

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Report No</b>	<b>ECI/16/2023</b>

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Economy and Infrastructure

**Date:** 2 February 2023

**Report Title:** Species Champion Initiative

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

### 1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 As is the case globally, Highland is in the midst of an ecological emergency and witnessing dramatic biodiversity decline. It is now understood that the decline in biodiversity will exacerbate the climate crisis, and a changing climate will accelerate the rate of biodiversity loss; the two crises are reinforcing and interlinked.
- 1.2 In 2014, in an effort to improve wider understanding of species decline and to shine a light on Highland's most important and at-risk species, the Species Champions initiative was launched. The initiative gave Members, during the course of their duties, debates and work with Council officers, constituents, colleagues and politicians, a platform from which to advocate for and raise the profile of one or more of Highland's most threatened species.
- 1.3 Given the recent intake of new Members, the Species Champions initiative has been relaunched. Members have been asked to represent one or more of the animals, plants and fungi from a prepared list and to use their position to champion the cause of their chosen species. This paper details which species will be represented and by whom.

### 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to **note** the content of the report and **approve** the list of Species Champions.

### 3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - None. Initial introductions with organisations that promote and conserve each species can be made on request, and thereafter it will be for Members to develop a relationship with the species representative and to champion the cause of their chosen species.

- 3.2 **Legal** - There are no legal implications, but the Species Champions initiative will assist the Council in fulfilling its statutory Biodiversity Duty and will be included in the next Biodiversity Duty Report for Scottish Ministers.
- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** – No implications.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** – It is the diversity of living organisms which provides nature's resilience in the face of climate change. Globally around 50% of human-made CO2 emissions are removed from the atmosphere each year by our vegetation, oceans and soils. A decline in biodiversity will exacerbate the climate crisis and a changing climate will accelerate the rate of biodiversity loss. Biodiversity is the best chance we have to adapt to climate change and ensure continued provision of nature's services on which we all depend.

Many of the species on the list are threatened directly or indirectly by climate change. The Species Champions initiative is a response, in part, to these pressures and it is an opportunity for Members to raise awareness of climate change and the impact it has had on some of Highland's most important, iconic and threatened species. Equally, it is an opportunity for Members to highlight the importance of biodiversity and nature as an essential component of the fight against climate change,

- 3.5 **Risk** - No implications.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** - No implications.

## **4 Background**

- 4.1 Biodiversity is the variety of all living things and ecosystems. It includes plants, animals, fungi and micro-organisms and comprises the living organisms in a particular space or habitat. It is this web of relationships between interdependent organisms and the environment which provides the benefits that people get from nature, such as food, medicines, and other natural materials, all of the things we need to survive.
- 4.2 Biodiversity is important for everyone – for our economic success, our society and our way of life. Biodiversity enables businesses to operate effectively, for example, through pollination by insects, resilient fishing stocks and productive seas which our fishing and aquaculture industries depend on; it prevents soil erosion, purifies water and helps prevent flooding; and it contributes to our wellbeing, providing recreation, relaxation and a sense of place. Critically, biodiversity is central to our survival as a species.
- 4.3 The evidence for biodiversity decline is dramatic. We have, for example, seen a 24% decline in average abundance of 352 terrestrial and freshwater species since 1994 (which in itself was not a high point); a 14% decline in range for 2,970 terrestrial and freshwater species; peatlands in such poor condition that they are emitting, instead of storing, carbon; declines in biogenic habitats and species such as Atlantic salmon, with climate change now the most critical factor affecting the marine environment; a 38% decline over 30 years in the Scottish breeding seabird indicator; and the increasing spread of 190 established invasive non-native species across terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments.

- 4.4 Scotland has one of the lowest biodiversity intactness indexes in the world and this undermines our ability to rely on our natural environment to hold onto its carbon stocks and sequester greenhouse gas emissions.

