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CONSERVATION

INVERNSNAID GOATS

The Herald reported that the feral goat population on RSPB's Invernsnaid reserve on Loch Lomond, is being controlled with contraceptive darting; the goats are damaging their protected habitat [Aug 16].

Strathard Community Council and others are to meet with RSPB Scotland to seek reassurances over the herd's future. They have called for more information about the contraceptive programme and especially the long term effects of the process. A spokesman for RSPB Scotland said that the contraceptive programme was a more humane way to control numbers, and a limited number will be darted; the effect of contraceptive is expected to last about three years.

Local resident, Fiona Alexander, said: "Although this has been touted as a more humane measure by the RSPB Scotland, repeated use which they fully intend has been shown in trials to cause permanent infertility, so locals are arguing that this amounts to a recipe for extinction. Although feral/wild goats do not have protected status in Scotland, locals argue that this is a unique and well loved herd with a powerful history which is part of the life blood of their area, worthy of preservation."

A spokesman for RSPB Scotland said: "Counts of the feral goat population by ourselves, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and neighbouring landowners reveal that there are between 300 and 500 animals in this area. We are hoping to treat approximately 100 with immuno-contraceptive and potentially moving 50 to another location. We will be monitoring the recovery of this important woodland annually and modifying our actions accordingly."

A spokesman for Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) said: "Managing the goat population on the land that we manage around Loch Katrine and Loch Ard – and keeping it at a level which will be in balance with our habitat restoration work – is a significant and ongoing challenge. We appreciate that this is a sensitive topic for many locals and we do consult regularly with local communities to make sure that they are informed of our approach."

Ian Bray, of SNH, said: "Pollochro Woods are among the best woodlands in Scotland. But very few young trees are surviving and growing because they are being eaten by goats and deer, putting the future of the woodland at risk. Monitoring shows that high numbers of goats are the main problem affecting the woodland, so we recognise that there is need to manage the goats at Invernsnaid."

NIGHTJARS

The *BBC News* website reported that 40 male nightjars were recorded in Dumfries & Galloway this summer, the highest total since surveys began in the 1980s and double the figure recorded in 2015. Populations are estimated by counting the number of males heard singing, or churring, after sunset. RSPB Scotland said that nightjars were on the northerly edge of their range in Scotland, where they prefer to breed in restocked forestry plantations or clear-felled sites. FES has been creating and maintaining suitable habitats in traditional nightjar areas.

The UK population has suffered historical declines due to habitat loss, and nightjars are now amber-listed birds of medium conservation concern.

BUTTERFLIES

Results from the Big Butterfly Count indicated that the majority of species in Scotland continued to decline in number. Scottish participants saw an average of just eight butterflies per count this summer, slightly up on last year, but well below the number spotted in 2013. Common species such as the ringlet, meadow brown, small tortoiseshell and red admiral all struggled with numbers falling in comparison to last summer.

The green-veined white was the most abundant butterfly in Scotland this summer rising 452% in comparison to last year. The large white – up 150% – and small white – rising 114% – also recorded large year-on-year increases in Scotland, while the speckled wood – up 106% – reached its highest levels in Scotland since the count began.

Numbers of the colourful small tortoiseshell have now dropped from an average of 3.3 individuals *per* count in 2013 to just 0.5 per count in 2016.

Richard Fox, of Butterfly Conservation, said: "The drop in butterfly numbers this summer [across the UK] has been a shock and is a bit of a mystery. The summer months were warmer than usual, yet most Big Butterfly Count participants saw fewer butterflies. Perhaps the very mild winter had a negative effect, or the cold spring, or perhaps the impacts of intensive farming and pesticides are really hitting these common species now."

SEA EAGLES

The *BBC News* website reported that research commissioned by SNH from RSPB's Centre for Conservation Science predicted the growth in population of white-tailed, or sea eagles. The study said that numbers could rise from 106 pairs of birds to 221 pairs to the year 2025 and beyond. By 2040, there could potentially be between 889 and 1,005 pairs. However, the report added that the maximum figure may not be reached because of a lack of suitable territory.

A range of scenarios were modelled to predict the potential size of the sea eagle population, including scenarios with no limits on population growth. Other scenarios included limits such as availability of suitable habitat, food and nest sites.

Angus MacFadyen, of NFU Scotland, said that the report was a valuable addition to the debate on sea eagles and their impact on livestock. He said: "It clearly flags up the fact that the sea eagle population and range is likely to dramatically increase in the coming years, and underlines the vital importance of finding ways in which to reduce predation and conflict. This effort is something NFU Scotland is fully committed to."

Duncan Orr-Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, said: "Our population modelling work is showing that we can expect sea eagle numbers to gradually increase, and re-colonisation of much of the former range across Scotland will take place. Scientific evidence of this type will continue to play a critical role in determining future conservation actions."

See: *Population and Future Range Modelling of Reintroduced Scottish White-tailed Eagles, Haliaeetus albicilla* Sansom, A., Evans, R. and Roos, S. (2016), SNH Commissioned Report No. 898.

See: <http://bit.ly/2dOobTg>

• *The Scotsman* reported that David Colthart, of the Argyll & Lochaber Sea Eagle Stakeholder Group, said: "The report highlights that sea eagle population is forecast to increase very rapidly over the next few years. There is already serious concern from farmers and crofters where predation is currently an issue and where sheep are extensively farmed."

He said that it was significant the predicted population did not include juvenile birds; sea eagles can be up to five years old before they mate and they can also kill young stock during that growing period. He stressed that the loss of lambs in areas where stocking densities were low could cause long-term damage to the husbandry and economics of sheep farms in remote areas. This was especially true with hefted flocks that belong to the farm.

He said: "Over time sea eagle predation undermines the ability of an extensive hefted hill flock to self-sustain itself. This is fundamental to its viability. Replacement stock has to be bred on the hill to keep it populated. Trying to replace sheep with bought-in stock often fails as they do not stay on areas of the hill that ewes that are bred there would."

RED KITES

A report by RSPB's Centre for Conservation Science, and commissioned by SNH, found that the population of red kites in the north continues to grow more slowly than elsewhere. There are currently about 70 breeding pairs in north Scotland but SNH said that if there had been no illegal killing there could have been as many as 1,500 pairs. It estimates there could still be around 131 pairs by 2024 and, in the longer term, there could be about 550 pairs by 2044.

Of 57 dead red kites recovered between 2007 and 2014, 42% were confirmed to have been illegally killed. However, there were at least 283 pairs in 2015 throughout Scotland. The study also assessed the impacts of illegal poisoning of 16 red kites in Ross-shire [Mar 14]. It found that when modelled as a one-off event, the incident had a relatively small impact in the short-term.

Duncan Orr-Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, said: "Illegal killing is the principal threat despite the fact that the red kite poses no threat to any land use interests."

A spokesman for the Scottish Gamekeepers Association said: "We are pleased that the report mentions, for the first time, potential impacts of windfarms on raptor survival rates as this is now a reality in the modern Scottish countryside, although we feel the role of feeding stations deserve further analysis in the context of whether this impacts on the natural dispersal of reintroduced birds."

See: <http://bit.ly/2eMAk92>

CORNCRAKES

1,059 calling male corncrakes were counted during RSPB Scotland's annual survey this year – a decrease of 3% compared with 2015 and 20% on 2014. The Isle of Tiree had the largest population this year, with 346 calling males recorded.

Stuart Housden, of RSPB Scotland, said: "The Scottish corncrake has become emblematic of conservation success in Europe. Effective financial support to crofters and farmers has enabled them to deliver what threatened wildlife needs, benefiting nature, farming communities and all of us as a result. Following the EU referendum

vote we face huge uncertainties regarding the future of agricultural support payments. During this period, the fortunes of our corncrakes, and the High Nature Value farming and crofting systems that support them, stand as a key test for the Scottish Government. It is a mistake to think of agri-environment schemes as money that is an optional extra. It pays for investment and activity which is of vital importance to rural communities, tourism and our wildlife."

