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SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE

The Forum

## Scotland's Biodiversity: (Wild) Life Through a Lens

It is difficult for communities to value or protect that which they are not aware of. Many animals are elusive or nocturnal and local residents often have no idea of the species that they share their space with. However, technological developments such as camera traps, or trail cameras as they are also known, are increasingly providing a method for scientists, naturalists and the general public to detect and monitor a range of species that are often difficult to survey by other means.

With a decrease in cost and an increase in specification, we were keen to utilise camera traps as a tool for raising awareness, increasing engagement and making real contributions to knowledge of local wildlife. Our first foray into camera trapping as a Partnership was in 2013. We bought five cameras that were loaned to individuals and community groups. They were used in nature reserves, gardens, private land and land managed by community projects. This proved hugely successful.

Keen to tackle the well-documented disconnect between young people and the outdoors, in 2014 we established a multi-partner project working with more than a dozen primary schools across Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray. With the assistance of five rangers' services and a number of folk involved in environmental education, more than 250 children were given the opportunity to participate in some rather unique outdoor education. (cont. over)



Bushnell

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## Contact details

Do you have a news story? Are you involved in a project? If so, then let the Biodiversity Team know! Ask for our article guidelines to help you make the most of your article.

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**BIODIVERSITY SCOTLAND**

## The role of camera traps in engaging communities with biodiversity

As the citizen science aspect of the project continued to develop, we realised that camera trapping could make a significant contribution to gathering records for the forthcoming North East Scotland Mammal Atlas, the first of its kind in the region. Working closely with NESBReC (North East Scotland Biological Records Centre), producers of the atlas, we ran a number of training courses to encourage volunteers to use camera traps to gather data, particularly of some of the more under-recorded species.



Gripped by fervour for the technology, we developed a technique which has enabled the use of camera traps to record a range of species such as mice, voles and shrews. This innovation is now being widely adopted, not least because it comes with none of the animal welfare issues associated with small mammal trapping. We are currently working with a number of conservation initiatives to apply the technique in their monitoring projects.

While the projects all contribute to Scotland's 2020 routemap through facilitating outdoor learning and enabling individuals and communities to enjoy their green spaces, to volunteer and to engage in citizen science, it's also really good fun!

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<https://www.facebook.com/northeastscotlandcameratrapping/>



NORTH-EAST SCOTLAND  
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## Sea Eagles On-Hoy

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A pair of sea eagles are nesting on RSPB Scotland's Hoy nature reserve tending the eggs, raising hopes that this year may see Orkney's first chicks in nearly 150 years. The young pair are assumed to be the birds that nested on the nature reserve last year - the first breeding attempt seen in the county since 1873. Although last year's eggs were infertile, hopes are high that with their growing maturity and experience from last season the birds may make history this spring.

Sea eagles have a long history in Orkney. A Pictish symbol stone found at the Knowe of Burrian, Harray features a well-known carving of one bird, while bones belonging to this species were found inside the Neolithic chambered tomb at Isbister, South Ronaldsay (the 'Tomb of the Eagles').

Alan Leitch, RSPB Scotland's Sites Manager in Orkney, said: "It's very exciting to see Hoy's sea eagles back on the cliffs. It's been quite a journey from their national extinction in 1918 to seeing these birds soaring over Orkney's hills and coasts again, and with luck we may all witness the next step in their story this year. With a wingspan of 2.4 m, or 8 feet, sea eagles are one of the most magnificent birds you can hope to experience in Orkney. We're looking forward to helping people spot this pair at an informal watchpoint at the small roadside car park for the Dwarfie Stone, opposite the Dwarfie Hamars, the cliffs where the birds have recently been seen displaying."



## ..So will it be chicks this year?

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“To give these birds the best chance of success, please don’t approach the cliffs and keep dogs under very close control in the vicinity. There’s no problem with visiting the Dwarfie Stone, but to be on the safe side we would recommend not lingering too long or gathering in large groups there – the best views are to be had from the car park in any case.”

“Nesting sea eagles are specially protected by law, so if you see any signs of disturbance please pass your concerns onto the police straightaway.”

Sea eagles became extinct across the UK in the early 19th century due to a combination of widespread habitat loss and human persecution, with the last bird shot in Shetland in 1918.

Following successful reintroductions since the 1970s on Rum, Wester

Ross and more recently in Fife, sea eagles are now reclaiming their former ranges. Success for the pair in Hoy, which have returned to Orkney of their own accord, would represent a significant expansion in breeding range for the birds in Scotland.

The local RSPB Scotland team are happy to answer questions about the sea eagles, and can be contacted on 01856 850176 or at [orkney@rspb.org.uk](mailto:orkney@rspb.org.uk)



## Featured Fungi—*Peziza domiciliana* (Carpet Cup)

This fungus is not necessarily a delight to find as it commonly grows indoors and surprises people with its appearance in carpets, in showers, on furniture, even on clothing. It is a common household fungus that can grow on a very wide range of substrates including sand, cement, plaster, coal dust and walls. Although this fungus prefers alkaline conditions it can pretty much grow everywhere there is constant moisture, nutrients and a porous surface. It can be found all year around.

*Peziza domiciliana* belongs to a large family in the Class Ascomycota.

Young specimens are cup shaped with a central depression, a short stalk and a rubbery texture. The older the specimen the flatter they get and are normally 2-10 cm in diameter. The yellowish to brownish colour and shape, especially of older specimens, can be reminiscent of pancakes. They often grow in clusters.

Although the fungus is not considered to be poisonous, it is at best thought to be inedible due to its rubbery texture. Although it may not be poisonous, there is an open question about whether the spores can cause allergic reactions. The spores of many fungi which occur indoors are known to be in the wide range of allergens involved in the so-called '[sick building syndrome](#)'. No research has been carried out specifically on the spores of the carpet cup however.

The spores in this fungus are forcibly released and can often be seen as a brief powdery cloud when the fruit bodies are touched. Removing the fruit bodies would remove the source of the spores but the main body of the fungus will still remain growing within the substrate and will persist until one or more of the growing requirements are no longer available.