## 5 Summary of Current Actions to Tackle Biodiversity Loss

- 5.1 Alongside climate change, tackling biodiversity loss is now recognised as one of the most significant issues and challenges of our time. Scottish Government's recently published *draft* Scottish Biodiversity Strategy has set a target to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and to reverse biodiversity loss by 2045. The Strategy will be supported by rolling delivery plans with statutory targets. There is a commitment to designate 30% of Scotland for nature by 2030, develop nature networks and designate at least one new National Park. Concurrently, a range of cross-cutting legislation and policy is being amended to redirect the emphasis to the climate and biodiversity crises and the *draft* National Planning Framework 4 will now require all new development to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity.
- 5.2 In 2019 the Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency. In November 2022 the Council joined c.300 governments, cities and local authorities across the world in becoming a signatory of the Edinburgh Declaration. In 2022 the ecological emergency was added to the Council's Corporate Risk Register and a new Council Natural Environment Strategy is in development as a key pillar of the Council's forthcoming Net Zero Plan.
- 5.3 The Species Champions initiative is an essential component of this wider work. Without advocacy at the highest level, many of our most important species will lack the exposure, support and promotion that is required to enable positive action. The Species Champions initiative provides Members with a platform that is vital in advocating for a species, shining a spotlight, cultivating understanding and ultimately encouraging, supporting and facilitating conservation action.

## 6 Species Champions Initiative

- 6.1 The Species Champions initiative was launched in 2014, updated in 2019 and now again in 2023 following the recent intake of new Members.
- 6.2 The species included in **Appendix 1** have been identified in the Biodiversity Action Plan as threatened by one or a combination of factors, including climate change, habitat loss, persecution and pollution. The initiative focuses on those species that are currently struggling to survive in a changing environment and are at significant risk, where a continuation in declining numbers may lead to unviable populations and ultimately extinction.
- 6.3 Many of these species are synonymous with Highland identity and attract visitors from across the world. Others are directly linked to Highland's rural economy. Many however, are not as well known; they may not be conventionally photogenic, or they lack the charisma of many of the larger iconic species. They are, nonetheless, just as important with some, such as Fonseca's seed fly, endemic to small, isolated pockets of the Highlands and found nowhere else on earth.

- 6.4 The Species Champion initiative seeks to create a strong connection between an elected Member and one or more of our most threatened species. The Member will become an advocate for their chosen species and champion its cause whilst carrying out their work, during debates, public meetings and when interacting with Council officers, constituents, colleagues and politicians. The Species Champion will raise the profile and boost public awareness of their particular species and its habitat, ensure it is properly considered in Council decision making and promote positive conservation efforts wherever practicable.
- 6.6 Species Champions will develop a positive and ongoing relationship with the relevant body leading on the conservation of the species and/or habitat. This may be an environmental NGO, society, organisation or local group. Species Champions may be asked by the species' representing body to comment on issues affecting their species or include their comments in press releases. This relationship has been particularly beneficial for the Red Kite (RSPB Scotland) and the Great Yellow Bumblebee (Bumblebee Conservation Trust).

## 7 Highland Council Species Champions

- 7.1 Twenty-one Members have signed up to champion 24 species. Species Champions are listed below:-

Member	Species
Jackie Hendry	Common Toad
David Gregg	Brown Long-eared Bat
Marianne Hutchinson	Great Yellow Bumblebee
Muriel Cockburn	Mountain Mason Bee
Kate Maclean	Golden Eagle & Flame Shell
Andrew Sinclair	Hen Harrier
Biz Campbell	Black Grouse
John Bruce	Capercaillie
Lyndsey Johnston	Red Kite
Glynis Sinclair	Small Blue & Dinghy Skipper
Paul Oldham	Bottlenosed Dolphin
Morven Reid	Harbour Porpoise
Trish Robertson	Minke Whale
Ken Gowans	Wild Atlantic Salmon
Bill Lobban	Mountain Hare & Pine Hoverfly
Alex Graham	Red Squirrel
Struan Mackie	Wildcat
Andrew Jarvie	Juniper
David Fraser	Scottish Primrose
Alasdair Christie	Adder
Kate Willis	Beaver

- 7.2 Members will note that many other threatened species remain without a Champion. The full list is included in **Appendix 1**. If there is interest amongst Members in the initiative and in becoming an advocate for one or more species listed please email [Nathan.mclaughlan@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Nathan.mclaughlan@highland.gov.uk).