Despite these recent declines in corncrake numbers, the species has recovered greatly since conservation efforts, in partnership with crofters and farmers, began in the early 1990s when the population had dwindled to 400 calling males.

RARE FLY

Two specimens of *Platypalpus aliterolamellatus Kovalev* have been found on Ballinluig Island, part of the Scottish Wildlife Trust's Tummel Shingle Islands reserve near Pitlochry. This is the first record for the fly species in the UK.



FARMING

PESTICIDE USE

Scotland's chief statistician published three reports in relation to Pesticide Usage in Scotland: *Pesticide Use on Outdoor Vegetable Crops in 2015*, *Pesticide Use in Protected Edible Crops in 2015* and *Rodenticide Use by Local Authorities in 2015*.

98% of vegetable crops in Scotland were treated with a pesticide in 2015 with a total combined application weight of 67 tonnes. Fungicides were the most frequently used pesticides on outdoor vegetable crops, followed by herbicides and insecticides. Overall pesticide application was higher in 2015 than that reported in the previous survey in 2013, perhaps because weed and disease pressure, was lower than average in 2013. For the first time information was collected about grower adoption of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) measures in relation to risk management, pest monitoring and pest control. A wide range of IPM activities were encountered and the majority of vegetable growers, 76% of the sample, used non-chemical control methods in partnership with, or instead of, chemical control.

The *Protected Edible* report includes pesticide use on all edible crops, except soft fruit, which are permanently protected by glass or polytunnel. Less than 40% of the crop was treated with pesticides, with a total combined weight of just over two kilograms. Overall the estimated quantity of pesticides applied per hectare has declined over the last three surveys. Growers were using a variety of IPM methods in relation to risk management, pest monitoring and pest control. The majority of growers, 80% of the sample, used non-chemical control in partnership with, or instead of, chemical control.

The *Rodenticide Use by Local Authorities* survey is the first of its kind in Scotland to report use of rat poison by local authorities in domestic, industrial and agricultural settings. The local authorities surveyed used almost 15 tonnes of rodenticide bait in 2015, predominantly in domestic settings. This bait contained less than 1 kg of rodenticide active substance. Almost all rodenticide use was of second generation anticoagulant compounds and the principal rodenticide encountered was bromadiolone.

See: www.gov.scot/stats/bulletins/01240; www.gov.scot/stats/bulletins/01241; www.gov.scot/stats/bulletins/01242

WILD BOAR

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is currently studying the extent and impact of wild pigs,

which have escaped or been released from wild boar farms, and are due to submit a report to Holyrood in November [Jul 16]. SNH is examining clusters of wild boar in the Invergarry area of Lochaber and at a few sites in Dumfries & Galloway.

A Scottish Gamekeepers Association spokesman said: "Our understanding is that no decision has been made. However, if it was decided to let wild boar roam free, it would be very difficult to grant this without introducing a compensation scheme, like they have in many other European countries where boar are allowed to free range. In the Forest of Dean in England, there is now an annual population growth rate of 300%. It would be inconceivable that there would be no agricultural damage. It is already being witnessed in the north west of Scotland and, given the problems with controlling boar, this will only increase over time as the population expands."

John Bruce, of the British Deer Society, said: "There are those who say pigs are marvellous for re-wilding the countryside and you get down to whether the government values farmers making use of the land in a manageable fashion or are they all for chaos, because they seem rather keen on chaos ... If the government allows any creature which has a nuisance factor to re-establish they should compensate and take responsibility for it."

NFU Scotland said that it has concerns over the wild pigs breeding with domesticated animals, as well as the risk of disease spreading.

CEREAL HARVEST

Scotland's chief statistician has released the first estimates of the 2016 Scottish cereal and oilseed rape harvest. The harvest is expected to fall 11% on 2015. Scottish farms are estimated to produce 2.8 million tonnes of cereals this year, including 1.6 million tonnes of barley and one million tonnes of wheat. The total is 4% lower than the ten year average.

The figures show that this year's fall in production is due to an anticipated 7% fall in overall cereal yields. The total area of land sown has also decreased by 3% with an estimated 428,000 hectares of cereal grown in 2016. Overall yields are expected to average around 6.5 tonnes per hectare; ranging from 5.3 tonnes per hectare for spring barley to 8.7 for wheat. Spring barley, Scotland's most important cereal crop, is expected to fall 17% to 1.27 million tonnes, the lowest since 1998. Winter barley likewise saw a 15% fall to 345,000 tonnes, with wheat holding slightly more steady, with a 7% drop to 953,000 tonnes. Only oats saw positive results, with the crop expected to top 200,000 tonnes for the first time since the 1970s.

Oilseed rape is expected to have a particularly poor year, with yields averaging around 3 tonnes per hectare, resulting in the lowest production since records began in 1992, at 94,000 tonnes.

Yields this year have been lower than expected; there had been no catastrophic weather condition responsible for this, just a series of less than ideal factors affecting the seed bed, growing conditions and the final harvest. However, Scottish cereals are still being harvested and these figures are very much provisional estimates.

See: www.gov.scot/stats/bulletins/01248

FARM CENSUS

Scotland's chief statistician has released the latest results from the June 2016 Agricultural Census [Jun 16]. It shows that there was an overall reduction in area of cereals of 12,400 hectares (3%), with barley down 20,700 hectares (7%). The areas of wheat remained similar to last year, with oats increasing by 5,600 hectares. It was the lowest area of cereals reported since 2010. Fallow land increased markedly for the second consecutive year, this time up 10,000 hectares to 43,000 hectares.

Potatoes saw a small increase, of 1,800 hectares (7%) to 27,500 hectares; however, the area is still the second lowest since 1994. The area of oilseed and of crops for stock-feed decreased again (15% and 8% respectively), but there were increases in the area of vegetables for human consumption (9%), and of fruit (3%).

Cattle numbers remained fairly constant at 1.8 million, but are at the third lowest since the 1950s. There was very little change in either dairy or beef numbers. Sheep numbers increased for the third consecutive year, up 125,000 (2%) to 6.8 million, but are still lower than in 2009.

Pig numbers were up 12,500 (4%) to 330,000, the third consecutive rise. Poultry numbers increased by 8% on 2015. The figure of 14.1 million, similar to the longer-term average, included 6.5 million broilers (up 15% and 6.3 million layers (up 4%).

The area growing strawberries rose by 54 hectares to 990 hectares (6% increase), but raspberries decreased by 24 hectares (7%) to 330 hectares. About 80% of the area of Scotland is agricultural land, in 51,900 agricultural holdings.

See: www.gov.scot/stats/bulletins/01250

GREENING

The *Scottish Farming Leader* reported that EU Commissioner Hogan announced that delays in agreeing greening rule changes meant that these would not be in place before early 2017, so would be optional for member states until 2018 [Sep 16]. The Commission refused to drop its proposal to ban the use of plant protection products on Ecological Focus Areas (EFA), despite the stated opposition of 18 member states. However, the proposal to extend the EFA fallow period was dropped from the agreement.

CROFTING

Colin Kennedy, the Crofting Commission's convener has submitted an official complaint about the minister in charge of crofting, Fergus Ewing, accusing him of being in breach of the ministerial code [Sep 16]. Mr Kennedy has refused to stand down from his post, despite coming under pressure from the government to resign following a dispute over the Mangestera and Upper Coll common grazings on Lewis.



WOODLANDS

WOODLAND FUNDING

Plans to plant 2,965 acres (1,200 hectares) of new woodland across Scotland have been backed with £6.5m in Scottish Government funding, the highest level of funding awarded since the new Forestry Grant Scheme was set up in 2015.

