

	CONSERVATION	1
	FARMING	2
	WOODLANDS	2
	FISHFARMING & FISHERIES	2
	MARINE	3
	POLITICS & PARLIAMENT	3
	GENERAL ENVIRONMENT	4
	ENERGY	7
	TOURISM & RECREATION	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. Sue Fenton edited issues 162 to 357.

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CONSERVATION

ORKNEY STOATS

The *BBC News* website reported that traps have been set on the island of Rousay in Orkney after a stoat was sighted for the first time [Jun 17]. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has started a rapid response trapping programme in the area. SNH said that it was essential the animals were not allowed to colonise the outlying islands. There is concern that they threaten ground nesting birds and the Orkney vole, which is an important source of food for hen harriers and short-eared owls.

ABERDEEN SQUIRRELS

The *BBC News* website reported that monitoring in Countesswells and Foggieton woods near Aberdeen showed that native red numbers were rising, with no evidence of invasive grey squirrels in the area for the last two years. Forest Enterprise (FE) Scotland and Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels said that feeder box activity and cameras have been used as well as maximising tree species favoured by red squirrels and include minimising the amount of large clearfell sites. It is hoped that these 'crucial forests' will become strongholds for red squirrels in the coming years.

Philippa Murphy, of FE Scotland, said: "We put some sticky tape on the feeder boxes to collect hairs and these, once analysed, showed that the number of red squirrels recorded in these woodlands are increasing year on year, suggesting more and more red squirrels are taking advantage of the free treats on offer. But the best news is that we've got no trace of grey squirrels, which tend to drive reds away from local habitats."

This work will continue to be supported by FE Scotland with more funding from the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route Offset Mitigation Fund.

SHIANT ISLANDS

RSPB Scotland, SNH and the Nicolson family, which owns the islands, secured funding from EU Life+ for black rat eradication work on the Shiant Islands in the Minch in 2014. The black rats are not native to the islands and are thought to be the descendants of rats that came ashore from shipwrecks in the 1900s. It is hoped that it will be possible to declare the islands rat-free in March 2018, provided that no rats are found in the interim. Colonies of puffins, razorbills and guillemots have been in decline, while Manx shearwaters and, until now, storm petrels have not been found at all.

Dr Charlie Main, of the Shiant Isles Recovery Project, said: "The churring of a storm petrel is very distinctive and we're delighted that it's been recorded on the Shiants this summer. While we are still some way off the islands being officially declared rat-free, these calls indicate that all the biosecurity work we're doing to keep these islands predator-free and make them ideal breeding sites for seabirds is paying off. The long-term aim is to allow a breeding colony of storm petrels to establish at the Shiants."

Dr Andrew Douse, of SNH, said: "Storm petrels only occur on islands without rats, which means that they are very vulnerable to the effects that arise from invasive species such as these. The Shiants are an ideal breeding location for storm petrels and hopefully they will go on to become an important stronghold for this species."

MUIRBURN CODE

Scotland's Muirburn Code has been launched. The new code places the traditional and necessary management tool of muirburn, the burning of heather and grass, in a Scottish Government policy context. It makes it clear that muirburn continues to have a role in stimulating new growth of moorland plant species such as heather and blaeberry that benefit, sheep, deer, grouse and hares. The code has a clearly defined interest in soil and water management.

Dr Adam Smith, of Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) Scotland, said: "This new code is much more policy document than practical guide to doing good things for our game and wildlife with muirburn. While we welcome guidance to protect very deep peat habitats and hydrology, there is a lack of evidence for some assumed negative impacts of fire or positive benefits of not burning, and not enough recognition of the positive role of muirburn for biodiversity and reducing the risk of wildfire. It also seems likely that some of the code changes will prove challenging to deliver in real world conditions. We welcome assurances that this is a living document so we can continue to feedback our experience of muirburn into the code so it can evolve over the years."

See: <http://bit.ly/2xqOImt>; <http://bit.ly/2fm5PWt>

CURLEWS

A British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) report says that the number of curlews has dropped by more than 60% over the last 20 years and faces extinction in some areas. The losses are the single highest of any terrestrial breeding bird in Scotland and have been attributed to changing land use and predation of eggs and chicks by foxes and crows.

The report blames a loss of habitat as the bird breeds most in areas of semi-natural grassland and moorland and there are also small and declining populations in areas of extensive arable farming.

The study was conducted by the BTO as part of the Breeding Bird Survey programme, using this information to determine how curlew populations have changed in different regions and habitats. The recent and dramatic declines have resulted in the species being proposed as the UK's most pressing bird conservation priority.

Writing to the letters page of *The Herald*, Dr Adam Smith of GWCT Scotland said: "Low breeding success is now driving curlew declines. More than 70% of curlew nests (1996-2006) did not hatch a single chick, with foxes and crows eating the most. Adjusting farming practices may help those curlew still using lowland nesting sites but we must also protect the vast majority that breed in our uplands."

"GWCT research has established that curlew thrive on grouse moors. We used this work to predict what might happen with and without gamekeepers killing foxes and crows, over the next five years. With gamekeepers, the curlew population increased by 93% and without them it fell by 61%. So while the national decline of curlew may have originally been driven by habitat loss, we should celebrate the part grouse moors are preserving their breeding habitat and protecting their young from foxes and crows."



FARMING

LFASS

The UK government has announced that it would guarantee EU funding, for applications made in 2019, to support hill farmers for another year, The Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme (LFASS) supports hill farmers and crofters in difficult areas to farm. In Scotland, 85% of agricultural land is classified as LFA, compared with 17% in England. The UK government has also guaranteed other Common Agricultural Policy Pillar 2 projects signed before the UK leaves the EU.

Andrew McCornick, of NFU Scotland, said: "The UK government has already committed to funding levels for direct support payments until 2022, the end of the current parliament. It is imperative that the UK government now makes a similar commitment on rural development funding for the same time-frame. This would make a genuine difference to the confidence of those farming and crofting in LFAs and allow them to plan ahead with a greater degree of certainty. The union will now press the Scottish Government on its funding commitment to LFASS in 2019. Meanwhile we'll also continue to press both the UK and Scottish governments over further funding levels that recognise all of Scotland's rural development measures."



WOODLANDS

GLENMORE FOREST

Forest Enterprise Scotland has begun a major felling programme in the 308 hectare McAlpine plantation, part of Glenmore forest, near Aviemore, to protect the Caledonian pinewood from *Dothistroma* needle blight.

The project area contains Lodgepole pine, non-native conifers that were planted in the early 1970s, which are now infected with the blight. These trees are being harvested to reduce the risk levels to the wider Caledonian pinewood. The aim is that the McAlpine plantation will be free of non-native conifers by 2021/22. Native woodland will then be established through a combination of natural regeneration of Scots pine, *Pinus sylvestris*, and planting of native broadleaves. The operations are planned to have no impact on public access and will have minimal impact on local capercaillie, ultimately providing more, high quality habitat for the birds.

HEBRIDEAN ARK

Horshader Community Development's Hebridean Ark project is taking cuttings and seeds from trees in the Western Isles and growing 100,000 saplings to plant in Lewis and Harris by 2020. Seeds are being gathered from surviving trees because they were hardy and had adapted to conditions on the islands; the genetics of these trees go back 2,000 years.

Deforestation has taken place thousands of years across the Outer Hebrides with Vikings, climate change and crop expansion all partly to blame. A seed bank is now being built up from species which have a historic connection to the island.

These include rowan, aspen, birch, willow, hazel and juniper. Some are still found in remote locations, few and far between, such as on cliff edges and rocks close to lochs. Benefits from the project could include the return of different wildlife and the creation of natural windbreaks.



FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

FISHFARM PRODUCTION

Marine Scotland Science has published the *Scottish Fish Farm Production Survey 2016*, which details statistics on the employment and production from Scottish fishfarms. It is structured to follow industry trends within the farmed Atlantic salmon, rainbow trout and other species sectors. Some statistics are given for the period 1996-2016.

The main findings are that, in 2016, production of Atlantic salmon decreased by 8,905 tonnes (5.2%) to 162,817 tonnes. The total number of staff employed in marine salmon production in 2016 increased by 123 to 1,486. Production tonnage of rainbow trout decreased by 6% in 2016 to 8,096 tonnes. Production remained high with this being the second highest level of rainbow trout production recorded in Scotland. During 2016 there was an increase in the production of halibut, 80 tonnes, but a decrease in brown trout/sea trout production at 41 tonnes. There was increased production of lump sucker and wrasse which are used as biological controls for parasites. Production of wrasse has increased only very slowly, to 4 tonnes last year. Lump sucker reached 10 tonnes in 2016, and is expected to rise steeply to 46 tonnes during 2017.

See: www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Fish-Shellfish/FH/surveys

The *BBC News* website reported that much of the fall in production weight is due to infestations of sea-lice, which force fishfarm operators to bring forward harvest to a point before the fish have fully grown; the average weight of a harvested Scottish farmed salmon fell from 5.2 kg in 2015 to 4.7 kg last year. Seven firms dominate the industry and expect to see a rise in production to 177,000 tonnes during 2017.

311,000 salmon escaped from Scottish fishfarms during 2016. Escapes of fish from any of Scotland's 248 farm sites should be reported by aquaculture firms. Five such escapes were reported last year, with 311,000 fish going missing. Three other incidents were reported, which could have led to escapes. There are concerns that interbreeding can harm wild stocks.

MULL FISHFARM ESCAPE

The Herald reported that 11,040 farmed salmon escaped from the Scottish Salmon Company's fishfarm at Geasgill on Mull.

The Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) Fishing Group said that the farmed salmon had entered rivers, including the River Ba, one of the few rivers in the west of Scotland given a class one rating for salmon conservation. Ghillies in the area have ordered that any farmed salmon caught should be killed and not returned to the river. There is concern that cross-breeding between farmed salmon and wild salmon will weaken the wild gene pool.

Greg Marsh, of the SGA Fishing Group, said that anglers need to be able to identify farmed salmon to ensure the fish are not being re-released into the system. One of the key differences in appearance between wild and farmed salmon is that vents on a wild salmon will be red/brown and slightly swollen at this time of year.

SEA-LICE

The Scottish Information Commissioner has published a formal decision that Scottish ministers unlawfully tried to withhold information naming fishfarms that had breached Scottish Government trigger levels for the number of adult female sea-lice on farmed salmon. Salmon

& Trout Conservation (S&TC) Scotland had made a number of requests for information for details of fishfarms that had notified Marine Scotland that the new trigger levels, announced to the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation in 2016, had been exceeded [Feb 16]. Scottish ministers declined to provide this information, on the basis that it would cause 'substantial prejudice' to the interests of the fishfarms which had provided the information. Ministers argued that the salmon farmers feared that information on the performance of individual fishfarm sites could be used to undermine commercial contracts through undue media pressure, or to call for local authorities to revoke consent for sites reporting higher sea-lice levels.

Guy Linley-Adams, of S&TC Scotland, said: "For years, we have been arguing that farm specific sea-lice information should be made publically available, and indeed, have been supported in that by local authorities on the west coast and in the Western Isles, and by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) ... As soon as we have the information, S&TC Scotland will publish the list of Scotland's 'liciest' salmon farms."

Across the industry as a whole, there is an upward trend in the failure of salmon farms to control sea-lice and stay below the Code of Good practice threshold of 1 or 0.5 adult female sea-lice per farmed fish. Regions covering 61.4% of total farmed salmon production in Scotland were over the thresholds in June 2017, according to Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisation data. Marine Scotland said that: "Adherence to the suggested criteria for treatment of sea-lice stipulated in the industry code of practice may not necessarily prevent release of substantial numbers of lice from aquaculture installations."

SOUND OF JURA FISHFARM

Kames Fish Farming Ltd has applied for a licence from SEPA for a 2,500 tonne rainbow trout fishfarm at Dounie, south of Crinan in Argyll [Feb 17]. North Knapdale Community Councillor, Lottie Goodall, said: "Scottish Natural Heritage recognised rare northern sea fans and sponges in the images [from an underwater survey] which they say could be killed by fishfarm waste. Besides the sea fans, Kames' first report also makes no mention of the endangered skate living just a couple of hundred of metres offshore, nor the wild salmon, sea trout, common and grey seals, bottlenose dolphins, otters, or porpoises that use the bay, all of which are Scottish Government Marine Priority Features."

Stuart Cannon, of Kames Fish Farming, said: "We have been in production for 45 years, and are not going to suddenly pollute the whole of the Sound of Jura. We do listen to local concerns and if there are sound scientific reasons why it cannot be sited there then we would site it elsewhere. We await the decision from SEPA and we will comply with whatever the authorities tell us to do."

Kames said that Marine Harvest is its backer in this proposal. Steve Bracken, of Marine Harvest, speaking on Radio 4, said: "We will not create a new farm, establish a new farm, unless we have community support. At the end of the day, they're the people that are living there. If the community said that they're not in favour of the salmon farm we wouldn't attempt to try to start one up."

A petition objecting to this development has been signed by over 3,400 people, including a majority of electors in the North Knapdale Community Council area.

PINK SALMON

The Ness District Salmon Fishery Board said that eggs laid by non-native Pacific pink (humpback) salmon in the River Ness appear to have hatched [Aug 17]. The board said that eggs it had collected show evidence of having been fertilised. A number

of empty shells were also been recovered, suggesting that some have hatched. The board will keep the eggs in special chambers to monitor their survival rate.

MULL OYSTERS

Argyll & Bute Council has approved Celtic Sea Ltd's application for an oyster farm at Aird Phada on Loch Scridain, between Bunessan and Pennyghael on Mull. The farm will have 1,020 metal trestles to support mesh bags. Mull Community Council has objected to the application.

LOBSTERS

The Herald reported that east coast skippers said that fewer lobsters are being brought to shore than in previous years, with a reduction in the size of the females; the quality of the eggs produced is slightly poorer and the season is also much shorter. The price of lobster rose by 11% last year, and now stands at £11,973 per tonne. 1,147 tonnes of lobster were caught in Scottish waters last year, the highest figures for four years, with an increased fishing effort.

Measures to protect the sustainability of shellfish stocks have now come into effect [May 17]. Fishermen without a licence are restricted to a daily catch limit on a number of shellfish species, which limit them to just one lobster. There is also a closed season from October to December, a ban on landing females with eggs and a limit on the number of lobster pots per boat and per person. Fishermen are asked to keep any berried lobsters (with eggs), which are then v-notched, and returned to the sea.

SEA FISHERIES STATISTICS

Scotland's chief statistician has published sea fisheries statistics for 2016. The quantity of fish landed increased by 3% from 2015 [May 17].

453,000 tonnes of sea fish and shellfish were landed by Scottish registered vessels in 2016, with a value of £557m. A 25% increase in the real term value of landings was mainly driven by an increase in value of pelagic species. Pelagic landings increased in value by 36% to £222m, and increased in quantity by 1% to 294,000 tonnes. Demersal landings increased in value by 16% to £169m and increased in quantity by 5% to 95,000 tonnes. Shellfish landings increased in value by 21% to £166m, and increased in quantity by 10% to 64,000 tonnes.

Mackerel remains the most valuable stock to the Scottish fleet, accounting for 30% (£169m) of the total value of Scottish fish landings. In 2016, the value of mackerel landings increased in real terms by 27%, while the quantity of mackerel landed decreased by 6% and the average price of mackerel increased by 35%. Nephrops remain the most valuable shellfish species to the Scottish fleet, accounting for 14% (£77m) of the total value of all Scottish fish landings. Nephrops landings increased in real terms by 24% and the quantity increased by 27%, however the average price of Nephrops decreased by 3%.