## **8 Next Steps**

- 8.1 Members already signed up to become a Species Champion will be provided with the contact details of the primary organisation(s) that work for that species. The Council's Environment Team will be pleased to make initial introductions if desired.
- 8.2 A media release to highlight the initiative and the Members signed up to become Species Champions will be prepared in due course.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

Date: 14 December 2022

Author: Andrew Puls, Environment Team Leader

Background Papers: Appendix 1: Species Champion List

APPENDIX 1

Group	Key Org Contacted	Species Champion	Common Name	Latin Name	Distribution	Main Issue(s)
Amphibian		Jackie Hendry	Common Toad	Bufo bufo	L	Habitat
Amphibian			Great Crested Newt	Triturus cristatus	L	Habitat
Bat		David Gregg	Brown Long-eared Bat	Plecotus auritus	W	Development of old buildings with complex roofs.
Bee		Marianne Hutchinson	Great Yellow Bumblebee	Bombus distinguendus	L	Habitat
Bee		Muriel Cockburn	Moss Carder-bee	Bombus muscorum	L	Habitat, food sources
Bee			Mountain Mason Bee	Osmia montana	L	
Bee			A solitary bee	Andrena marginata	L	Habitat
Beetle			Violet Oil Beetle	Meloe violaceus	W	Habitat
Bird			Common Scoter	Melanitta nigra	L	Uncertain, but possibly predators e.g. Mink, Climate Change, or change in food supply
Bird			Corncrake	Crex crex	L	Habitat
Bird		Kate Maclean	Golden Eagle	Aquila chrysaetos	W	Habitat, illegal persecution
Bird		Andrew Sinclair	Hen Harrier	Circus cyaneus	L	Grass moors and predators
Bird			Twite	Carduelis flavirostris subsp. benensonorum/pipilans	L	Habitat
Bird		Biz Campbell	Black Grouse	Tetrao tetrix subsp. britannicus	W	Habitat, deer fencing
Bird			Eurasian Curlew	Numenius arquata	W	Habitat
Bird			Grey Partridge	Pendix perdix	L	Habitat
Bird			Manx Shearwater	Puffinus puffinus	Small Isles	Rat predation in certain colonies.
Bird			Northern Lapwing	Vanellus vanellus	L	Habitat
Bird			Red Grouse	Lagopus lagopus subsp. scotica	W	Habitat, co-existence with other species
Bird			Ring Ouzel	Turdus torquatus	W	Habitat, possibly climate change, research underway.
Bird			Wood Warbler	Phylloscopus sibilatrix	L	Habitat
Bird		John Bruce	Capercaillie	Tetrao urogallus	L	Habitat, disturbance, deer fencing
Bird			Corn Bunting	Emberiza calandra	L	Habitat
Bird			Puffin	Fratercula arctica	L	Food
Bird		Lyndsey Johnston	Red Kite	Milvus milvus	L	Indirect persecution
Butterfly			Chequered Skipper	Carterocephalus palaemon	L	Habitat management
Butterfly			Large Heath	Coenonympha tullia	W	Habitat
Butterfly			Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Boloria euphrosyne	L	Habitat
Butterfly		Glynis Sinclair	Small Blue and Dingy Skipper	Cupido minimus and Erynnis tages	L	Habitat
Butterfly			Mountain Ringlet and Northern Dart	Erebia epiphron and Xestia alpicola subsp. alpina	L	Habitat
Butterfly			Marsh Fritillary and Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth	Euphydryas aurinia	L	Habitat management