- Jim MacKinnon has been commissioned by the government to undertake an analysis of the forestry planting process in Scotland. The analysis aims to identify actions that could be taken to reduce the duration, complexity and cost of tree planting applications.

ELMS

The *BBC News* website reported that two Wentworth elms, *Ulmus Wentworthii Pendula*, have been identified in the garden of the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh. Wentworth elms were believed to have been extinct in Britain. Dr Max Coleman, of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, said: "There are relatively few people these days that are familiar with elm trees and unfortunately the reason for that is that since the 1970s we've lost somewhere between 25 and 75 million elms across the UK as a whole due to Dutch Elm Disease. It is very likely the only reason these rare elms have survived is because City of Edinburgh Council has been surveying and

removing diseased elms since the 1980s. Without that work many more of the thousands of elms in Edinburgh would have been lost. The success of this programme may be partly demonstrated in the way two rare trees have been preserved."

CROFT WOODLANDS

The Croft Woodlands project aims to help create 500 hectares of new woodland on croft land, on both in-bye and common grazings, by 2020. Three Croft Woodland Advisors offer specialist support and advice for woodland creation and management in crofting communities. Support is available in the Highlands, Orkney and Shetland, the Western Isles and Argyll & Lochaber.

The project is a partnership between Woodland Trust Scotland, Forestry Commission Scotland, the Scottish Crofting Federation and the Point & Sandwick Trust. The project is also supported by local partners including Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape. See: www.crofting.org/uploads/news/project.pdf

TIMBER TRANSPORT

A floating pier is to be built on the shores of Ardcastle Forest in Argyll which could unlock an estimated £10m of the region's growing timber supplies. Ardrishaig Pier is already very busy, so the new pier on the National Forest Estate will boost the ability for shipping greater quantities of timber to wood processors. The Scottish Government's Strategic Timber Transport Scheme gave funding of £123,000 to allow an estimated 250,000 tonnes of timber to be shipped over the next ten years. The additional shipping facilities will be able to take larger boats in deeper water and cut down the need for using timber wagons on fragile rural roads, saving 3.5 million lorry miles. The pier and shore-side infrastructure will be able to stack around 3,000 tonnes of timber in advance of a vessel arriving.



FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

AQUACULTURE

A new growth strategy has been launched for Scottish aquaculture which identifies key actions that are required to double the size of Scotland's aquaculture sector within 15 years. A working group, including representatives from the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation, Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre, Scotland Food & Drink and the Association of Scottish Shellfish Growers has developed the strategy. It sets out key recommendations for action by both the industry and government. These include moving the industry development role from Marine Scotland to the Scottish Government's Food, Drink & Rural Communities Division. World-leading innovation sites are proposed to trial cutting-edge equipment, technology and fish health strategies. The proposal for a new industry leadership group to drive forward the plans has already been accepted by the Scottish Government.

Salmon is the largest component of the Scottish aquaculture industry, with about 170,000 tonnes produced on fishfarms each year. The value of export sales is about £450m. The strategy predicts an increase in salmon production to about 350,000 tonnes per year by 2030. The strategy forecasts that Scottish shellfish production – mostly mussels – will rise from about 8,000 tonnes per year to 21,000 tonnes by 2030.

AGD

Four fishfarms, West Loch Tarbert and East Loch Tarbert on Harris, Loch Greshornish on Skye and the Isle of Ewe in Wester Ross, have been affected

by an outbreak of Amoebic Gill Disease (AGD). Salmon & Trout Conservation Scotland said that up to a quarter of the stock had died, 'hundreds of thousands' of fish, but that the companies involved had been slow to admit the extent of the problem. It called on Scottish ministers to intervene to protect wild fish from the disease.

VENDACE

The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) has been working with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the University of Glasgow to establish a population of vendace in Loch Skeen, in the NTS's Grey Mare's Tail property near Moffat. The fish were introduced to the loch in the 1990s using stock from Cumbria [Aug 05]. Monitoring over this summer showed that the population has established itself well enough for breeding to take place and 'significant numbers' of the fish to be evident.

Richard Clarkson, of NTS, said: "Vendace are our rarest freshwater fish. They have sadly disappeared from other lochs, mainly due to pollution affecting the water quality but also from the introduction of other fish species that would eat their eggs or the fish themselves. The species was extinct in Scotland before they were introduced to Loch Skeen."

WILD SALMON

The Herald reported that the number of wild salmon caught on the Tay this year was 6,000, compared to 7,000 in 2015. The autumn salmon fishing season on the Tay started in September and ended on October 15. Similar low numbers have been reported elsewhere in Scotland.

Dr David Summers, of the Tay Salmon Fisheries Board, said: "The end of the season was very disappointing and unless there is a compensation of fresh fish in the spring season, the drop in the autumn could be very worrying. The last time the numbers at the end of the season were this poor was back in 2003 and then maybe you would have to go back to the 1950s to find similar numbers. It started so positively, with a particularly strong spring. The entire month of April in particular was very strong, but really the fishing was good through until June."

- The Doonfoot beat on the River Doon has closed its banks to anglers because there are not enough fish to catch. 20 years ago, almost 1,000 salmon were landed from the 1¼ mile stretch. 27 were caught in 2015, and this year catches are expected to be similar. David Cosh, the owner, said: "I hold every Scottish Fisheries minister over the years of the Scottish Parliament personally responsible for the dramatic decline of wild salmon stocks. The clear-to-see cause, supported by countless evidence-based reports, is the unregulated growth of salmon farms that are set up with very little monitoring."

FISH LANDINGS

NAFC Marine Centre research states that more fish and shellfish were landed in Shetland in 2015 than in any other port in the UK except Peterhead. Just over 72,000 tonnes of fish and shellfish worth £61m were landed in Shetland, 16% of all landings in the UK. Almost a quarter of all the fish and shellfish landed in Scotland in 2015 was in Shetland.

Dr Ian Napier, of the NAFC Marine Centre, estimated that European Union fishing boats, including UK boats, caught about 450,000 tonnes of fish and shellfish worth more than £300m in the waters around Shetland, a third of the total catch in UK waters.

- A NAFC Marine Centre report said that, on average, from 2012 to 2014 fishing boats from

other EU countries caught 58% of the fish and shellfish landed from the UK's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This equates to about 650,000 tonnes of fish and shellfish, worth more than £400m each year. In contrast, UK fishing boats fishing elsewhere in EU waters, landed on average 90,000 tonnes of fish and shellfish, worth about £100m.

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF) said that exit from the EU will enable the UK to assert control over its 200 mile EEZ, which means foreign vessels could not then fish in the zone without express consent. Bertie Armstrong, of SFF, said: "This detailed analysis of these landing figures is a bombshell that reveals the truly shocking extent of how our rich fishing grounds have been given away in recent decades. Brexit provides a sea of opportunity to breathe new life into our coastal communities by ensuring increased catching opportunities and fit for purpose management within our own EEZ.

"The UK and Scottish Governments must take heed of the startling figures contained within this report and work together as a team to ensure the best possible deal is reached for our hardworking fishermen. It would be a monumental betrayal of our coastal communities if this opportunity was traded away in the forthcoming Brexit negotiations. Brexit has the real potential to turn Scotland into a world leading sustainable seafood harvesting and exporting nation."

The report also stated more than half of the hake and saithe, almost 75% of the herring, 86% of the horse mackerel and 94% of the blue whiting landed from the Scottish part of the UK EEZ were caught by non-UK boats.



