GLENMUCKLOCH HYDRO

An application has been submitted by Buccleuch and 2020 Renewables to the Scottish Government for a pumped storage hydro scheme at the Glenmuckloch opencast mine site near Kirkconnel [Jul 15].

Alan Baker, of 2020 Renewables, said: "One of the legacies of the Glenmuckloch mine is an 18 million m³ hole in the ground which means the site naturally lends itself to consideration of a pumped storage hydro scheme."

UCG

The Sunday Herald reported that the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has produced confidential draft reports which state that Underground Coal Gasification (UCG) could cause pollution, earthquakes, underground explosions and uncontrollable fires [Sep 15]. The drafts, outlining eight potential hazards in preparation for regulating the technology, have now been released under Freedom of Information law.

SEPA said that it doesn't know what level of protection its safety regulation can provide against the hazards of UCG; the risks were 'sometimes unknowable.' A more recent draft points out that some of these risks could be reduced if developers drill down to more than 800 metres below the sea. However, it warns that there are 'significant technological and knowledge gaps.' Because controls and regulations are still being clarified, it is not possible at this stage to assess the level of protection they will provide.

Emma Taylor, of SEPA, stressed that the reports had not been completed. She said: "They are not final reports outlining credible risks from the technology in Scotland, rather an initial scoping which includes a range of areas which may be added to, or screened out, as knowledge develops. The assessment of potential risk requires significant additional work, and during the moratorium SEPA will continue to work with Scottish Government, Professor Campbell Gemmill, and other regulators, to ensure we have the appropriate controls and regulations to protect the environment and human health."

- The Scottish Government has invited tenders for a research programme into the potential impacts of onshore unconventional oil and gas extraction. The programme will include projects on transport impacts, decommissioning and aftercare, seismic monitoring, climate change and economic impact. The UK Committee on Climate Change will undertake the climate change impact study. A public health impact assessment is also being carried out by Health Protection Scotland.

The projects are scheduled to report by summer 2016, followed by a consultation.

See: www.gov.scot/Topics/Business-Industry/Energy/onshoreoilandgas



RECREATION & TOURISM

LOCH LOMOND PARK

The *BBC News* website reported that broadcaster Cameron McNeish wrote on the *Walk Highlands* website that he, Dennis Canavan, Dave Morris, and Nick Kempe had written to First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and the Environment Minister, Dr Aileen McLeod, concerning several 'failures in governance' by the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA).

Mr McNeish said that government approval of the proposed camping management bylaws around five lochs in the park (Loch Venachar, Loch Lubnag, Loch Earn, Loch Achray and Loch Voil) would 'damage land reform progress and drastically reduce the opportunities for public enjoyment of the outdoors' [Oct 15].

He said: "Our advice to the Scottish government is concise and clear. The camping by-laws issue points to a clear need for effective, co-ordinated government action to help the National Park out of the cul-de-sac into which it has driven with the camping by-law proposals. The essential first step must be the abandonment of the camping by-law proposals. We already have strong legislation in place to deal with the kind of problems the park board wants to solve with bylaws – litter, vandalism, loutish behaviour etc, but the Scottish Government also needs to support the Park in the development of an adequate camping infrastructure over the next ten years, even if that means compulsory purchase of suitable locations."

Gordon Watson, of LLTNPA, completely refuted the allegations in the blog, which he said were 'totally unfounded.' The Scottish Government is currently considering the Park's proposals.

See: www.walkhighlands.co.uk/news/not-fit-for-purpose/0014171

LEDGOWAN ESTATE

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Highland Council has decided not to pursue legal proceedings against Ledgowan Estate near Achnasheen in Wester Ross [Dec 14]. The estate has been at the centre of access issues over the past few years, with the public reporting padlocked gates and intimidating behaviour from estate employees. Rob Gibson MSP said that Section 14 of the Access Law in the Land Reform Bill may need to be amended to strengthen the council's position.



NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS

CUMBERNAULD LIVING LANDSCAPE

The Heritage Lottery Fund has funded a project, Natural Connections, by the Cumbernauld Living Landscape. The project will improve St Maurice's Pond, Ravenswood Local Nature Reserve and Cumbernauld Glen Wildlife Reserve. The sites run by the Scottish Wildlife Trust and North Lanarkshire Council, are adjacent to high schools. Pupils will be involved in the project, which will reinforce and expand existing green networks and reconnect the people of Cumbernauld to their natural environment.

See: www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk

FRIENDS OF LOCH LOMOND

The Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs has received a £10,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to improve the picnic area around the Tom Weir statue at Balmaha, providing storyboards and a booklet. The Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park is also contributing to the project.