Photo © Stirling council ranger service



### Distribution:

The species is probably one of the most ubiquitous fungi indoors but there are only 39 records on the NBN with one from Scotland (53 records on the more up to date [FRDBI](#) but still just the one from Scotland).

Please remember to submit your records to your [local recording group](#) or via the [Scottish Fungi online recording form](#).

Photo © Michael Kuo

## Climate Change – SNH Action Plan updated

Climate change is one of the most serious threats facing the world. Continuing increases in ocean acidification, sea-level rise, global temperatures and more extreme weather events demand not only a national but a global response. Therefore when agreement was reached by all 195 participating member states, during the 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris last December, this was an historic moment when the world responded to climate change.

So what better time than ever to review and focus our work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation) and to prepare for a changing climate (adaptation) by working with nature. Securing carbon stocks in peatlands, demonstrating adaptation across protected areas (See article on [pages 10 & 11](#) from Anna Brand), and working in partnership with others to promote the role nature can play in addressing climate change are just a few examples of what SNH is doing. To find out more please download the Action Plan directly from this [link](#). If you would to request a paper copy, please contact [pubs@snh.gov.uk](mailto:pubs@snh.gov.uk) or telephone: 01738 458530.

The Action Plan highlights things we can do whether we manage land, freshwater or the sea, or influence them through our work and lifestyle choices to make nature more resilient to change, and reduce the adverse impacts of climate change on all of us.

Julia Quin

Policy & Advice Officer Climate Change

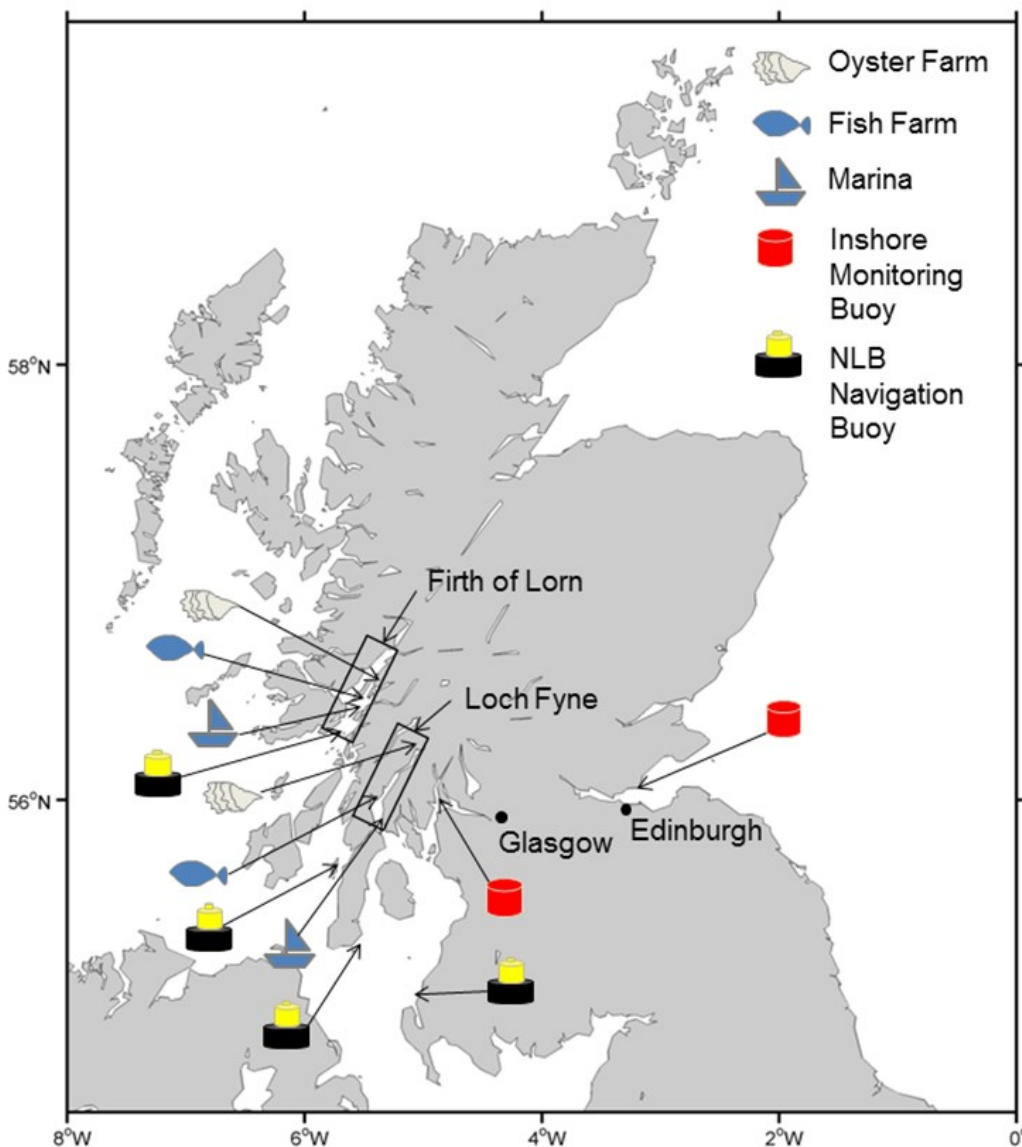


## Early warning detection of marine aliens off Scotland

The saying that “if you don’t look, you won’t find” is likely to hold true for marine non-native species. At least the saying might be expected to be the case for the smaller, more difficult to identify, species. Another saying is that “fore-warned is fore-armed”, and there has been a gap in our marine surveillance regarding the “warning”. To help fill that gap work led by Dr Liz Cook of The Scottish Association for Marine Science, funded by Scottish Government and SNH, was published in September - [SNH Commissioned Report 874: Assessing the effectiveness of early warning systems for the detection of marine invasive non-native species in Scottish Waters](#).