MARINE

LAMLASH LOBSTERS

The universities of York and Bangor have conducted potting surveys in Lamlash Bay on Arran for four years, monitoring the populations of European lobster, brown crab and velvet swimming crabs. The community-led marine reserve, set up in 2008, has seen twice the number of lobsters in that time, which also increased in size. There has also been an increase in the breeding potential of lobsters, with females carrying an average of 22% more eggs compared to lobsters at other sites. Tagging studies also found lobsters are spreading out from the marine reserve as numbers grow, but as the lobsters thrive crab numbers are declining, which may be evidence of competitive displacement or predation.

Dr Bryce Beukers-Stewart, of the University of York, said: "Our findings provide evidence that temperate marine reserves can deliver fisheries and conservation benefits, but they also highlight the importance of investigating multi-species interactions as the recovery of some species can have knock-on effects on others."

Dr Leigh Howarth said: "Studies into the effects of marine reserves remain scarce in temperate and cold waters, and are particularly limited in Europe and the UK. However, our research within Lamlash Bay has shown that a wide range of species and habitats can benefit from protection. Marine reserves are only one part in creating sustainable fisheries. It is widely agreed that a combination of managing fishing effort, fishing gears and establishing protected areas, all of which have received mutual consent from managers, fishers, and other stakeholders, is by far the most effective way to restore stocks and marine ecosystems."

SOUTH ARRAN MPA

The Scottish Salmon Company is proposing to expand net cage salmon farming in Lamlash Bay, Arran, adjacent to the No Take Zone and in the recently designated South Arran Marine Protected Area (MPA) [Feb 16]. COAST (the Community of Arran Seabed Trust) said that this is clearly not compatible with the conservation and restoration status of priority marine features in the MPA. COAST said that Scottish Environment Protection Agency seemed to be under pressure from commercial interests to give its approval.

COAST has asked the Cabinet Secretary, Roseanna Cunningham, to 'call in' this application and reject it on environmental grounds. A spokesman said: "COAST considers that Scotland's hard-won MPA network must not become an easy option for fishfarms and that it is vital that MPAs such as Arran's are not put under further pressure. There are far more sustainable and creative ways in which communities can benefit economically from MPAs. Communities need to be able to focus on these and not have to take action against those who would seek to undermine Scotland's MPAs before they have had a chance to flourish.

FAIR ISLE MPA

The Fair Isle Demonstration & Research MPA has been designated, which will give the local community opportunities to develop new or improved forms of marine management to protect seabirds and promote ecotourism. Fair Isle is internationally renowned for its seabird colony, the second largest in the UK.

CROMARTY OIL TRANSFERS

The Herald reported that a public meeting was held in Cromarty to discuss Cromarty Firth Port Authority's (CFPA) application for a licence to conduct ship-to-ship oil transfers at the mouth of the Cromarty Firth [Sep 16].

Professor Paul Thompson, of Aberdeen University, said: "If you were trying to find a place in Europe that posed the maximum risk to a protected dolphin population, this would probably be it. It is one of the most predictable place bottlenose dolphins will visit in Europe, and they occur here throughout the year. Most of the North Sea's bottlenose dolphins occur on the east coast of Scotland, and there are days when 25% of this population could be within a few miles of that site."

Up to 180,000 tonnes of oil would be transferred at time. Professor Thompson said that in the event of an oil spill, it could not be assumed that dolphins, seals, porpoises or any other marine mammals or wildlife would simply swim away. There was no recognised research evidence they would. He said: "So it would be incredibly challenging for anyone to produce a risk assessment which didn't recognise that there was a residual risk of a catastrophic oil spill that could have a major impact on the dolphin population. My argument is that at least at a Scottish level, ideally a UK level, we should be doing a strategic assessment to determine whether we need to do ship-to-ship transfers. If we do, then we should establish where on balance these should occur. Ironically this comes at a time when Scotland is involved in major work on marine spatial planning with Marine Conservation Areas.

"For many years now we have worked to reduce arguably much lesser threats, developing codes of practice for wildlife cruises and controlling disturbance from recreational boat users. However this application to transfer millions of tonnes of crude oil every year in the most sensitive part of this protected area is now receiving serious consideration by the Maritime & Coastguard

Agency (MCA). Dolphins are protected under the European Habitats Directive, and assumptions are made that oil transfers could not be permitted within the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) isn't necessarily the case.

A CFPA spokeswoman said: "We believe it is possible for environmental sustainability and economic growth to go hand in hand, and the port continues to demonstrate that. The [recent] sighting of a humpback whale is further evidence that our waters attract aquatic and industrial life in equal measure, and that they can continue to coexist as they have done over the past forty years of port operations." She said that ship-to-ship oil transfers have been carried out safely for over three decades at Nigg jetty as part of the Beatrice oil field operation: "As this field is now scheduled for decommissioning, this transfer activity has stopped and the associated revenue has been lost."

The transfers would reportedly earn the port authority around £750,000 a year. But campaign group Cromarty Rising maintains that the environmental health of the Inner Moray Firth underpins £260m annually in the local economy.

- A coalition of six conservation charities has voiced their concerns over the transfer plans. Whale & Dolphin Conservation, Marine Conservation Society, Scottish Wildlife Trust, RSPB Scotland, WWF Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland have united to express their concerns. The proposed ship-to-ship transfers threaten nationally and internationally important sites for wildlife. The proposed location is within the Moray Firth Special Area of Conservation for bottlenose dolphins and the proposed Moray Firth Special Protection Area for a wide range of seabirds. The organisations claim that other European protected sites could be harmed by the operations, such as the Inner Moray Firth and the Moray & Nairn Coast Special Protection Areas and the Culbin Bar SAC.

- The Herald* reported that Marine Scotland (MS) has not given a view about the proposed oil transfer plan; it said that it is not one of the MCA's statutory consultees. MS is responsible for the integrated management of Scotland's seas. The MCA said that it would again ask MS to respond, when the port authority had refined its application.

- Repsol Sinopec Resources UK, operator of the Nigg Oil terminal on the Cromarty Firth, is looking to create new jobs at Nigg after the decommissioning of the Beatrice oilfield, including ship-to-ship oil transfers at the jetty. The site already owns a licence to allow ship-to-ship oil transfer. A Repsol spokesman said: "Our first priority is to make sure the site is safe and presents no environmental risk after the closure of the Beatrice operation."

Dr Greg Fullarton, adviser to Cromarty Rising, said: "Nigg jetty offers a potentially safer option for undertaking ship-to-ship. It is outwith the main area of dolphin activity, a spill can be quickly and more effectively contained and there is the important capability for onshore VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) recovery facility. The CFPA proposal is a cheap and dirty option in direct competition to Nigg and if awarded a licence will lead to loss of those 40 jobs while bringing no new jobs and an unacceptable level of environmental risk."

See: www.snh.gov.uk/marinebirdSPAs

SHETLAND OIL SPILL

An oil spill, of about 95 tonnes, occurred at BP's Clair platform off Shetland. BP said that oil had been observed on the sea surface, and seemed to be moving north, away from the coast. The rig was shut down after the leak.

The Environment Secretary, Roseanna Cunningham, said: "I am closely monitoring the situation, which I understand to be the result of the rig discharging 'produced water' containing a much

larger than usual amount of oil. The oil residue is moving away from the shore and, as such, there is a low risk to bird species at this time of year. The nearby Faroe-Shetland Sponge Belt MPA is home to deepwater sponges 400-600 metres below the sea surface. MS have advised that allowing the oil to weather naturally is the least harmful option for this internationally important marine habitat.”

TRANSOCEAN WINNER

Counter-pollution measures took place after leakage of hydraulic or gear oil was spotted from a damaged section of the Transocean Winner rig off Lewis [Sep 16]. The MCA said it believed a maximum of 50 litres of oil was involved.

The drilling rig ran aground at Dalmore Beach in a storm after breaking free while under tow from Norway [Aug 16]. It has now been transported to Malta for stripping of components before scrapping in Turkey.