During 2016, quota uptake for North Sea monkfish exceeded 100%; North Sea cod and North Sea whiting both reached 99%; North Sea saithe exceeded 98%; North Sea nephrops reached 84%; North Sea haddock was 59%; West of Scotland monkfish and saithe exceeded 98%; West of Scotland nephrops exceeded 88% and West of Scotland haddock was 71%; North Sea and West of Scotland herring and mackerel all exceeded 100%.

The number of active fishing vessels registered in Scotland was 2,033 at the end of 2016, representing an increase of 19 vessels from 2015. At the end of 2016, the number of vessels in

the 10 metre and under fleet increased by 16 to 1,464 vessels; the over 10 metre fleet increased by three to 569 vessels; the demersal fleet increased by four vessels to 187 vessels; the shellfish fleet maintained level at 363 vessels and the pelagic fleet reduced by one vessel to 19 vessels.

In 2016, the overall number of fishermen employed on Scottish fishing vessels was reported at 4,823 which is consistent with the figure reported in 2015. See: www.gov.scot/stats/bulletins/01291



MARINE

BASKING SHARKS

The BBC News website reported that Basking Shark Scotland is conducting a survey to catalogue the number of basking sharks visiting Glasgow's River Clyde and the Firth of Clyde. The location, time, size, number of individuals and any notable behaviour should be recorded, and submitted via the website or phone. It is hoped to find out whether the same sharks are returning to the same areas at the same time of year. This could highlight areas of the Clyde that are important feeding grounds for the sharks.

See: www.baskingsharkscotland.co.uk/basking-sharks/sightings; telephone 07975 723140



POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

The Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2017/18 contained the following environmental highlights:

- Recognition that Scotland's natural capital is fundamental to Scotland's success as a nation and is the essence of Scotland's global brand
- Commitment to safeguard natural capital and the development of a strategic approach on environmental policy in Scotland to protect and enhance our environment
- Introduction of a deposit return scheme designed to increase recycling rates and reduce littering and plastic pollution
- Recognition that investing in a low carbon economy for Scotland is an opportunity as much as an obligation that will bring many social, economic and environmental benefits
- Expansion of the 'sheep and trees initiative' and a commitment to encourage more woodland creation on farms and crofts
- Improvement of the protection given to Priority Marine Features outside Marine Protected Areas
- Creation of a research programme on blue [marine] carbon and evaluation of options to create a deep sea national marine reserve
- Support for the development of partnerships involving communities, public and private sector investors to plant more trees and create more woodlands
- Establishment of an independent group to consider how to ensure that the management of grouse moors is environmentally sustainable
- Restoration of 500 hectares of ancient woodland on the Public Forest Estate
- Establishment of an independent group to advise on effective and sustainable deer management
- Support for increased pollinator planting by local authorities across Scotland on roadside verges, public green spaces and similar areas

The Scottish Government also built upon its promise to have one Low Emission Zone

(LEZ) by 2018, and committed to work with local authorities to introduce LEZs in the four biggest cities by 2020 and, where necessary, in all other Pollution Zones by 2023. An LEZ is an area where access by highly polluting vehicles is restricted or financially penalised with the aim of improving the air quality. In draft plans for LEZs, the government announced an Air Quality Fund to support local councils with Pollution Zones, and pledged the introduction of an Engine Retrofitting Centre. However, it stopped short of a firm commitment to help to jointly fund LEZ infrastructure with councils.

FORESTRY BILL

The Forestry & Land Management (Scotland) Bill is currently under consideration in the Scottish Parliament. An evidence session has been held with land owner stakeholders, forestry policy and environmental stakeholders. If the bill is passed, it will have major implications for rural land management in Scotland, including for example abolition of the Forestry Commission in Scotland. The plan is to transfer the Commission's promotional/regulatory/grant-giving functions to a division in the Scottish Government and to create a new agency which will manage the National Forest Estate, and also have wider powers to manage land for furthering the achievement of sustainable development. See: www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/104932.aspx

• NFU Scotland, in written evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Rural Economy & Connectivity committee, voiced concerns about Part 3 of the bill which will allow ministers to compulsory purchase land to 'further the achievement of sustainable development.'

Andrew Bauer, of NFU Scotland, said: "The Scottish Law Commission recently concluded that Scottish compulsory legislation is not fit for purpose, and we would agree with that. We also have concerns that while the principle of sustainable development is a widely accepted term, it merits clarity and guidance on its application, not just in this bill but in other pieces of legislation. The Law Society of Scotland has expressed legal uncertainty over the term sustainable development. Given the fluidity around the definition and application of the term, NFU Scotland is justifiably concerned about a proposed expansion of existing compulsory purchase powers to include its application to furthering the achievement of sustainable development. Compulsory purchase powers are already an option to overcome 'ransom strips' to allow forestry to be managed and harvested. NFU Scotland believes that the major expansion proposed in the bill could potentially see them applied in a much wider range of circumstances – perhaps to allow renewable energy and tourism developments and to facilitate community ownership of land."

AARHUS CONVENTION

The Sunday Herald reported that a report to the United Nations on access to environmental justice criticises the Scottish Government for breaching commitments to ensure that legal challenges to property, energy or other developers were not 'prohibitively expensive.'

Scotland, as part of the UK, is bound by the UN's 1998 Aarhus Convention on access to environmental justice. This requires governments 'to remove or reduce financial barriers to access to justice.' The convention's compliance committee reported that Scotland has not yet fulfilled key requirements of the convention. These are to ensure that the allocation of costs in court procedures 'is fair and equitable' and to bring in 'appropriate assistance mechanisms to remove or

reduce financial barriers to access to justice.' The reprimand follows a series of court cases in which those opposing controversial developments have been faced with massive legal costs.

Mary Church, of Friends of the Earth Scotland, said: "The Scottish Government has abjectly failed to ensure that some of [the Aarhus Convention's] most important provisions are incorporated into Scots law. For too long taking legal action to protect the environment in Scotland has been a luxury that effectively only the rich can afford. The chances of getting a ruling from the Scottish court system that actually fixes the harm is slim."

Clare Symonds, of Planning Democracy, said that the public is effectively excluded from challenging decisions that damage the environment. "The Scottish Government has resisted taking any action to provide communities with substantive rights to appeal planning decisions." She said that giving people the same rights to appeal as developers 'might restore people's faith and confidence in the planning system.'

The Scottish Government said that the Aarhus report welcomed the significant steps taken to date in Scotland. Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Roseanna Cunningham, said: "We are committed to protecting environmental justice and welcome further measures to promote this. The Scottish Civil Justice Council has recently concluded a consultation on further enhancements to the regime of protective expenses orders that limits the costs faced by those bringing environmental cases to court."

She said that the government's civil litigation bill would make the costs of legal action more predictable and would extend the funding options for pursuers, and bring more equality to the funding relationship between pursuers and defenders in personal injury actions.

- The Scottish Government has responded to its consultation on environmental justice and decided not to create a specialist environmental court [Jun 16]. The government accepted that a substantial majority of the respondents favoured the introduction of an environmental court or tribunal. The report said: "However, there was no clear consensus on whether such a court or tribunal should deal with criminal or civil cases, whether it should be a specialised sheriff court, a specialist tribunal, or a specialised court within the Court of Session, and within each of those jurisdictions what type of 'environmental' cases should be considered."