Field work was undertaken in 2013 to assess the effectiveness of five sampling techniques to detect target marine non-native species. The five techniques were rapid assessment, settlement panels, scrape samples, in-situ photographs and settlement panel photographs.

Sampling took place both inshore and off-shore, making use of fish-farms, marinas, inshore buoys serviced by SEPA and off-shore buoys managed by the Northern Lighthouse Board.



**Map to show location of the marinas, fish and oyster farms where the five early warning sampling techniques were assessed. The locations of the inshore SEPA monitoring buoys are also shown.**



The rapid assessment survey proved to be the most reliable and cost-effective technique, involving a visual inspection, by two people for an hour, of floating structures and submerged surfaces down to a depth of 0.5m. As rapid assessment does not provide quantitative data and work in the field can be difficult, the



project recommends that rapid assessment is used in combination with either the scrape or settlement

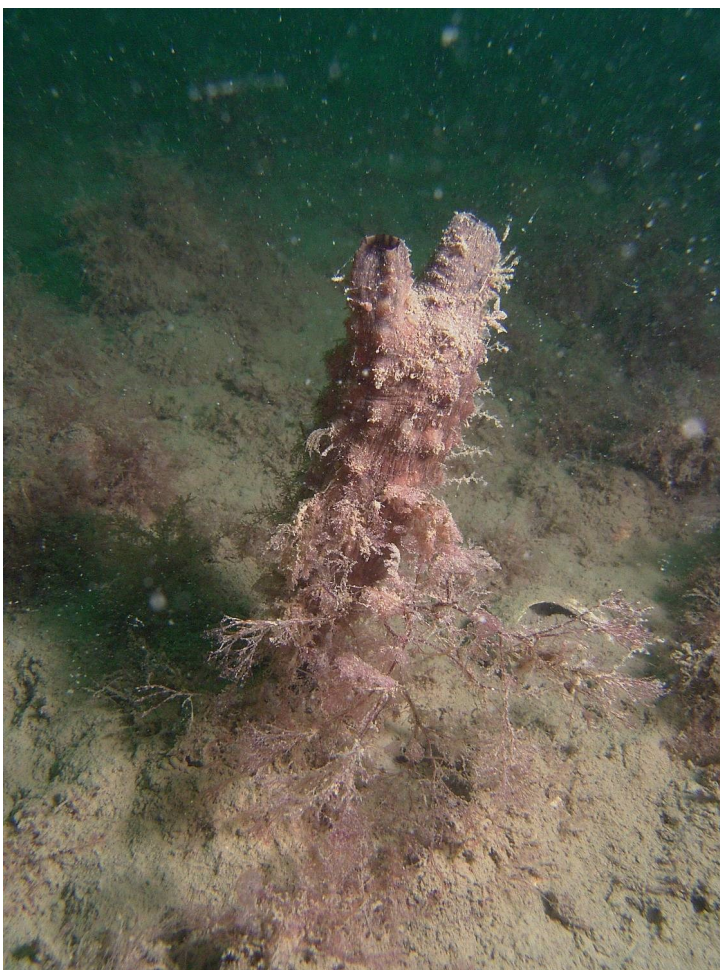
Wireweed

© Crown Copyright 2009

© SNH

panel techniques. Marinas were found to be the most successful location for the detection of non-native species, but that fish farms and monitoring/ navigation buoys may also be useful if visited routinely by trained surveyors.

Leathery Sea Squirt



The assessment is timely as there are likely to be marine non-native species heading “our way”. Not long after the field work was undertaken, Dr David Mann of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh discovered the diatom *Diademoides luxurios*, a species known from the Pacific, but found by David on the foreshore near Edinburgh. It is thought to be the first record (potentially) of an introduced marine benthic diatom in the UK. A combination of horizon scanning, surveillance for target species and specialist research will all be important in identifying and then managing the spread of non-native species.

Iain Macdonald

Policy and Advice Officer  
Scottish Natural Heritage

© Chris Wood, Marine  
Conservation Society



## Helping our nature reserves cope with a changing climate

We are beginning to realise that some effects of climate change will be inevitable. While we continue to limit carbon emissions to minimise these effects, we will also need to adapt to the changes that will happen.

We've all noticed unusual weather and rainfall patterns, and these changes also affect nature. You can find more information on the



changes in land-based biodiversity in the [Biodiversity Climate Change Impacts 2015 Report Card](#), and for changes in the marine environment in the [Marine Climate Change Impacts 2013 Report Card](#).

At Scottish Natural Heritage, we have identified eight climate change adaptation principles, to guide our work to help nature cope with climate change. The principles are:

- ◆ Improve habitat management
- ◆ Enhance habitat diversity
- ◆ Take an adaptive approach to land and conservation management
- ◆ Plan for habitat change
- ◆ Consider translocation of species

- ◆ Reduce other pressures on ecosystems, habitats and species
- ◆ Make space for natural processes
- ◆ Enhance opportunities for species to disperse



## Helping our nature reserves cope with a changing climate

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To illustrate how these principles are being used, we have created a suite of case studies that tell encouraging stories of management for climate change adaptation from around the country. For example:

At Forsinard Flows, large areas of planted conifer forest have been restored to bog, to [make space for natural processes](#). A functioning bog that has not been planted, drained or burned stores carbon, preventing it from being released into the atmosphere.



At Creag Meagaidh, lichens have been trying out their new home, some having been moved from their native habitat in the high Cairngorms. By [considering translocation](#), researchers are trying to see whether they would survive in new areas, were their habitat to disappear as a result of climate change. This is no simple process; there are many

consequences when moving species and researchers followed the [Scottish Code for Conservation Translocations](#).

More and more, people are taking action to protect nature. Healthy and diverse environments support wildlife and habitats that we can all enjoy. Examples for all eight of the case studies will shortly be available. Keep an eye out for existing and new cases on the [SNH website](#).