SPAs

Five new offshore Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are proposed by the Scottish Government, covering more than 18,000 km² of sea and furthering existing protection for seabirds and their habitats.

The proposed SPAs are:

- Outer Firth of Forth & St Andrews Bay complex
- Pentland Firth
- Seas off Foula
- Seas off St Kilda
- An extension of coverage in the Solway Firth (jointly led by SNH and Natural England)

The consultation closes on 17 January 2017. See: <http://bit.ly/2fabtJg>

BASKING SHARKS

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) and the University of Exeter are running a satellite tracking project of basking sharks in the Sea of the Hebrides, which will help to understand the range and behaviour of sharks in the proposed Sea of the Hebrides MPA. Three basking sharks have been tagged this year in the proposed MPA, a globally important hotspot for basking sharks which is also proposed for minke whales. Extensive research has already been carried out in the area by the University of Exeter and SNH; since 2012 over 60 basking sharks have been tracked, the largest study of its kind in the world.

See: www.mcsuk.org/url/baskertrack

 **POLITICS & PARLIAMENT**

EUROPE & ENVIRONMENT

A roundtable, chaired by Professor Dame Anne Glover, met to discuss the impact of the EU referendum on the environment and climate change. The panel will provide advice to the Scottish Government’s Standing Council on Europe, set up by the First Minister. Ways of maintaining Scotland’s role as a leader on environmental issues were discussed and as well as building links with other policy areas, including energy, land use and agriculture.

BREXIT

The Herald reported that the Scottish Parliament debated the potential impact of Brexit on the environment and climate change [Sep 16]. Dr Richard Dixon, of Friends of the Earth Scotland, said: “The UK is currently supposed to contribute to meeting European climate, energy efficiency and renewable energy targets. After Brexit we will need to agree new climate targets with the

United Nations. Scotland’s targets are already significantly more ambitious than the current overall UK targets but any agreement with the UN may be on the basis of those weaker UK targets, reducing the drive for a low-carbon economy.

“After Brexit, there will be no compulsion on the UK to set any targets for energy saving or green energy, which are both essential for meeting Scotland’s ambitious climate targets. The current UK government’s energy priorities are nuclear power and fracking, and they have already reduced support for renewable energy. There is a real danger that Scotland will toughen up its own climate target, to play its fair part in delivering the UN Paris Agreement, only to be held back by UK energy market rules rigged to support nuclear power.”

He said that most of EU environmental law was devolved to Holyrood so Scotland could decide to keep these protections in place but would still feel the impact of deep cuts to budgets for managing the environment. Society will lose the protection of being able to appeal to European courts if either the UK or Scottish governments fail to protect the environment.

ESTATE SALES

Anders Povlsen’s Wildland Ltd has bought two further estates in Scotland, bringing the total number of estates owned to 11, totalling over 200,000 acres. Recent purchases are the 21,034 acre Strathmore estate at Altnaharra and the 6,242 acre Polla Estate, Loch Eriboll near Durness in Sutherland which also includes 375 acres of forestry. Mr Povlsen is the owner of the Glenfeshie Estate on Speyside [Sep 15].

GAMEBIRD HUNTING LICENCES

The Scottish Parliament’s Public Petitions Committee heard evidence on the call for the licensing of all gamebird hunting in Scotland (grouse, pheasant and partridge shooting). A petition was submitted by the Scottish Raptor Study Group (SRSRG) and supported by RSPB Scotland [Jul 16].

The Petitions Committee decided to defer the decision to refer the petition to the Environment, Climate Change & Land Reform (ECCLR) committee until there was some indication as to whether the ECCLR would accept it. If the ECCLR, for whatever reason, had rejected it, the petition would be moribund. If the ECCLR won’t take it, then the Petitions committee would continue with it.

The British Association for Shooting & Conservation issued a press statement about the evidence session, accusing the petitioners of making ‘inflammatory and far-fetched claims.’

A spokesman for the Scottish Gamekeepers Association said: “We are pleased that the report mentions, for the first time, potential impacts of windfarms on raptor survival rates as this is now a reality in the modern Scottish countryside, although we feel the role of feeding stations deserve further analysis in the context of whether this impacts on the natural dispersal of reintroduced birds.”

 **GENERAL ENVIRONMENT**

FANNYSIDE MUIR

Buglife Scotland has completed the final phase of a large bog restoration project at Fannyside Muir, near Cumbernauld [May 13]. As part of their Slamannan Bog Restoration Project, Buglife Scotland has restored over 210 hectares of damaged bog at Fannyside Muir by blocking

old ditches and removing trees to encourage peat-forming sphagnum moss to recolonise the site. Over 4,100 dams have now been installed and 25 hectares of conifers and scrub have been removed. 27 hectares of shallow bog pools have also been created for dragonflies and other wildlife, including Taiga bean geese that roost on the bog in winter [Jan 16].

Prior to restoration work only 11% of site was in favourable condition, with ground water within 10 cm of the surface. The monitored sections of Fannyside Muir are now holding an average of an additional 258 million litres of rain water and over 90% of the site is suitable for sphagnum to recolonise. More than 650 species of invertebrates, plants, mosses, fungi, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles have been recorded from the bog

Forest Enterprise (FE) Scotland took ownership of the Fannyside Site of Special Scientific Interest a year before the project began.

The Slamannan bog restoration project is funded by the WREN Biodiversity Action Fund, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the contribution of the LIFE financial instrument of the European Community for the EcoCo LIFE project. Partners in the project include FE Scotland, North Lanarkshire Council, Scottish Wildlife Trust, RSPB, Cumbernauld Living Landscape and SNH.

SCOTLAND’S SOILS

Scotland’s Soils website has been updated. See: <http://soils.environment.gov.scot>

GREENBELT HOUSING

The Herald reported that the proposed Local Development Plan for East Dunbartonshire was submitted to Scottish ministers in December 2015. It sets out the land-use strategy when determining planning applications. A Scottish Government Reporter has now said that 14 greenbelt sites across East Dunbartonshire should be released for housing. However, the Reporter proposed the removal of housing plans at Redmoss Farm, Milton of Campsie, which encroaches on greenbelt and would increase the population of the village by around 15%. Two other sites have also been rejected by the Reporter.

East Dunbartonshire Council said the move by the Reporter was ‘extremely disappointing’ and now has three months to consider the report making a decision over the recommendations.

Ross Greer MSP said: “It’s really disappointing and frankly shocking to see the Scottish Government try to earmark areas of greenbelt for housing development. We need more housing and more green space. It’s not a choice between the two. The council’s position is a tricky one, but they should challenge this.”

Councillor Billy Hendry said: “It is a delicate balancing act to ensure there is an effective five year land supply across East Dunbartonshire, while weighing up issues such as town and village boundaries, protecting our greenbelt, sustainability and economic development.”

GREEN SPACE

A £8.25m EU Green Infrastructure Fund has been announced, which will develop green spaces in some of Scotland’s most deprived areas. The funding, specifically targeted at areas with a population of over 10,000, will support projects like new nature reserves and parks and green spaces in urban areas, benefiting communities across Scotland. With match funding from partners the total overall investment will be up to £20m. Projects should either benefit nature, biodiversity and ecosystems, address environmental quality, flooding and climate change, involve communities and increase participation, increase place attractiveness and competitiveness or improve health and wellbeing.

The Canal & North Gateway site in Port Dundas in Glasgow is one of the first projects to be supported by the programme, which is being delivered by SNH. The project will enhance green space along the canal corridor between Firhill and Port Dundas, including creation of a local nature reserve and an innovative water management solution based around the Forth & Clyde Canal.

The Greater Easterhouse scheme involves large scale enhancement of green infrastructure which will give local people links to a wide network of green space including the Seven Lochs area. The project will also benefit a nationally important population of water voles.