Ministers said that the variety of views on what sort of cases should be heard, combined with the uncertainty of the justice landscape caused by Brexit led them to decide that 'it was not appropriate to set up a specialist environmental court or tribunal at present.' See: www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/09/9368

ULVA RIGHT TO BUY

Northwest Mull Community Woodland Company Ltd withdrew its application to Scottish ministers for a community buyout of the Ulva Estate [Jul 17]. Some parts of the estate would not be put on the market, whilst information about ownership of other parts was incorrect in the initial application. A new, updated, application has now been submitted.

DRIVEN GROUSE SHOOTING

Les Wallace lodged a petition with the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee calling for a comprehensive and independent study into the full economic impacts of driven grouse shooting [Jun 17]. The committee agreed that such a study was needed but were unsure

whether this topic would be covered as part of the Scottish Government's earlier commitment to undertake a review of grouse moor management practices [May 17]. There was also confusion as to whether the Scottish Government had actually commissioned this research yet, and the panel agreed to contact the Scottish Government to ask for an update on progress and to ask for a timescale, including a start and finish date, of that proposed work. The committee also agreed to write to Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to ask for their view.

Harry Huyton, of OneKind, presented evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee in support of a petition calling for greater protection for mountain hares [Aug 17]. The petition was signed by over 11,000 people. It said: "The Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce greater protection for mountain hares on both animal welfare and conservation grounds, which may include: introducing a three-year moratorium on all mountain hare killing, permitting culls and driven hunts only under licence, and ending all culling and driven hunting of mountain hares within Scotland's National Parks using a Nature Conservation Order."

Mr Huyton said: "We have tried to put forward a number of approaches. The other possibility would be a simple extension of the licensing regime. Given that the current regime applies five months of the year, why not just extend it to apply the whole year round? If we ran it for a few years, it would not only result in fewer mountain hares being killed but provide quite essential data on the level to which the species is being controlled."

"I point the committee to a similar arrangement that was introduced five years ago for seal killing in Scotland. In that example, the move from unregulated to licensed activity not only resulted in a big reduction in the number of seals killed but brought transparency to the sector. Every three months, SNH publishes the latest data on the number of licences that have been issued and the number of seals that have been killed under licence, and that is essential from a conservation and, indeed, a welfare perspective."

The Petitions Committee agreed to seek written evidence from SNH, Scottish Land & Estates, Scottish Wildlife Trust, James Hutton Institute and Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust.

In 2015, ten conservation organisations unsuccessfully called on the Scottish Government to introduce an immediate three-year ban on driven grouse shoots [Apr 15]. Those organisations (National Trust for Scotland, John Muir Trust, RSPB Scotland, RSZZ, Highland Foundation for Wildlife, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scottish Raptor Study Group, The Cairngorms Campaign, the Mammal Society and the Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group) are now urged to update and republish their earlier joint statement so the Petitions Committee are provided with a more balanced, scientific view.

NATIONAL SCENIC AREAS

National Scenic Areas (NSA), and whether there should be more of them, was debated in the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee [May 17]. Christine Metcalfe, on behalf of Avich & Kilchrenan Community Council in Argyll & Bute, called for a review of the process for designation of NSAs and consideration of the potential for more NSAs to protect the natural landscape. Ms Metcalfe highlighted how the founding document of NSAs suggested that landscape conservation should be open to revision but that, to date, this has not happened, and the 40 NSAs remain as originally mapped in 1978. A previous petition in 2015 had called for NSA status for Loch Ness and

the Great Glen but the Scottish Government had said it had no plans to designate any further NSAs, a position re-stated in 2016.

She said: "A much more dynamic policy response is required from the Scottish Government than reliance on a four-decade old mapping of protected landscapes" in view of the scale of major developments such as windfarms in sensitive and scenic areas.

MSPs agreed to write to the Scottish Government to ask why it is not reviewing the NSAs process. The potential conflict for the government between landscape protection and renewable energy policy would be worthy of further discussion.



GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

HEN HARRIER DISAPPEARANCE

The *Press & Journal* reported that David Fyffe, of Scottish Land & Estates (SLE), criticised RSPB Scotland's handling of the disappearance of a female hen harrier north of Ballater on Deeside [Aug 17]. He said: "It is deeply disappointing that estates, and specifically grouse moors, are being portrayed as the cause of missing satellite-tagged hen harrier Calluna. Those in the Deeside area are appalled at this suggestion, no-one knows what has happened to the bird at this stage. If they had been alerted three weeks ago, estates would have provided resources to help in the search. Instead, we learn about the missing hen harrier through an RSPB press release which smears shooting estates. Estates are perceived as guilty until proven innocent as a result of statements from RSPB headquarters."

Mr Fyffe would not rule out the possibility the bird was deliberately killed, but argued it was also possible that its satellite tag had simply stopped working.

Lord David Johnstone, of SLE, writing in *The Times* (Scotland edition) said: "Readers might well infer that the fate of Calluna, the missing satellite-tagged hen harrier, is linked to the management of grouse moors. Estates in the Deeside area are appalled at this idea. At this stage, no one knows what has happened to the bird. The problem with the 'guilty until proven innocent' attitude taken by the RSPB is that it may be successful in smearing shooting estates but it fails to involve the very people who are best placed to help: land managers and gamekeepers. The possibility of any species being killed deliberately or accidentally cannot be discounted, and we do not seek to deny that this happened on shooting estates previously. Equally, there have been various instances where sat-tags have stopped working and birds have reappeared later, as the RSPB itself has demonstrated at the Langholm project this year. The search would have been assisted greatly had land managers been informed around the time of Calluna's disappearance."

In a later statement on the SLE website, Lord Johnstone added: "All members of the Partnership Against Wildlife Crime, including ourselves, agree that this is the recommended way of dealing with such incidents."

RSPB Scotland informed the police of the disappearance, as per the agreed PAW protocol. The sudden cessation of her satellite tag signal was suspicious; the tag was reported to be 'working perfectly' prior to its abrupt stop. In addition to this, the tag stopped working in an area with a known history of illegal raptor persecution.

The *RaptorpersecutionUK* blog said that had RSPB Scotland notified the estate on 12 August when the tag stopped transmitting, the grouse-shooting industry would have said that the timing was just a publicity stunt designed to coincide with the opening of the grouse-shooting season.

Duncan Orr-Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, replied to *The Times* letters page: "David Johnstone of SLE is wrong to infer that our public appeal for information to find out the fate of a missing satellite tagged hen harrier *Calluna* is an attempt to smear the reputation of local shooting estates. The satellite tags used are extremely reliable, highlighted recently in a Scottish Government report on missing satellite tagged golden eagles. It is exceptionally rare for a tagged bird, whose tag was working perfectly normally, to simply disappear. When this happens it is rightly treated by the public authorities as highly suspicious, and PAWS (Partnership for Action on Wildlife Crime Scotland) protocols then dictate that local land managers should not be informed. It is an indisputable fact that the vast majority of other missing satellite tagged raptors that have disappeared in suspicious circumstances have done so on land that is managed for driven grouse shooting. Despite overwhelming evidence to support this assertion, of which SLE is fully aware, they instead choose to ignore facts to suit its narrow agenda and 'shoot the messenger.'

A spokesman for RSPB Scotland said: "That SLE seeks to obfuscate and shoot the messenger in relation to this case, rather than channelling its concern for the disappearance a very rare bird which has declined by 27% in Scotland since 2004 – brings shame on them."

Andrew Gilruth, of the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT), wrote to *The Times* (London edition). He said: "The RSPB are right to say an organisation must not 'ignore facts to suit its narrow agenda.' The most productive location for hen harrier nests, 47 fledged young from 12 nests, was achieved by gamekeepers on Langholm Moor just three years ago. However, their improvement of the moorland habitat and protection of these ground nesting birds from foxes has now ended, because conservationists could not agree on how to also recover grouse numbers. Should hen harrier numbers drop to the two pairs there were before these gamekeepers arrived in 2008, the birds might ask who has the narrowest agenda."