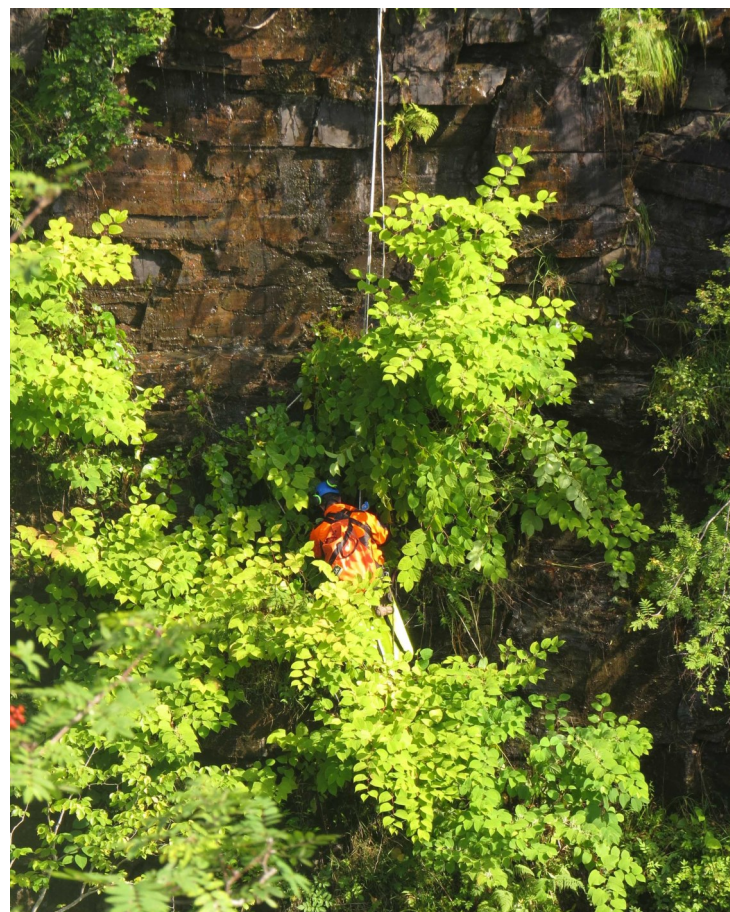
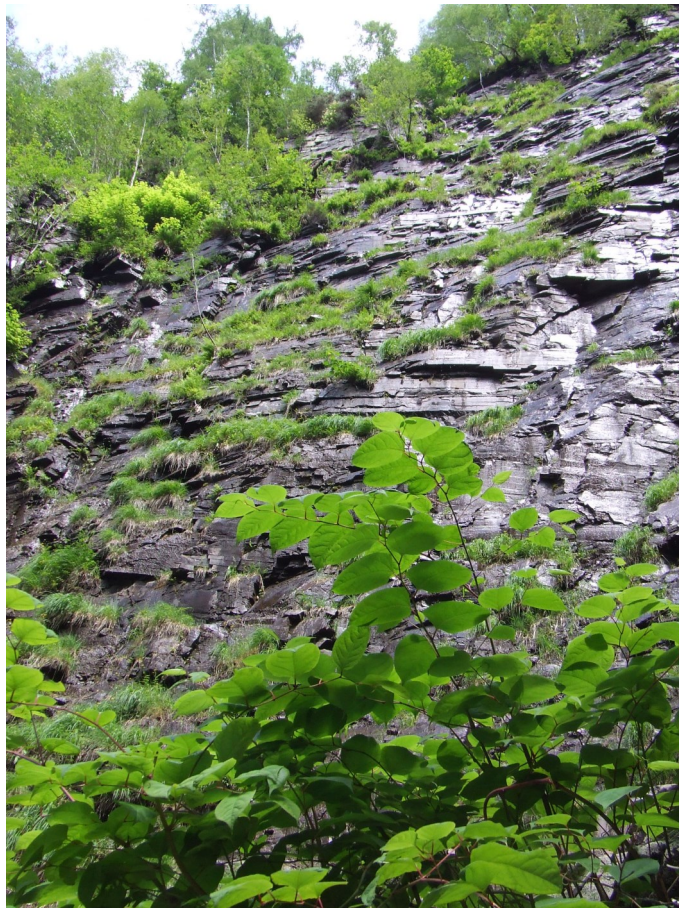
Anna Brand, Policy & Advice Officer, Climate Change SNH.

## Control of invasive knotweeds on the River Broom

Last year, a catchment-wide programme of knotweed eradication was initiated on the River Broom in Wester Ross. This project is being funded by the Landfill Communities Fund and local landowners.

In 2012, Coille Alba was asked to help treat several small stands of Japanese knotweed in Corrieshalloch Gorge. A survey revealed that the knotweed had originated from small feeder burns above the gorge at Braemore. Subsequent discussions with Wester Ross Fisheries Trust and neighbouring land-owners eventually prompted efforts to take concerted action to control knotweed throughout the Broom catchment.

Over 250 knotweed colonies were located in a survey, these varying in extent from single stems to 0.25 hectare. They include three species: Japanese, Giant and Himalayan knotweed, and the total net area (all species) in the catchment is 25,000 square metres.



Most knotweed colonies are on the banks of the River Broom and are reasonably accessible, but those in Corrieshalloch Gorge and along small steep watercourses can only be safely tackled at low water. Small stands on a rock-face in the gorge must be accessed Using ropes.



# Control of invasive knotweeds on the River Broom

**The tactics of knotweed control:** Japanese knotweed has earned a reputation for being difficult to kill. It is a perennial with a very extensive, deep rhizome system which renders it resistant to treatments which do not adequately penetrate to the underground parts of the plant. Knotweed can also survive relatively long periods of dormancy induced by stress.

The control methods most widely used are based on treatment with glyphosate, a systemic broad-spectrum herbicide. This is best applied in late summer, when photosynthates are being translocated and stored in the root system for the winter. It is most frequently applied by spraying or stem injection. Both these application methods are useful in a control programme, and a combination of the two techniques is probably the most cost-effective way to achieve eradication.

Because it can be difficult to supply enough herbicide by foliar application alone, spraying well-established knotweed can sometimes maim plants without killing them. Stem injection has the advantage that it guarantees delivery of a measured amount of herbicide regardless of leaf area. It can also be carried out in all weathers, especially useful in a wet summer. Injection also minimises adverse environmental impacts, particularly close to watercourses.