CAMMO ESTATE

Cammo Estate, north east of Edinburgh, is to become the city's newest local nature reserve. At almost 100 acres, it has farmland, woodland, wetland and an ornamental canal. Lesley Hinds, of City of Edinburgh Council, said that the estate provides an important link to the Almond River. The council has produced a ten year management plan for the site.

LANDSCAPE PROJECTS

Staffin Community Trust has been awarded a grant of £522,100 from the Heritage Lottery Fund for its ecomuseum, the first of its kind in Scotland. The museum's exhibits are features of the landscape across the 13 locations at Staffin, on Skye, such as archaeological sites and geology. Plans include the creation of a new path network and a viewing platform at Lealt Gorge waterfall.

Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership has also received a £2.24m grant for social and environmental projects, including the restoration of woodland along sections of the River Avon, wetland habitats for wading birds and new paths.

CLIMATE TARGETS

A report by WWF Scotland, Friends of the Earth Scotland and RSPB Scotland, based on independent analysis by Ricardo Energy and Environment, sets how Scotland's climate targets could be met in the most cost-effective way. It found that to achieve these goals half of all the country's energy will need to come from renewables by the end of next decade. It suggested that two-fifths of Scotland's homes will be heated from renewable sources, with a Warm Homes Act helping to ensure access to cleaner, more affordable heat. A national energy efficiency programme should help reduce energy use in homes by 30%, while millions of homes across the country will have to be insulated. One in three cars, and half of all buses, should be electric, with almost all electricity generated from renewables.

The report shows that a 50% renewables target for all Scotland's energy needs by 2030 is not only needed, but that it is achievable.

POLLUTION PROSECUTION

Scottish Water Horizons Limited was fined £26,000 at Airdrie Sheriff Court due to offensive odours coming from its Deerdrykes Composting and Organics Recycling facility during 2012. The company pled guilty to five charges of failing to comply with the conditions of its former Pollution Prevention & Control permit. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) said that the outdoor composting of waste and the turning, screening and maturation of the compost contributed to the offensive odours and that equipment designed to treat odorous air was not performing adequately. Local communities were regularly and severely impacted by the activities at the site over a prolonged period.

FOX HUNTING

Police Scotland has raised concerns about current laws banning fox hunting which it said are unworkable, open to exploitation and should be amended. The force raised its concerns in a submission to the review of Scotland's hunting laws by Lord Bonomy, saying the act lacks clarity and personal accountability. Fox hunting has been banned since the introduction of the Protection Of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act, which was brought in by the Scottish Government in 2002. However, there have not been any successful fox hunting prosecutions since the ban was introduced.

The force said: "To make this legislation more effective and workable, offences need to be simplified and terms expanded. Exceptions to the offence to 'deliberately hunt a wild animal with a dog' are multiple and provide opportunities for exploitation by those who continually and deliberately offend. As a consequence of this lack of clarity, the police are on occasion unable to establish the high threshold of evidence required to prove and, ultimately, report cases."

Hunts are still allowed to use dogs to flush out foxes and chase them, but foxes should be shot, not killed by hounds. Police said there are occasions where it is extremely difficult to have guns in place as soon as a fox is located.

The submission said: "The current lack of clarity in the legislation can lead to allegations by those opposed to this form of pest control that 'guns were not in place' and this presents significant issues for those undertaking a lawful act, as well as those investigating alleged illegal activity ... If the legislation necessitated the nomination of certain individuals with strict liability for particular actions on the day and created an absolute offence to 'hunt a wild mammal with a dog', with the burden of proof on the suspect to show that person was acting in accordance with one of the current exemptions, this would undoubtedly strengthen the legislation."

ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS

Scotland's chief statistician has published *Key Scottish Environment Statistics 2016*. The publication provides key datasets on the state of the environment in Scotland, with an emphasis on trends over time. Public attitudes to the environment, global atmosphere, air quality, water, radioactivity, waste, land, conservation and biodiversity are charted. It includes previously published statistics and figures produced by other organisations, some of which are not official statistics. See: www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/10/7565

CAIRNGORMS HOUSING

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that planning permission has been given by Cairngorm National Park Authority for 53 houses on a greenfield site at Grantown on Spey [Sep 16]. Tessa Jones of the Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation group said: "This development would mean losing yet more long established flower-rich meadows with important associated biodiversity of national conservation concern. It really matters that undisturbed areas become disturbed, because there are so few undisturbed areas." There would be loss of habitat for otters and capercaillie.

UPLANDS

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) responded to SNH's stakeholder's consultation, *Scoping a Strategic Vision for the Uplands*.

Anne Gray, of SLE, said that enhanced dialogue between stakeholders would be welcomed, given the wide range of competing views about what the

uplands should deliver. "We would argue that any vision that is published must be truly strategic and it should not become a tool which directs the use of individual land holdings. It should be inclusive of all interests in the uplands but also recognise the decision-making processes of those who own and manage land, which are complex and uniquely individual. How land is managed matters to more than just those that own it and it is legitimate for there to be some public interest in the outputs of Scotland's uplands. Indeed this is a key aspect of our own landowner's commitment. This is not least for reasons of mitigating climate change, managing flood risk and improving biodiversity as well as providing landscapes that are important to tourism and recreation."

The SLE also identified moor management as a key issue when responding to the CNPA's partnership consultation, *Big Park, Big Question* [Jun 16]. SLE wants recognition of the role that agriculture and heather moorland, managed for grouse shooting, has on the shape of the National Park, and warned about unworkable environmental restrictions on farmers.



ENERGY

2015 RENEWABLES

Figures from the UK Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy show that more than 13 million tonnes of CO₂ were displaced in Scotland by clean power from technologies such as wind turbines, hydropower and solar in 2015.

SEPTEMBER RENEWABLES

WeatherEnergy reported that wind power output in Scotland rose by 36% in September compared with the same time last year; 766,116 MWh of electricity was provided to the National Grid. WeatherEnergy also estimated it was the first time all of Scotland's electricity needs had been met by wind on two days in a month. The company said that turbines provided the equivalent of 127% of demand on 24 September and 107% on the 29 September.

Scotland Against Spin said that it was no news Scotland was producing more wind energy every month as more turbines became operational; there were other days in September when wind output was low and demand was high. Linda Holt said: "On 15 September the UK's 12 GW of wind turbines were producing less than 0.3 GW while coal and gas generation had to be ramped up to winter levels. Wind output was almost as low on 20 September at 18:00, the time of peak demand. These were some of the lowest minimum figures for wind for 2016. The point is wind energy is wildly variable and it cannot be ramped up according to demand. This means the more wind energy we have in our electricity system, the more conventional generation we need for when the wind isn't blowing."

Professor Stuart Haszeldine, of Edinburgh University, said: "Although we applaud this great success in generating lots of renewable power, we have to be aware that this isn't constant and we need to look at how to use the excess energy and also how to store electricity and energy for when there's not enough renewables being generated."

Weather Energy also said that its latest figures showed that, for homes fitted with solar panels, there was enough sunshine in September to generate an estimated 70% of the electricity needs of an average household in Aberdeen, 69% in Dundee's electricity and 50% in Glasgow.

WINDFARM UPDATES

Dumfries & Galloway: A Scottish Government Reporter has overturned the council's refusal of plans for Brookfield Renewable UK's eight-turbine windfarm at Larbrax, near Leswalt. The Reporter

concluded that the locations where adverse landscape or visual effects would be experienced were 'limited.' He said: "I conclude, on balance, that the benefits outweigh the harm the proposal would cause and the consequent conflict with the development plan."