Logan Steel of the Scottish Raptor Study Group, replied: "The single and only reason Langholm Moor supported 12 harrier nests that fledged 47 young was that the gamekeepers working on this collaborative demonstration project were under strict instructions not to kill them and operate within the law. It is very telling that no other driven grouse moors in Scotland (or the rest of the UK) can equal this hen harrier population or productivity. What this statistic actually suggests, therefore, is the rampant scale of illegal killing of this majestic bird, given its landscape-wide absence and the lack of breeding success on all other driven grouse moors and which our members, (who are licenced by Scottish Natural Heritage [SNH]), monitor across Scotland every year."

LAMMERMUIRS

The *Sunday Herald* reported that three researchers, Professors Andrew Barker, Ian Poxton and Alan Heavisides, all members of the Lothian & Borders Raptor Study Group, claim that they have been prevented by gamekeepers from continuing a 30-year study into declining bird populations in the Lammermuir Hills in Berwickshire and East Lothian [Mar 17].

Collapses in numbers of lapwings, curlews, oystercatchers and merlins had been recorded, together with the disappearance of breeding short-eared owls. They found that cuckoos were rarer and that there were fewer dippers and sandpipers. The decline in numbers of species and birds were attributed in part to the 'scorched, degraded

heather monoculture' created by grouse moor managers. Red grouse were 'pampered as never before' making the hills a much poorer place for other native wildlife. Heather burning and the widespread use of traps by estates are thought to be possible causes. More windfarms and changing weather patterns could also have played a role.

An article in *Scottish Birds* describes how vehicular access to sporting estates for research was suddenly stopped in 2015 'after an altercation with gamekeepers.' The researchers accused estates of thwarting the collection of important scientific data and said that landowners and gamekeepers 'might risk reputational damage at a time when the activities of sporting estates are under increasing and frequently hostile scrutiny. That our presence on these moors ended in such an abrupt manner remains for us a matter of frustration and regret. Although we cannot pretend to have provided the answers to why so many bird species are faring poorly in upland areas like the Lammermuirs, we know that the future absence of the data we consistently provided over such an extended period will do nothing to help remedy an increasingly disturbing situation.'

They said that the only wild birds that were not declining were the red grouse: "Whether they even remain truly wild birds is debatable. What is unarguable, however, is that the intensification of land management in the Lammermuirs, coinciding with major shifts in weather patterns and the industrialisation of the landscape in connection with power generation, has coincided also with a significant slump in the fortunes of nearly all wild birds living there with the exception of red grouse. We questioned how, and in whose interests, this publicly-subsidised land is managed. We concluded that just one thing really matters for the majority of those who own and manage the land today: its capacity to produce higher numbers of red grouse for recreational shooting than are naturally sustainable. The interests of everything else appear subsidiary."

A spokesman for the Lammermuirs Moorland Group (LMG), which represents landowners, pointed out that the authors admitted they had written an opinion piece, rather than a balanced scientific approach to their study. He said: "They also note there can be no evidential link established between moorland management in the area and any declines they may have recorded. It is clear that grouse moor management, overall, helps provide a suitable nesting environment for [merlins]. There can be multiple reasons or factors at play for regional declines of any species ... Walking access to the estates remained available to the group at all times, like it does to all members of the public. It is surprising that privileged vehicular access was such an issue when their article states their opposition to these access tracks. Prior to the disagreement over vehicle access, the group had never published such views as those expressed in this commentary."

In a subsequent letter to the *Sunday Herald*, the study authors said: "As we grew older, the ability to drive along these tracks was increasingly appreciated ... The LMG reference to 'our privileged vehicular access' is specially egregious, coming from a consortium that enjoys spectacular benefits, receiving an annual public subsidy of £54 per hectare of moorland in support of a lucrative hobby which despoils a rare and fragile habitat: now that is a real privilege."

GOLDEN EAGLES

The peer-reviewed results of the latest, 2015, national survey of golden eagles have been published [Nov 16]. The paper details the continued low occupancy of eagles on grouse moors in the eastern Highlands. The highest

densities of golden eagles were recorded in the Outer Hebrides and on Mull. Increases in golden eagles numbers have been reported in regions such as the Hebridean Islands in which there has been a rapid increase in white-tailed eagles. The authors do acknowledge that the white-tailed eagle population is predicted to continue its expansion and this may, potentially, create competition between the two species in the future but, based on the currently available data, there is no evidence to suggest this is a population-level concern.

See: Hayhow, D *et al* (2017). Status of Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* in Britain in 2015. *Bird Study*.

DEER

SNH has published a report detailing an extensive literature review of deer research. It is accompanied by an interactive web resource, www.deerscotland.info, which provides easy access to a broad range of deer research papers. The report recommends that existing research is made more accessible and understandable to a wider audience. Its production was overseen and funded by SNH, Forestry Commission Scotland and the Scottish Government.

SNH Commissioned Report 963: Meeting the Challenge of Wild Deer Research to Support Delivery of Sustainable Deer Management in Scotland. See: www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/963.pdf

GREEN BELT

The *Sunday Herald* reported that a poll, commissioned by the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS) and carried out by Survation, asked whether or not respondents agreed that all green belt land in Scotland should have stronger protection from building development. Nearly 39% agreed 'strongly' and 32% 'somewhat.' 1% strongly disagreed and 5% somewhat disagreed. Some 18% said they neither agreed nor disagreed, and 5% said they didn't know.

John Mayhew, of APRS, urged ministers to better defend the 11 green belts around Scotland's urban areas. He said that green belts were under severe pressure from developers: "They should be protected for the long term by national and local planning policy. Once lost they are gone forever. They will be even more important for our children and grandchildren than they are for us. They have gradually been whittled away over the years, largely by speculative housing developments. Most damage comes from speculative commercial proposals for sites not allocated in the council's local development plan. Sometimes the development sounds worthy, such as a film studio or tennis centre, but also includes extensive housing or hotel development. Previously-developed brownfield sites should be developed first. Development sites in green belts should only be allocated as a last resort."

In April, the Scottish Government gave notice of its intention to grant planning permission in principle for Pentland Film Studio and linked developments near Straiton in Midlothian. Ministers rejected a recommendation from their planning reporter to refuse permission because of the damage that would be done to Edinburgh's green belt. Ministers also gave permission for a tennis and golf centre, with housing, at Park of Keir near Dunblane [Aug 17]. That decision also overturned a reporter's recommendation to protect the green belt.

A Scottish Government spokesperson stressed that there were already strong protections for green belts. "Any proposed development must be weighed up on environmental considerations as well as other criteria. We will listen carefully to all representations going forward as we look to review, simplify and improve the planning system."

AN CAMUS MÒR

A poll conducted by Survation, and commissioned by the Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group, found that more than 44% of respondents said that they opposed the plan for 1,500 new houses at An Camus Mòr, near Aviemore which received outline planning permission, with conditions, from the Cairngorms National Park Authority [Aug 17]. Just under 25% said that they supported the plans, and the same number neither opposed nor supported the plans.

SEA LEVEL CHANGE

A study by SNH said that sea levels could rise by almost half a metre in just over five decades. The natural coastline must be realigned and extended to combat rising sea levels which pose a threat to communities. Natural defences such as saltmarsh, sand dunes and beaches could be artificially extended or new ones built to combat the rising seas. Rivers should also be rerouted to less flood prone areas, while under threat roads, bridges and buildings would be moved to avoid the most at risk areas. Action is required now as by 2080 sea levels in the Firth of Clyde could be 47cm higher than they were in 2008 which will present 'widespread challenges' in terms of managing potential effects on infrastructure on certain low-lying coastal areas of the Firth of Clyde. Mudflats and areas of saltmarsh which are currently used by birds for nesting and feeding in a protected area of the inner Clyde may also be at risk.