Injection cannot be used on very small stems, however, and spraying (or weed-wiping) is the only practical way to treat plants with stems less than about 15mm in diameter.



For the first year of control, we stem-injected over 60,000 Japanese and Giant knotweed stems during August and September using a Nomix Stem Master. Himalayan knotweed stands were sprayed with a Berthoud knapsack sprayer. Knotweed on a rock-face above Corrieshalloch Gorge was accessed on ropes and stem-injected.

We will be following up with further injection and spraying this summer, and eventually look forward to eradicating knotweed in the Broom catchment.

If you wish to know more about the project please contact [john.parrott@coillealba.org.uk](mailto:john.parrott@coillealba.org.uk)

## Darwin project puts Iraq's wildlife on the map

A three-year project in Iraq has significantly contributed to knowledge of the country's flora and fauna – including five previously unknown plant species – as well as improving the prospects for future conservation efforts in the country.

The *Iraq Darwin* project, which ran between April 2012 and March 2015, has been successful in helping to build capacity for biodiversity conservation, through training Iraqis in botany, ornithology and conservation

techniques. The project will also help Iraq to meet the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). National Red Lists are now available for the country's endemic plants and birds, and this data has already been used by the Iraqi Government in its assessment of the country's Key Biodiversity Areas.

Nature Iraq was founded in 2004 and is the BirdLife Affiliate for the country. It is currently the only non-governmental organisation in Iraq actively engaged in conservation work. Funding for the project came from the UK Government's Darwin Initiative programme, with staff from BirdLife International and the Centre for Middle Eastern Plants (CMEP), which is based at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, offering support and expertise.



Peramagroon© Tony Miller



“The main focus of the project was Peramagroon Mountain in Iraqi Kurdistan. Here, Nature Iraq established an eco-camp, which was used as a base for field surveys, training and an educational programme. New plant survey methods were developed at the site, as well as user-friendly guides to the plants and birds of the area,” said Hana Raza of Nature Iraq. “We published in Kurdish a teachers toolkit and a manual to land use planning, and both have been distributed to the target schools in Peramagroon. We also ran an online course in biodiversity and conservation for students at Sulimaniye

Allium University – the first of its kind in Iraq.”

Although Peramagroon represents only around 0.03% of Iraq's land area, the project revealed that it contains 25% of Iraq's flora – offering a significant insight to the understanding of Iraq's flora as a whole. Five new (as yet undescribed) species were found: a *Sedum* (Crassulaceae) a *Pterocephalus* (Dipsacaceae), an *Orobanche* (Orobanchaceae) and two species of *Allium* (Alliaceae).

"This work has increased the number of plants known from Peramagroon Mountain by more than two-and-a-half times demonstrating the impact that intensive study in a relatively small area can have on our knowledge of biodiversity. The techniques and tools developed for identification of plants and birds will make it easier to carry out similar work in other places in Iraq", explained CMEP Project Manager Sophie Neale.



Sedum

As well as documenting the plants and birds of Peramagroon, the project has also contributed considerable knowledge about the area's dragonflies and butterflies, including four new dragonfly records for Iraq. The country's first citizen science exercise has also begun, encouraging Iraqis to submit images of butterflies and dragonflies. For further details see: <http://iraqdarwin.org/thebighunt/>



"Despite the challenges of working in post-conflict Iraq, the success of the *Iraq Darwin* project and Nature Iraq in training a new generation of environmental professionals – as well as engaging children and communities about their local nature – bodes well for the future of wildlife conservation in Iraq," commented Richard Porter, BirdLife's Middle East Advisor.

Orobanche

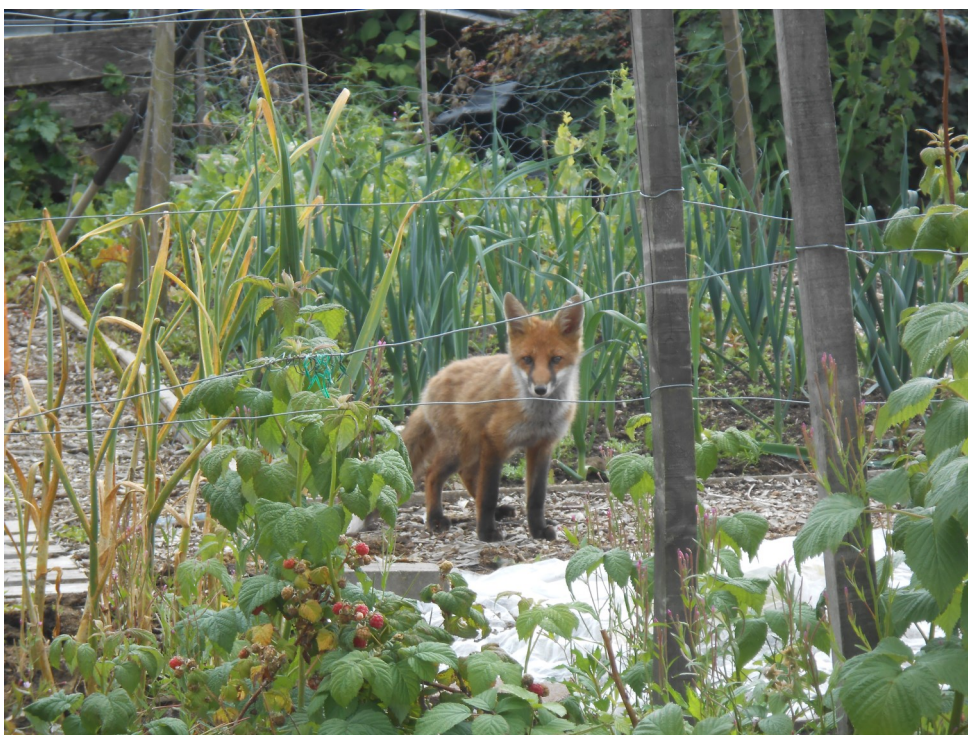
## Green fingers, green space, green awards

The value of allotments has long been recognised; the opportunity to grow your own produce, get some exercise or even escape from everyday pressures and hide out in a shed. Indeed many urban dwellers in some local authorities can face lengthy waiting lists to be assigned a much-coveted plot. However, allotments are increasingly being recognised as valuable greenspace, sometimes surprisingly rich in biodiversity, and with the potential to provide multiple benefits to local residents.