North Ayrshire: Samey Ling monks applied to build five wind turbines on Holy Isle, off Arran, to reduce the Buddhist community's environmental impact and become as self sufficient as possible. The council approved the application using its delegated authority; the planning department made the decision instead of it being passed to the planning committee. 89 objections were lodged, saying that the relatively unspoilt landscape of the island would be ruined and because of the impact on wildlife. Objectors included Arran Community Council, Arran Civic Trust, Kenneth Gibson MSP and Patricia Gibson MP.

A council spokesman said: "Due to its small scale, this application was defined in statutory regulations as a 'local' application for which officers have delegated authority to make a decision. This is not unusual as the majority of planning applications are determined in this way and this practice is in line with the council's agreed procedures."

According to John Campbell on the letters page of *The Herald*, the council had sponsored a study of the relative landscape value of the entire area of its mandate and the report had made it clear that the Holy Isle was entirely unsuitable for installation of wind turbines; the council had designated the landscape as being of 'High Sensitivity.' He said: "The reasoning behind giving local authorities power to bypass elected representative decision-making in the planning process has its roots in cost-cutting and was designed to simplify the route to approval of low-impact schemes that adhered to previously agreed development planning and council guidelines. The main safeguard put in place relates to the degree of opposition."

Lanarkshire: Banks Renewables' 41 turbine Kype Muir windfarm, near Strathaven, has been given planning permission. Glasgow Airport confirmed that it had successfully trialled a new radar system to detect the turbines.

Scottish Borders: Councillors are to make a site visit before taking a view on plans to expand the Fallago Rig windfarm [Sep 16]. Developers EDF want to add 12 turbines to the existing 48 turbine windfarm. The application would allow the full windfarm to run for 25 years if the second phase became operational. The local authority was being advised not to oppose the project which will be decided by the Scottish Government.

- Community Wind Power Ltd's 19 turbine Aikengall IIa, with a generating capacity of 75.5 MW, has been granted planning consent by the Scottish Government [Mar 15]. It will be located near Cockburnspath in the Lammermuir Hills across the East Lothian and the Scottish Borders council areas. Both councils had voted against the second extension; Borders considered that it would 'unacceptably harm the landscape and have a detrimental impact on locals and visitors' and East Lothian claimed that it was 'unquestionably the wrong development in the wrong place.' Community Windpower is currently building a 19 turbine Aikengall II scheme, alongside the original 16 turbine windfarm; the latest permission will take the total for the three developments to 54 turbines.

Sutherland: The *BBC News* website reported that the 22 turbine, 72.6 MW Creag Riabhach windfarm near Lairg on the Altnaharra Estate has been consented by the Scottish Government. Highland Council had recommended approval

and Bettyhill, Strathnaver & Altnaharra Community Council did not object. However, over 200 objections to the project were received, including submissions from Mountaineering Scotland and the John Muir Trust (JMT) who are both concerned about loss of wild land. The *Press & Journal* reported that five of the turbines would be within the boundary of Wild Land Area 37 (Foinaven/Ben Hee).

Stuart Brooks, of JMT, said: "This is the first such development to be consented within the boundaries of the 2014 [Wild Land] map and flies in the face of a series of previous decisions by the Scottish Government, refusing consent to similar applications impacting on wild land. We are concerned that this project will become a Trojan horse, attracting further large-scale industrial development into the area in the future."

A spokesman for the developer said that the Altnaharra Estate's Foundation would provide employment and business opportunities in the area, including a partnership with North Highland College UHI to provide training and skills, employment opportunities, and apprenticeship funding for local employers.

KITE POWER

Kite Power Solutions has received planning permission for one of the world's first kite power stations at the Ministry of Defence's West Freugh range in Stranraer, Dumfries & Galloway. It is hoped that the 500 kW demonstration project will be in operation by March 2017. A 3 MW system is planned for 2019. The firm claims that kite power will halve the cost of offshore wind energy, dispensing with the need for government subsidies.

Power is produced via a pair of kites up to 70 metre square attached to two spool drums connected to electricity turbines. As one kite rises up to a height of 750 metres, it pulls a tether and then flies in a figure of eight pattern, turning the turbine. The kites work in tandem so while one falls, the other rises, generating electricity continuously. A full-sized kite will be 40 metres wide and able to generate 2/3 MW of electricity, comparable to a 100 metre conventional turbine.

The installed and onstream cost for kite power stations is around five euro cents (4p) per kilowatt hour, compared to about 10 cents (9p) for traditional offshore wind turbines.

FRACKING

The Herald reported that six research reports on fracking, commissioned by the Scottish Government, have been delayed [Feb 16]. They were due to have been published 'by the summer of 2016.' Publication will now be in winter 2016/17 and will be followed by a public consultation.

- The Sunday Herald* reported that a report, by Professor Andrew Watterson and Dr Will Dinan of the University of Stirling, argues that the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) will not have the capacity to oversee fracking wells that could be drilled across the central belt to extract underground shale gas. There are fears that the wells could leak, causing groundwater contamination and climate pollution.

The report assesses the evidence available on fracking regulation and industry practice in the US and the UK. It concludes: "There are multiple serious challenges surrounding location, scale, monitoring and data deficits facing regulators. The evidence from peer-reviewed papers suggests fracking in the UK will not be effectively regulated. It is highly likely that regulatory agencies may lack the staffing and resources necessary to monitor and enforce effective regulation of the industry."

Professor Watterson, said: "The belief in the

capacity of government and industry to ensure the health and safety of fracking seems to rest in large part on a wing and a prayer. That is no basis for protecting public health either now or in the future ... it is acknowledged no one knows how exactly the industry will be regulated in full commercial production when so much information is missing and when UK government agencies omit to assess all the risks from established hazards ... We are now asked to believe assertions stating regulations will again protect us and ensure the new fossil fuel shale gas fracking industry will always maintain good practice. This smacks of policy-making madness as we face a global climate change disaster".

Dr Dinan said that industry and official reports were geared towards reassuring the public that fracking in densely populated areas would be safe. He said: "Our review of the available evidence gives us no confidence in this assessment. While a lot of political capital has been invested in the promise of best regulatory and best industry practices in the UK, in reality the regulatory agencies who might oversee the industry have suffered cutbacks and do not have the necessary capacity or expertise."

- Two small areas of Robroyston and Milton to the north of Glasgow are included in a UK government licence for fracking onshore gas. Glasgow City Council prepared its development plan for the next ten years and sought to rule out fracking. The plan said: "Given the size of these areas, and their proximity to communities (either existing or proposed), applications for extraction of onshore oil and gas are unlikely to be acceptable in Glasgow."

Scottish Government Planning Reporters then amended the city council's policy so that fracking wasn't barred. The policy now says that fracking developments will be assessed and buffer zones introduced to ensure communities aren't facing unacceptable risks. Only when the proposed buffer zones are considered inadequate will planning permission be refused.

A spokesman for Glasgow City Council said: "The council has accepted the proposed modification by Scottish Government Reporters to the city development plan which is intended to align the plan with national policy."

Mary Church, of Friends of the Earth Scotland, said: "It is very concerning that Scottish Government Reporters would prevent a local council from going further than the bare minimum of national planning policy in seeking to protect their citizens from the threat of fracking. While the current moratorium means fracking can't go ahead in Glasgow, or anywhere else in Scotland, planning policy clearly doesn't go far enough. This also demonstrates the need to swiftly bring planning policy in line with the Scottish Government's recent ban on underground coal gasification."

UGC

The Scottish Government has confirmed that Underground Coal Gasification (UGC) is to be banned in Scotland, following a separate independent review by Professor Campbell Gemmill [Jul 16].

The energy minister, Paul Wheelhouse, said: "Having considered the report in detail, it is the Scottish Government's view that UGC poses numerous and serious environmental risks, and on that basis the Scottish Government cannot support this technology. Accordingly, UGC will have no place in Scotland's energy mix at this time. ... Professor Gemmill's report makes a number of observations which I believe raise serious concerns over the future of this industry in Scotland."