The report says that three sites in the Firth of Clyde have potential for phased 'managed realignment' – Erskine South, Newshot Island, and Holy Loch. This is a technique in which river, estuary and or coastal water is deliberately allowed to extend beyond current flood defences.

The report was coordinated by the Clyde Marine Planning Partnership.

James Curran, of Climate Ready Clyde, said: "This research sits alongside other collaborative work with the Scottish Government, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Historic Environment Scotland, and local councils which appraises changing risks and opportunities in the light of climate change."

CLIMATE CHANGE

The Herald reported that a new report from the UK Committee on Climate Change said that the Scottish Government must come up with new policies and make changes to areas such as transport, agricultural and heating if it is to stand any chance of meeting its target of a 90% reduction in emissions by 2050; the reduction in Scottish emissions seen in recent years are unlikely to continue in the 2020s.

Emissions in Scotland fell by 3% in 2015, taking them to 38% below the 1990 benchmark. However, the report warns that only the electricity generating sector has achieved significant decreases in recent years, largely due to the switch from coal fired power stations.

Transport emissions increased in 2015, and while sales of electric vehicles in England rose by over 32% in 2016, Scotland lagged behind with just 5% rise. Emissions from aviation rose by 7% in 2015, and are now 82% higher than in 1990. The report said that lack of progress on agricultural emissions and focus on voluntary measures was concerning and called for the sector to make a greater contribution to meeting emissions targets and calls on ministers to consider if compulsory measures are needed for farming. It also warns that the target of having 80% of heating from low carbon sources by 2032 is very unlikely to be feasible.

Greater ambition is required to cut emissions in the transport sector; the Scottish Government's draft Climate Change Plan must set out how the newly announced ambition to phase out petrol and diesel only cars by 2032 will be achieved.

Climate Change Secretary, Roseanna Cunningham, said: "Scotland continues to lead the UK in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and shows the strong progress being made, as we have met our statutory emission reduction target for the second successive year and are well on track to meet our world-leading 2020 target. The recently published Programme for Government places climate action at its heart and includes bold new commitments in a range of areas, including low-carbon transport, infrastructure and energy efficiency." [see POLITICS above].

- Glasgow City Council is seeking approval to establish Scotland's first Low Emissions Zone (LEZ) by the end of 2018, but the restriction will initially apply only to buses. Friends of the Earth Scotland is disappointed that the LEZ will not apply to lorries and vans from the outset. The LEZ will gradually be extended to taxis, motorbikes and cars.

However, bus operator McGills has said it will take legal action if Glasgow goes ahead with plans to ban buses from the city centre. Strathclyde Partnership for Transport estimates that the cost of retrofitting hundreds of buses with exhaust modifications to comply with clean air standards is in the region of £10-17m; passenger fares are likely to increase as a result.

- A coalition of international development organisations, including Christian Aid Scotland, Oxfam Scotland, Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund and Tearfund Scotland, challenged the Scottish Government to go 'further and faster' to attack climate change by strengthening the forthcoming climate change bill. They want the bill's proposed 90% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 to be stepped up to a 77% reduction by 2030 and zero emissions by 2050 at the latest.

SNOW PATCHES

The *BBC News* website reported that the snowpatch known as the Sphinx, on Braeriach in the Cairngorms, has disappeared. It has melted only six times previously in the last 300 years – in 1933, 1953, 1959, 1996, 2003 and 2006. A second patch at Aonach Beag is also expected to melt away early in October. Iain Cameron's records of snow patches are published by the Royal Meteorological Society.

RECYCLING

SEPA said that 1.13 million tonnes of waste was recycled in 2016, while a similar amount was sent to landfill; 45.2% of the rubbish generated from people's homes in Scotland is being recycled, an increase of 1% on 2015. East Renfrewshire is the first Scottish council to recycle more than 60% of household waste. However, ten of Scotland's 32 local authorities actually reduced the amount they recycled, compared with 2015. There is a rise in the amount of waste being incinerated – 683,000 tonnes – a rise of 28,000 tonnes from 2015.

However, Scotland is behind on its 2020 target of 60% of household waste being recycled, composted or reused, with total waste rising in 2015 to over 11.5m tonnes. The Scottish Government has a target of a 75% recycling rate by 2025.

GENERAL LICENCES

SNH has restricted the use of general licences in two separate cases; Edradynate Estate near Aberfeldy in Perthshire and also an individual near Tarland, Aberdeenshire. Edradynate Estate

is to appeal the decision, which was made on the basis of evidence, provided by Police Scotland, of wildlife crime against birds of prey. General licences allow landowners or land managers to carry out actions which would otherwise be illegal. This includes controlling common species of wild birds, by shooting or trapping, to protect crops or livestock. General Licences are a light-touch form of regulation and they rely on trust. In situations where that trust has been lost, General Licences are not appropriate.

These measures will help protect wild birds in the area, while still allowing necessary land management activities to take place, but under tighter supervision. The three-year restriction will increase if more evidence of offences comes to light.

Ian Thomson, of RSPB Scotland, said: "We are disappointed that no prosecutions have arisen from either of these cases. It has been reported by the authorities that these latest restrictions are as a result of evidence of serious wildlife crime offences being found, with clear links to local gamebird shoot management established by the subsequent investigations. This part of Perthshire has had an appalling history of raptor persecution and this case followed the discovery by police of two poisoned buzzards. The other restriction was imposed after RSPB investigations staff passed video footage to police of a gamekeeper allegedly setting illegal traps, baited with a dead woodpigeon, very close to a goshawk nest in north east Scotland."

Duncan Orr-Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, said: "In May 2017, the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment announced a package of new measures designed to protect birds of prey, including the consideration of all legal measures that could be used to target geographical areas of concern, and this is part of that approach. We look forward to hearing soon what other measures are to be implemented to act as meaningful deterrents to the continuing crimes against our vulnerable birds of prey. We believe that these current measures also need to be allied to an effective licensing scheme for driven grouse shooting in particular, where any illegal and bad practice substantiated by the public authorities, would also result in the ultimate sanction of licence removal. We envisage that any licensing system could work along similar lines to those that SNH have used here for Open General Licence removal, that is based upon stringent checks and balances of police evidence and SNH advice, to provide safeguards for those sporting businesses which work within the law and follow best practice."

SCOTLAND'S LAND

The *BBC News* website reported that the Scottish Land Commission (SLC) is to undertake a study into who owns Scotland's land and the impact that has on the people living there. 432 people own half of all privately-owned land in Scotland; one of the highest concentrations of land ownership in Europe. However, there is no definitive list of who owns what land. The SLC is expected to make recommendations to ministers within 18 months.

Hamish Trench, of SLC, said: "Scotland does have an unusually concentrated land ownership pattern. We want to get behind some of the headline figures and understand what the impacts are, what the implications are of both scale and concentration in land ownership."

Peter Peacock, of SLC, said: "Scotland has got very, very unusual land ownership patterns with very few people owning vast amounts of land. That has big societal implications. It concentrates power in a few people's hands and it concentrates wealth."

However, Jamie Williamson, of Alvie Estate near Kincaid said: "A lot of landowners, farmers and foresters feel that they've been effectively disenfranchised. Decisions are being made by

the urban population only seeing it as a place to recreate rather than from our point of view. What we're trying to do is produce the goods and services that society demand."

Malcolm Combe, of the University of Aberdeen, said: "At the moment Scotland has a wholly unregulated land market, which means to say it doesn't really matter where you're from or where your company is based. Some people say that is absolutely fine and that allows for inward investment and this kind of thing. But there are some issues in terms of transparency and accountability."

- The Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement has been published by the Scottish Government which outlines a strong and dynamic relationship between its land and people, where rights and responsibilities are fully recognised and fulfilled.