A project is underway in North East Scotland to capitalise on these benefits. Slopefield Allotments, owned by Aberdeen City Council, and managed by members of the local allotment association is a great example of how a greenspace can provide a host of services to the community and the environment, including food production, biodiversity and education. The dedication of the allotment association members, or “plotters”, has seen the project go from strength to strength over the last few years. It has received multiple awards and accolades,

including the top award in Keep Scotland Beautiful’s “It’s Your Neighbourhood” scheme three years running. Among the enhancements the community group has undertaken at the site to benefit biodiversity are building bat and bird boxes, planting hedgerows and digging a pond. Some of the members have even established a green roof on their potting shed.



  
NORTH-EAST SCOTLAND  
BIODIVERSITY



## Green fingers, green space, green awards (cont)

With the help of the North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership Co-ordinator, Rose Toney, they have also set up a scheme to record the wildlife at the site and were delighted when a Hedgehog was captured on film, using a camera trap, near to the bug hotel they had built. Slopefield members have also been keen to share their knowledge with the local schoolchildren. In the spring and autumn months, students from Airyhall Primary School visit the allotments once a week to find out about food production, sustainability and wildlife. With help from the plotters and staff



from the James Hutton Institute, the children spend time both on practical tasks, such as weeding and planting and on finding out about how biodiversity supports food production. There's also time for playing some games, including "Whose Poo?" and making moth finger puppets!

The project is an excellent example of how local action is significantly contributing to the objectives of the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity, with everyone

involved doing their bit; the allotment association provides a safe learning environment for the children, and biodiversity enhancements for local wildlife, biodiversity and research staff at the James Hutton Institute provide an insight into how living things are connected and the school and parents makes a significant commitment to the project by accompanying the children as they walk to the allotments each week. With so many obvious benefits resulting from this partnership working, it would be wonderful to see similar greenspace utilised in this way all across Scotland.

Rose Toney, North East Scotland Biodiversity Co-ordinator.

[Rose.toney@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:Rose.toney@hutton.ac.uk)



## Votes in to support greenspaces in Scotland

**Hundreds of thousands of Tesco customers in Scotland have voted to help community groups benefit from a share of a £11.5million carrier bag charge fund. Over eight million votes were cast across the UK with almost one million coming from Scotland**

The supermarket teamed up with Greenspace Scotland to launch its Bags of Help initiative, which sees grants of £12,000, £10,000 and £8,000 – all raised from the 5p bag levy – being awarded to environmental and greenspace projects. Around £1.4 million will now be distributed to 144 projects across 48 Scottish regions from the Shetland Islands to Gretna in the Borders as a result of the scheme.

Voting ran in stores from 27 February until 6 March – with customers choosing which local project they'd like to get the top award using a token given to them at the check-out. The results were announced on the 17 March and the groups will now use their award to bring their projects to life and transform their community. The final award winners can now be seen on our map of successful projects, <http://bit.ly/scotbagsmap1>

Tony McElroy, Tesco's Head of Communications in Scotland, said: "We have been overwhelmed by the response of our customers to the Bags of Help initiative. A total of 144 groups across Scotland will now be awarded substantial grants to bring their projects to life. From new play parks and play grounds to sensory gardens and sports field refurbishments – so many wonderful schemes will now have the opportunity to become a reality. The awarding of the grants is only the first step in the process and we can't wait to see the progress over the coming weeks and months."

Emma Halliday, Community Enabler Co-ordinator at greenspace scotland, said: "We have been delighted to have been involved in the Bags of Help initiative. It has been wonderful to follow the projects through the application process to the final announcement. This is money which will go directly back into the communities up and down the country creating places to meet people, grow food, be active, play or simply relax. This initiative is really putting something back into the local environment, transforming greenspaces and helping the community at a grass-roots level."

Applications for the next round of the initiative will open on the 18th April so we hope to hear from lots more groups across the country who want to bag a share of the fund. As well as applying direct, suggestions for projects and sites can also be nominated by people living locally. To find out more <http://bit.ly/bagsofhelp2>



## **Trees for Life rewilding project wins global conservation competition**

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The success will allow the charity to establish one of the UK's most inspiring examples of rewilding. This will involve ambitious habitat creation to support wildlife including pine marten, red squirrel, golden eagle and Scottish wildcat, the planting of 50,000 native trees, and also the annual growing of 10,000 rare montane tree species, at Trees for Life's Dundreggan Conservation Estate in Glenmoriston to the west of Loch Ness.

"This is fantastic news for Scotland's Caledonian Forest and its endangered and rare wildlife, as well as for the many people who will benefit from our Rewilding the Highlands project, which is about people as well as places. Our sincere thanks go to everyone who supported us," said Alan Watson Featherstone, Trees for Life's Founder.

Trees for Life also aims to boost the local and Highlands economy by promoting Glenmoriston as a tourist destination, where people can enjoy the great outdoors and discover remarkable wildlife. Central to this will be Dundreggan, a 'lost world' biodiversity hotspot where more than 3,000 species have been discovered, including 10 found nowhere else in the UK and others that are extremely rare.

There will also be opportunities for local people and visitors to get involved in conservation initiatives, and for volunteers from different walks of life to gain training in conservation. Support will be given to a local community project at Invergarry, to enhance biodiversity at its Glengarry Community Woodland.

The EOCA Online Conservation Vote attracts huge interest internationally with national media, politicians, presidents and celebrities getting involved. Trees for Life was Scotland's only finalist in the competition's three categories, which also featured projects from as far afield as central Asia, Brazil, The Caribbean, Ecuador, Madagascar and Nicaragua.