Firstly, there are very few comprehensive or peer-reviewed studies examining environmental and health impacts, where impacts have been documented these have been from trials rather than from full commercial scale activity. Where the industry has operated, which is typically at a pilot or trial scale, there is emerging evidence of significant environmental impacts. This includes soil contamination and exposure of workers to toxins resulting from major operation failures, a number of failures in Australia have resulted in prosecutions being brought. Professor Gemmill also raises concerns that the current regulatory framework is insufficiently clear and would need to be improved to protect the environment, public health and workers' health and safety."

Mr Wheelhouse said that Professor Gemmill had concluded that climate change and decarbonisation targets would be very seriously impacted by unmitigated releases of UCG greenhouse gases if operated at scale, making the achievement of current or stronger commitments much more difficult, if not impossible. He added: "Professor Gemmill also concludes that a step change in the availability of robust data and science would need to take place before the technology could be reliably assessed."

He quoted from the report's conclusions that it would be 'wise to consider an approach to this issue based upon a precautionary presumption' and it would appear logical to 'progress towards a ban.' The government would therefore develop and consult on an energy strategy for Scotland which will set out an energy mix for the future that does not include underground coal gasification.

He said: "It is a matter of great regret that this parliament does not have the necessary powers over the licencing regime for UCG. The Scottish Government therefore intends to continue to use the planning powers available to us to ensure UCG applications do not receive planning or environmental permission." Mr Wheelhouse told MSPs that he had written to the UK government requesting that no further UCG licences were issued for Scotland and that existing licences are revoked.

Cluff Natural Resources had been planning to use UCG to extract gas from under the Firth of Forth near Kincardine, Fife, and had secured licences from the UK government's Coal Authority. The company had halted work on the project until the political debate on the issue was resolved [Jan 16].

Lloyd Austin, of RSPB Scotland, said: "Our understanding of the potential impacts of UCG is still limited. Given sites being investigated in the Firth of Forth include some of our most important places for marine wildlife including internationally protected seabirds, we welcome that the Scottish Government has taken a precautionary approach, resisted pressures to rush ahead with this technology and put the protection of the environment and local communities first."

RENEWABLE HEAT

A report published by the Energy Saving Trust on behalf of the Scottish Government shows that 2015 had the largest increase in renewable heat output since measurement began in 2008/09. Scotland generated at least 5.3% of its non-electrical heat demand from renewable sources, up from 3.8% in 2014, an estimated 4,165 GWh of heat, an increase of 37% from the previous year.

The majority of the increase came from large commercial sites installing biomass and combined heat and power systems, and from installations supported by the UK government's non-domestic renewable heat incentive.

Capacity from small-scale biomass and other technologies such as heat pumps also rose by 44% between 2014 and 2015. The Scottish Government's target is for 11% of non-electrical heat demand from renewable sources by 2020. Heat makes up more than 50% of Scotland's current energy consumption and approximately 47% of r emissions – the largest source for both.

ENERGY-FROM-WASTE

The East Tullis energy-from-waste plant in Aberdeen has been approved. The plant is due to open in 2021, and will take landfill waste from Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray. Concerns have been raised about the possible environmental impact of the £150m plant; campaigners said that it could cause pollution and increase traffic congestion. Four community councils in the south of the city have now written to the Scottish Government urging it to call in the application for further scrutiny.

CHAPELCROSS NUCLEAR

A Radioactivity in Food & the Environment (RIFE) report detected a rise in the level of radiation around the former Chapelcross nuclear plant near Annan in Dumfries & Galloway. However, the study showed that levels remained well below UK and European safety limits. Radioactivity levels in farm produce, soil and water samples are routinely monitored.

The report said that only a fraction of the radiation level emanated from Chapelcross itself, with the majority of radioactivity locally attributed to discharges from the Sellafield nuclear complex in Cumbria.

Electricity generation ceased at Chapelcross, Scotland's first commercial nuclear power station, in 2004. Final site clearance is expected to commence in 2085 and be completed by 2095, according to the report.

 **TOURISM & RECREATION**

LOCH LOMOND

The Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park (LLTNP) Authority has approved a Camping Development Strategy to support new byelaws which will ban wild camping and restrict overnight visitors to designated campsites. The strategy includes four camping management areas: East Loch Lomond, West Loch Lomond, Trossachs West and Trossachs North which have been established on the busiest loch shores. The park said it would invest in new managed campsites and a camping permit zones within these four areas.

Ramblers Scotland (RS) said that the park's new camping strategy may fail to provide enough camping pitches to cope with demand. From 2017, seasonal byelaws will ban camping outside formal sites or without a permit in specific areas of the park. RS said that only 34 extra campsite pitches being provided – 26 at Loch Chon and eight at Rowardennan. Many of the 229 new camping permits would be sold where there were no extra facilities. No new seasonal campsites in partnership with local landowners were being offered to help manage demand at peak times

Brendan Paddy, of RS, said: "We recognise that the large numbers of visitors causes pressure on individual areas, and we support the authority's plan to provide more camping infrastructure and to better educate people about enjoying the park responsibly. However, these plans are disproportionately dependent on an untested permit scheme that will charge people to camp

in previously free areas, in some cases without providing any new toilets, drinking water or bins in return. We await more detail about how much these permits will cost, how people will obtain them and how they will be enforced."

Simon Jones, of LLTNP, said that the 300 camping places would be delivered by 1 March 2017, when the byelaws come into effect, with further investment after that. He said: "RS express concerns about the number of permits and pitches available and whether they will 'cope with demand' for camping places on loch shores, and also suggest we are banning camping. However, I want to make it absolutely clear that the aim of these measures is to allow camping at a sustainable level, to stop the damage to the environment that is being caused by large numbers of visitors a peak times in the season, which RS themselves highlight as a problem.

"The approach set out in our Camping Development Strategy will have the dual benefit of protecting the environment of our popular, fragile loch shores, and proving a better experience for everyone, including those who come to camp."

Mr Jones said that although the camping permit system was new in Scotland, the park hoped it would provide the flexibility to balance demand with sustainability.

• *The Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that introducing similar byelaws in the Cairngorms National Park would be difficult, as the park authority did not have the resources to enforce any wild camping bans at Loch Morlich and Glenmore. The authority is to create a single ranger service across Glenmore and Cairngorm with an increased presence on the ground, and will improve visitor facilities.

PATHWATCH

Ramblers Scotland has launched Pathwatch, a digital project to record positive experiences and report any problems encountered while out and about in Scotland. That could mean logging anything from missing signs and overgrown paths to exciting views and wildlife seen. Pathwatch is a six month pilot scheme lasting until Easter 2017.

Download from: www.ramblers.org.uk/scotland

 **NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS**

RSPB SCOTLAND

The *BBC News* website reported that RSPB Scotland has the opportunity to expand its Mersehead reserve on the Solway Firth reserve by 112 hectares (275 acres). It needs to raise £285,000. More than 40,000 Svalbard barnacle geese arrive at the reserve every year. The land purchase would allow two separate parts of the reserve to be linked. The new land would allow more access trails across the site and also help with reserve management. The reserve also has the only Scottish population of natterjack toads [Aug 16].

See: www.rspb.org.uk/merseheadappeal

SCOTTISH LAND COMMISSION

The new Scottish Land Commission is to be based in Inverness. Five Land Commissioners, the Tenant Farming Commissioner and support staff will be headquartered at Longman House. The commission will review law and policy, and make recommendations to the Scottish Government. It is being set up as part of new legislation, the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016.

The interim chief executive officer will be Hilary Pearce, seconded from the Scottish Government, who will work on establishing the commission until summer 2017.