Cabinet Secretary for Land Reform, Roseanna Cunningham, said: "I'm proud that this statement about land rights and responsibilities is the first of its kind anywhere in the world. I am sure it will play an important role in shaping the thinking on land issues in Scotland in the years to come. It rightly promotes and supports a human rights approach to land and will contribute to securing rights, equality and wellbeing by balancing public and private interests. Setting out this vision signals our determination to continue to lead the way in ensuring Scotland's urban and rural land plays a full role in promoting inclusive growth, a sustainable economy and social justice."

The Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement will support work towards greater diversity of ownership, including more community ownership, high standards and transparency of land ownership and use, and greater collaboration and community engagement in decisions about land. Together with the Scottish Land Commission's Strategic Plan, the statement underlines the government's commitment to on-going and long-term land reform. See: www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/09/7869

- *The Telegraph* reported that the Scottish Land Commission has issued a tender for background research on how other countries control land ownership 'and the impact this has had on ownership patterns and the productivity and use of land.' It will examine imposing a legally-enforced limit on how many acres any single individual or entity is permitted to own.

David Johnstone, of SLE, warned that breaking up large estates risks creating units that are too small to be economically sustainable. He said: "Our largest estates are at the forefront of delivering the policy goals of the Scottish Government, whether it be with regards to farming, housing, forestry, energy or tourism."

The Scottish Government has pledged to put a million acres into community ownership by 2020. A land-value based tax is also being considered.

CAIRNGORM INVERTEBRATES

The Rare Invertebrates in the Cairngorms project surveyed the Cairngorms National Park as part of a three year project. Small scabious mining bee nests were found, for the first time ever, at RSPB's Abernethy reserve. The project also found 11 rare pine hoverfly larvae at two sites, including two in the reserve, with the remainder at another site in the National Park. The project is also working to improve the conservation fortunes of the shining guest ant, dark boarded beauty moth, northern silver-stiletto fly and Kentish glory moth. All six have been identified as in need of urgent conservation action, with the Cairngorms being the last stronghold for most of them.

RSPB Scotland, Cairngorms National Park

Authority, Buglife, Butterfly Conservation Scotland and SNH are partners in the project.

KINGSHOUSE HOTEL

Mountaineering Scotland, the John Muir Trust and the National Trust for Scotland have all objected to Black Corries Estate Management Ltd's plans to extend the Kings House Hotel, on Rannoch Moor, near Glen Coe. The three story 'industrial style' extension is considered to be out of character with the original building and the surrounding landscape, a National Scenic Area.

CUMBERNAULD LIVING LANDSCAPE

Cumbernauld Living Landscape has received initial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund to develop its Creating Natural Connections project, a four-year initiative which aims to make the town's woods, parks and open spaces better for wildlife and people. Native woodland cover will be increased, non-native invasive species removed and wildflower meadows created. Creating Natural Connections is a partnership project between the Scottish Wildlife Trust, North Lanarkshire Council, The Conservation Volunteers, Sanctuary Scotland and the James Hutton Institute. It builds on work carried out in the town by Cumbernauld Living Landscape since it was launched in 2013.



ENERGY

POWER LINES

15 UK environmental non-governmental organisations have written an open letter to Ofgem about the visual amenity allowances included in the current price controls for electricity distribution and transmission. These allowances enable the electricity network operators to develop and implement projects to reduce the visual impact of existing power lines in, or significantly impacting on, important landscapes. There is scope to do more to reduce the visual impact of electricity infrastructure and these allowances apply to landscapes designated as National Parks and National Scenic Areas could make an invaluable contribution to this.

WINDFARM UPDATES

Dumfries & Galloway: The *Sunday Herald* reported that The Duke of Buccleuch, a partner in North Lowther Energy Initiative, has applied for planning permission for a 35 turbine, 151 MW windfarm between Sanquhar and Wanlockhead in Dumfries & Galloway.

A cross party group of MSPs have lodged objections, as have the Scottish Rights of Way & Access Society, Lowther Hills Ski Club, Leadhills Community Council and Wanlockhead Village Council, concerned about the cumulative effect of windfarms in the area. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has also objected because of potential water contamination from old lead mines and the disturbance of pollution within the soil. It said that the developer needed to do more work to properly assess the risks.

The Buccleuch estate said that it has reduced the visual impact of the windfarm and will avoid contaminated areas. It argues that its plans pre-date plans for a community buy-out.

John Glen, of Buccleuch Estate, said: "The project will also deliver substantial habitat restoration that will improve the environmental and conservation landscape. The design of the windfarm has been adapted to reduce visual impact, including a reduction in visibility from Wanlockhead. We are currently liaising with SEPA on some technical issues they have raised and are confident of addressing them satisfactorily.

We have avoided areas identified as being at risk of contamination from old mine workings."

- The Scottish Government has approved E.On's plans for 18 turbines at Benbrack near Carsphairn. Dumfries & Galloway council did not object to the development, but did voice fears over its 'significant and adverse' impact on the character and setting of the area. East Ayrshire Council, as a neighbouring authority, submitted an objection about the potential effect on tourism and recreation. Scottish Natural Heritage was also particularly concerned about the impact on Loch Doon. A public local inquiry was held, which concluded that the company had done what it could to mitigate any effect on the 'natural beauty of the countryside' in the area.

Highlands: The *BBC News* website reported that a 54 turbine windfarm proposed for Glenshero, near Laggan would supply electricity for GFG Alliance's Lochaber Smelter near Fort William. The scheme would also provide power for Motherwell's Dalzell steel mills run by Liberty, part of GFG Alliance. If the windfarm goes ahead, steel for the turbines would be rolled in Motherwell.

GFG said that it hopes to upgrade existing hydro power stations serving the smelter and look at the potential of building smaller scale hydro schemes in Lochaber.

Scottish Borders: ABO Wind UK has submitted a new application for a seven turbine windfarm at Barrel Law near Robertson. The site was previously rejected after a public local inquiry as it could interfere with radar systems at RAF Spadeadam and seismic monitoring at Eskdalemuir. An environmental assessment has now concluded that the effect of the operational turbines on radar and seismic equipment would not be significant.

- Councillors have been advised to refuse Gilston Hill Wind Farm Ltd's plans for a seven turbine windfarm at Gilston Farm, near Heriot on the same site as a 13 turbine project rejected by the Scottish Government in 2013. Planning officers have advised Scottish Borders Council to refuse the new plan due to its landscape impact. Developers have said that the latest proposals have a much smaller layout footprint, which would 'dramatically' reduce that effect. Concerns were also raised about the impact on badgers.

- The reporters overseeing applications for Limekiln and Drum Hollistan windfarms, near Reay in Caithness, have agreed to the developers' request for both Public Local Inquiries to be heard together [Jul 15]. The John Muir Trust (JMT) said that, although the sites are close together in the Flow Country, each needs to be considered separately as the geography, planning history and potential impacts of the two schemes are quite different. JMT observed that, when two developments are considered together in a conjoined inquiry, almost invariably one gets consented and one refused.

NESS HYDRO

Highland Council is planning a hydro-electric plant in the River Ness. The 100 KW turbine, an Archimedes screw, will control the water flow from a lade off the river through to Whin Park and will generate 672,529 KWh. The electricity would supply council buildings together with the Inverness Leisure Centre and Highland Archive Centre.

TIDAL & WAVE ENERGY UPDATES

The *BBC News* website reported that the European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC) in Orkney has generated hydrogen gas from tidal energy, a world first. Funding of £3m was made available through Highlands & Islands Enterprise. Prototype tidal energy converters, Scotrenewables' SR2000 and Tocardo's TFS and T2 turbine, fed power into an electrolyser situated next to EMEC's onshore substation which used the electricity to split water

into its component parts of hydrogen and oxygen. Scottish energy minister, Paul Wheelhouse, said: "The Scottish Government is pleased to be supporting this innovative project, which will help to partially overcome grid constraints in the Orkney Islands by enabling the storage of excess tidal power generated and using that electricity to produce hydrogen. The project also adds to our growing understanding of the potential role of hydrogen in Scotland's future energy system – something we have committed to exploring in our draft Energy Strategy."