## RSPB—Purchase of Dunnet Head Nature Reserve

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RSPB Scotland has announced that it has purchased the nature reserve at Dunnet Head, which is the northernmost point of mainland Britain, after receiving a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The dramatic coastal headland of Caithness, which boasts three-hundred feet-high cliffs, is home to thousands of breeding seabirds like puffins, guillemots, razorbills, fulmars and kittiwakes. The conservation charity has been leasing and managing the 40-acre site as a reserve since May 2008, but has now come to an agreement with the previous owner, Mr Ben Colson, to buy what it hopes will be a popular showcase for the country's marine wildlife. Dunnet Head Nature Reserve lies approximately 13 miles east of Thurso and commands dramatic views across the Pentland Firth and towards the islands of Orkney.



RSPB Scotland site manager, Dave Jones, said: “Dunnet Head really is an amazing place. The views across to Orkney are absolutely stunning, but for us, the most important aspect is the breeding seabirds and the opportunity this sites gives visitors to see these charismatic birds. Many of our seabird species are in serious decline so it is crucial that their breeding sites are properly protected. We are delighted to be taking over as custodians for this special place. Ben Colson and his family have cared for Dunnet Head for many years and, like Ben, we wish to see this amazing seabird city looked after for future generations to enjoy.”



Ben Colson said: “We owned the land at Dunnet Head for over a quarter of a century and our objective throughout has been to ensure that it is not commercially developed. So, whilst sad to be ending our relationship with the headland, we are delighted to have been able to agree this sale with RSPB Scotland who I am confident will ensure it continues as a place of wild beauty.”

Lucy Casot, Head of HLF Scotland, said: “Our natural heritage is a most precious resource and, thanks to National Lottery players, HLF grants have helped to protect an amazing range of landscapes, habitats and species of plants and animals. HLF is delighted to support the Dunnet Head Nature Reserve project that will stimulate people’s interest in the natural world and so help them conserve it for future generations.”

The Dunnet Head Nature Reserve project will see new leaflets detailing the natural and archaeological heritage of the site produced for 2016 and guided walks carried out during the visitor season to enhance the visitor experience at RSPB Scotland’s most recently acquired nature reserve.

## NTS squirrel census sees reds return

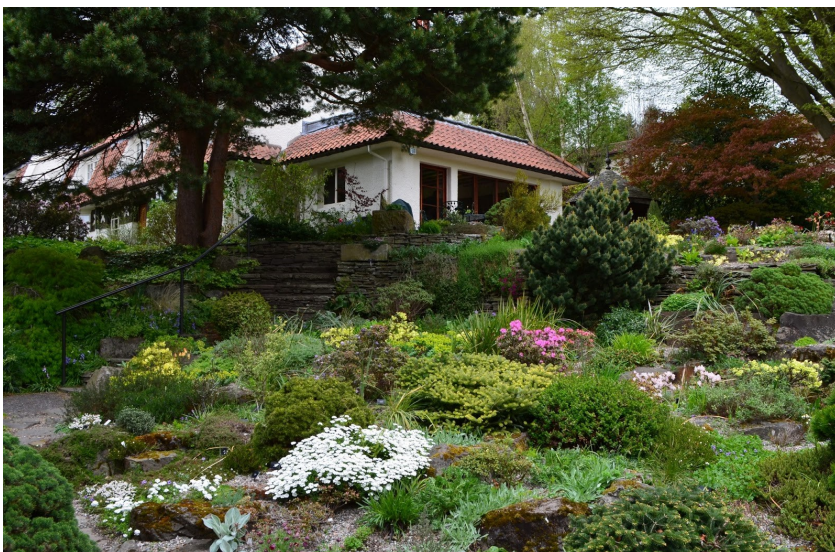
A survey by conservation charity the National Trust for Scotland has found that red squirrels have been spotted once again at properties in Perthshire and Fife, after years of absence. Expert conservationists say this is good news for the red squirrel, which for decades, has been losing territory to non-native grey squirrels. However, the charity says that the future is still far from secure for red squirrels and Highland havens could help in their long-term survival.



House of Dun

The Trust carried out the survey in late 2015 to establish which squirrels were found on its land across Scotland. For the first time in over 5 years, staff and volunteers at Branklyn Garden in Perth and Falkland Palace in Fife have reported reds – a positive sign which demonstrates that the work to control grey squirrels around these areas is working. At the House of Dun, staff are capturing many more shots of red squirrels on trail cameras, but unfortunately, they also filmed a grey squirrel for the first time recently, which is of major concern. The census found that there were red squirrels at 29 Trust properties, and grey squirrels at 32 places.

National Trust for Scotland Nature Adviser, Mr Lindsay Mackinlay said: “The recent census of our properties has shown that red squirrels are holding their own, and even thriving in many cases. We've had some real successes in our Aberdeenshire, Perthshire and Fife properties,



where we have seen the near disappearance of grey squirrels from places like Crathes and Drum after years of seeing them expand in numbers, whilst we have seen reds return in other places.”

However, the situation for red squirrels is still far from secure as their non-native cousins continue to move into new areas and the harmful squirrelpox virus spreads.

Branklyn Garden



Lindsay explains: “Greys have expanded their range in some regions, particularly around House of Dun, beside Montrose, and they continue to threaten reds in Dumfries and Galloway. The current situation is stark and simple - greys are still here, and with squirrelpox virus moving northwards with them, there is a very real danger for our red squirrels in some of our most beautiful properties, like Killiecrankie, Crathes, Threave and House of Dun, to name but a few. All these properties sit on the so-called frontline of grey expansion.”

Angus is proving to be a critical location in protecting the Aberdeenshire stronghold of red squirrels. And, hope for the red squirrel could be offered in the North West Highlands.

Lindsay continues:

“We are looking at our properties in the North West to see if they would be suitable for red squirrel introductions, and would encourage other landowners to do the same. This could provide a long-term refuge for red squirrels should grey squirrels and the squirrelpox virus keep heading northwards.”

National Trust for Scotland’s work to protect red squirrels is available in its Red Squirrel Conservation Action Plan, available here: <http://bit.ly/1VkFmFq>.

## Scotland's rarest trees planted in Inverness

Three rare Scottish tree species, which are native only to the island of Arran, have been planted in the grounds of Great Glen House in Inverness by Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) staff.

One of the species, Catacol whitebeam, is named after Glen Catacol in the north of Arran where it was discovered. Today it is represented in the wild by a single known tree and thus qualifies as Critically Endangered. It is the third offspring of

this family and arose from a natural crossing between the second offspring, Arran service-tree and one of its parents, rowan.

A plaque illustrating how the three species evolved was unveiled on 30<sup>th</sup> March by Susan Davies, Acting Chief Executive for Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

Ms Davies said, "There are very few species which truly belong to Scotland and to nowhere else in the world. The Arran whitebeam is one such species. It would be special to have just one tree species originate from a Scottish island, but for three to arise in a tiny area of one island is amazing."



RBGE Regius Keeper, Simon Milne, MBE said, "It is very exciting to have endemic species evolving here in Scotland and the Sorbus trees on Arran are fascinating. The evolution of these trees makes Arran a natural laboratory for studying species diversification. What we need to do now is to ensure their long term conservation and retain opportunities for further evolution."





# Scotland's rarest trees planted in Inverness

An example of each of the three endemic species, and the two species which gave rise to them, can be viewed in the grounds of Great Glen House, Leachkin Road, Inverness. The grounds are open to the public to visit and include a variety of habitats comprising native plant species.

Genetic research carried out at Edinburgh University has shown that Arran whitebeam was the first new

species and arose from crossing between the closely related rowan and rock whitebeam. A similar cross is thought to have arisen independently in Scandinavia. Arran whitebeam then crossed with rowan to create the Arran service-tree which then crossed with rowan again to create Catacol whitebeam.

RGBE has also planted examples of the Arran whitebeams outside the Scottish Parliament and on the island of Arran for public display.



Great Glen House is the shared Scottish headquarters for SNH, the Crofting Commission and Bòrd na Gàidhlig. The office also houses the Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service for Inverness.



Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh



Scottish Natural Heritage  
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba  
All of nature for all of Scotland  
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad

## Surge in seal pups at St Abbs

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Ongoing monitoring by National Trust for Scotland wildlife experts has shown that the number of grey seal pups born at St Abbs in Berwickshire increased by at least 10 per cent in the last year. The conservation charity has kept an eye on its seal pups each November for a number of years, but only started detailed monitoring of the numbers of the grey seal pups in 2014 when local staff started to notice that they were seemingly spreading along the coast.

Visual counts backed up by detailed photography showed that on the main pupping beach, the number of grey seal pups had increased from 556 in 2014 to 631 pups in 2015. Total numbers of pups in this area of coast reached 927 pups in 2015. The monitoring work will continue over the next few years to see if this growing trend in seal pup numbers is short or long-term.

Liza Cole, Property Manager at St Abb's Head said: "Scotland and the UK hold over 40 per cent of the world population of this species. It is good to see so many pups on our beaches, as the grey seal is actually one of the world's rarest. Grey seals are such a regular sight along our coasts, it is actually quite hard to appreciate this fact at times. However, it is not clear what our counts mean for the grey seal population as a whole at this time as many seal pups won't last their first year."

Lindsay Mackinlay, Nature Conservation Adviser said:

"The figures for seal pups are interesting and encouraging, and something we will keep an eye on in the foreseeable future. At this time, it appears that other grey seal colonies along the east coast of the UK have witnessed large numbers of seal pups being born in 2015, although we do not know for how long this trend will continue. I believe the Farne Islands colony saw similar increases to us but the seal pup counts at Blakeney Point in Norfolk remained stable in 2015 after several years of massive growth."



While the monitoring work was underway, the Trust's wildlife cameraman and video editor, Simon Goodall shot some compelling footage of the seal pups, focusing on one pup's struggle for survival. The video is available to view on the Trust's Nature Channel at: <http://www.nts.org.uk/Nature-Channel/View/St-Abbs-Seals/>

Liza Cole added: "This video is the best way to see our seal population up close. Trying to access our beaches can be dangerous and would disturb the seal population, so we'd encourage wildlife fans to view from the comfort of their own homes."

Formed by a series of volcanic eruptions, the craggy landscape of St Abb's Head on the



Berwickshire coast is a National Nature Reserve famous for its clamouring seabirds, rugged coastline, rich grasslands and crystal-clear waters. St Abb's Head is a year-round haven for birdwatchers, walkers and wildlife lovers. A veritable 'seabird city' in the summer months, the dramatic cliffs provide spectacular vantage points from which to watch thousands of nesting seabirds, including guillemots, kittiwakes and razorbills. Among the rugged cliffs and off-shore rock stacks, some of which stand 90 metres tall, you may feel suspended in serene isolation, but in fact this wilderness is just four miles away from the A1.

 the National Trust  
for Scotland  
a place for everyone

# Diary Dates

**21st June 2016:** Central Scotland Green Network Forum—Glasgow School of Art. The Art of Placemaking. [Booking is now open for the CSGN Forum](#); this year looking at the pivotal role of artists and designers in creating vibrant places for people to live and enjoy.

**1st-4th July 2016:** Field Studies Council. Biological Monitoring: Plants and Pollinators Location , Millport Isle of Cumbrae. This workshop on plant-pollinator monitoring will focus on taxonomic identification, robust field survey and inference, and floral assay for pollen and nectar. Led by Damien Hicks. Further information at: <http://www.field-studies-council.org/individuals-and-families/courses/2016/mi/pollinators-59601.aspx>

\*\*\*\***SAVE THE DATE**\*\*\*\*

Joint BES/CIEEM/SSG 2016 Science Conference

8th/9th November 2016 at RBGE

Further information to follow later—look in [www.biodiversityscotland](http://www.biodiversityscotland)



Emperor Moth