Neil Kermode, of EMEC, said: "Whilst the initial driver behind buying an electrolyser was to provide a storage solution to circumvent local grid constraints, the purchase has sparked off other pioneering projects around Orkney looking to use hydrogen in various means. So we're now looking towards the development of a hydrogen economy in Orkney."

- The Surf'n'Turf project will involve the EMEC electrolyser as well as power from a 900 kW wind turbine owned by the Eday community. The hydrogen will then be transported to Kirkwall, where a fuel cell installed on the pier will convert the hydrogen back into electricity for use as auxiliary power for ferries when tied up overnight. The project is also exploring the development of green hydrogen as a fuel source on the inter-island ferries.

- Atlantis Resources sought support from the UK government to install 49 turbines on the seabed of the Pentland Firth [Jan 17]. However, the government decided that the tidal energy that would be produced at the MeyGen extension would be too expensive and rejected Atlantis' application for funding in the latest auction under the Contract for Difference scheme. 11 projects that required less support per unit of output have won backing, including the Moray East windfarm in the Moray Firth and a biomass combined heat and power plant at Grangemouth.

The company is now unlikely to proceed beyond the demonstration phase of four turbines. Scottish Renewables said that MeyGen was the only commercial multi-turbine tidal array to have gone into construction anywhere in the world.

- Scotrenewables said that its floating generator had produced energy for seven days continuously during trials off Orkney. The SR2000 generated around 7% cent of the power needed on the islands.

- Separately, the state-funded Wave Energy Scotland has awarded around £660,000 to 13 projects that aim to increase the cost effectiveness of wave energy technology.

NORTH SEA OIL

A study led by Professor Roy Thomson, of the University of Edinburgh, said that North Sea oil and gas reserves will run out by 2027. Just 11% of the UK's oil reserves has still to be recovered. The study also examined the potential for fracking in Scotland, and found that it will be 'barely viable' because of a lack of sites with suitable geology with low quality source rocks and complex geological histories; many possible sites were in densely populated areas. Greater use of renewable energy resources were called for, including offshore wind and advanced solar energy.

However, Professor Alexander Kemp, of Aberdeen Centre for Research in Energy Economics, said that there were still around 11 billion barrels which can be recovered profitably. Big fields, such as Bressay and Rosebank off Shetland, were still to be developed, at least until 2050. Deirdre Michie, of Oil & Gas UK, said that there are up to 20 billion barrels of oil

and gas resources still to be recovered on the UK continental shelf. Production has increased by 16% between 2014 and 2016; 12 new fields are due onstream by the end of next year, increasing the contribution from recent developments to around 600,000 barrels of oil and gas equivalent. Most will still be producing into the 2030s and 2040s. By the end of 2018, more than one third of total production will have come from assets that have started production since 2016; some will still be producing towards 2050.

Ken Cronin, of Oil & Gas UK, writing to the letters page of *The Herald*, said: "An analysis of 25 shale gas systems in the United States isn't a good basis for sweeping assertions about Scotland. [Professor] Thomson has suggested the total organic carbon, one of the determining factors in hydrocarbon viability, for Scottish shale is 2%. If he had referred to the British geological Survey 2014 report on Scottish shale gas he would have seen that Scottish deposits in the West Lothian oil-shale area have a significant number of deposits between seven and 30% and that there are significant net thicknesses of shale with total oxygen content of more than 2% ... At present, 50% of our gas comes from outside the UK – a significant turnaround from 17 years ago when we were a gas exporter. This is set to rise to 80% in the next 17 years and has massive implications, both economically and environmentally."

CCS

The Scottish Government is to provide funding for a feasibility study into a carbon capture and storage (CCS) project in the North Sea [Sep 16]. It centres on the Acorn Project, which aims to create a CCS project at St Fergus in Aberdeenshire. A CCS plan at Peterhead was cancelled in 2015.



TOURISM & RECREATION

OLD MAN OF STORR

The Highland Council has refused to transfer 202 acres of land to Staffin Community Trust (SCT) at the Old Man of Storr on Skye [Mar 16]. The trust had proposed creating a car park, visitor centre and public toilets to improve access to the Old Man and Trotternish Ridge. However, the council said that while it could not accept the trust's current plan, which would leave it with the burden of funding maintenance of surrounding land, it wanted to continue discussions on how the project could work.

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that the council had previously earmarked £400,000 of development funding for car park improvements at the site. However, the trust wanted that money to be used to kick-start a larger project, including much-needed toilets. They planned to seek match funding from a variety of sources to deliver a project estimated at up to £900,000. The council said that the transfer of £400,000 'would not be prudent' and failed to protect the public interest without clear evidence of match funding. It suggested that a lease agreement, covering the whole site owned by the council at Storr Woodland, may have been a better alternative.

The council also took issue with the plan to separate the car park area from the remainder of the wider site, suggesting this would 'separate the revenue generating potential of the site from the burden of management and maintenance.' The SCT had proposed charging a fee to use any new car park.

The council said that sporting rights complicate the process. It states: "There is a requirement that within the land requested the sporting rights

are transferred at no cost. This is not possible for the council to approve as they are held by Lord MacDonald, under a Sporting Lease by the Secretary of State for Scotland."

The council local members said: "Members hope that a solution can be found that protects and enhances the natural heritage assets at this nationally important site while supporting economic benefits for the ward and beyond."

The local authority said: "Despite having refused the trust's Asset Transfer Request in its current form, the council remain optimistic that a partnership approach can still deliver the substantial improvements required at the site and have extended an invitation to continue dialogue with the trust towards a solution."

Sandy Ogilvie, of SCT, said: "In submitting the Asset Transfer Request back in March the SCT had responded to the concerns of the community regarding road safety and sanitation at the Storr by consulting closely with local residents and public agencies to develop a project which would combat those problems and enhance one of the most important visitor locations in Skye. SCT strongly believes it chimed perfectly with the Scottish Government's new community empowerment legislation."

SCT has asked for a review into the failed bid and has taken up an offer to negotiate with Highland Council. The Storr can nowadays have as many as 150,000 people visiting it in a single year; numbers in 2005 were 63,000.

FALLS OF CLYDE

The Scottish Wildlife Trust has been awarded £19,896 from SUEZ Communities Trust (formerly SITA Trust) to upgrade the footpath and install new information boards at Falls of Clyde Visitor Centre and Wildlife Reserve. More than 50,000 people a year visit the Falls of Clyde reserve which is part of the Clyde Valley Woodlands National Nature Reserve. SUEZ provides funding awards through the Scottish Landfill Communities Fund, linked to the Scottish Landfill Tax.

GLENCOE MOUNTAIN

Glencoe Mountain hopes to make enough snow artificially to guarantee snowsports every season. Massive snow piles will be manufactured in November so the centre can open for snowsports on 1 December each year. The snow would be spread on the new Coire Pollach ski run and sledging area. Last season was the centre's worst on record since it opened in 1956. The resort is crowdfunding for the snowfactory, the first of its kind in Scotland.

COUL LINKS

A plan for an 18 hole links golf course in Sutherland has been submitted to Highland Council by the Embo Trust and US businessmen [Aug 16]. The plans have been amended to reduce the impact on the Loch Fleet Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); the developers argue that the area involved makes up only 1.8% of the SSSI.



NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS

NTS

The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) has appointed Neil Oliver – the archaeologist, TV presenter and author – as president. He takes over from Lord Lindsay.

SCENES

Sue Fenton is retiring as editor/publisher with this issue of *SCENES*; Laken-Louise Hives (her address is on the front page) is taking over. Thank you all for your support over the past 16½ years!