Cetacean		Paul Oldham	Bottlenosed Dolphin	Tursiops truncatus	L	Offshore development, food supply
Cetacean		Morven Ried	Harbour Porpoise	Phocoena phocoena	W	Offshore development, food supply
Cetacean			Killer Whale	Orcinus orca	L	Marine Protected Areas
Cetacean		Trish Robertson	Mink Whale	Balaenoptera acutorostrata	L	Marine Protected Areas
Cnidarian			Tall Sea Pen	Funicularina quadrangularis	L	Marine Protected Areas, habitat disturbance
Dragonfly			Northern Damselfly	Coenagrion hastulatum	CNPA	Habitat
Fish	Y	Ken Gowans	Wild Atlantic salmon	Salmo salar	W	Habitat, climate change
Fish			Basking Shark	Cetorhinus maximus	L	Marine Protected Areas, Tourism +/-
Fish			Sea Trout	Salmo trutta	W	Habitat, climate change
Fungi			Hazel Gloves	Hypocrepis rhododendri	L	Habitat, woodland management
Fungi			Splendid Waxcap	Hygrocybe splendidissima	L	Habitat management
Fungi			Crimson Waxcap	Hygrocybe punicea	L	Unimproved but cropped grassland management
Fungi			White Stalkball	Tulostema niveum	L	Habitat management
Fungi			Soil Fungus	Scutellospora dipurpureascens	W	Habitat/ woodland management. Provides phosphate to Bluebells
Insect			Fonseca's Seed Fly	Botanophila fonsceai	L	Habitat
Insect			Narrow-headed Ant (and the other 3 sp of Wood Ants)	Formica exsecta	L	Habitat
Insect			Northern February Red (stonefly)	Brachyptera putata	L	Water quality, forestry impacts, abstraction
Insect			Upland Summer Mayfly	Ameletus inopinatus	L	Habitat, climate change
Insect		Bill Lobban	Pine Hoverfly	Blera fella	CNPA	Habitat management
Mammal			Eastern Atlantic harbour seal/ common Seal	Phoca vitulina	W	Marine Protected Areas, habitat disturbance
Mammal			Water Vole	Arvicola amphibius	W	Mink, habitat
Mammal		David Fraser	West European Hedgehog	Erinaceus europaeus	W	Habitat
Mammal			Brown Hare	Lepus europaeus	L	Habitat
Mammal		Bill Lobban	Mountain Hare	Lepus timidus	W	Habitat, culling for tick control
Mammal	Y	Alex Graham	Red Squirrel	Sciurus vulgaris	L	Habitat, threat from Grey Squirrel colonisation
Mammal		Struan Mackie	Wildcat	Felis silvestris	L	Habitat, legitimate predator control
Mammal		Kate Willis	Beaver	Castor Fiber	L	
Mollusc			Pilane Shell	Limnaea hians	L	Marine Protected Areas, habitat disturbance
Mollusc			Freshwater Pearl Mussel	Margaritifera margaritifera	L	Illegal persecution
Moss			Rusty Bog Moss	Sphagnum fuscum	W	Habitat management
Moss			Green Shield Moss	Buxbaumia viridis	L	Deadwood management
Moth			Netted Mountain Moth / Small Dark Yellow Underwing	Macarica carbonaria / Anarta cordigera	L	Habitat management
Moth			Argent and Sable	Rheumaptera hastata	W	Habitat management
Moth			Dark Bordered Beauty	Epione vespertaria	L	Habitat
Moth			Barred Tooth Striped	Trichopteryx polycommata	L	Habitat
Plant			Dwarf Birch	Betula nana	W	Habitat management
Plant			Elgrass	Zostera spp.	Sheltered E coast Firths	Habitat management
Plant			Highland Saxifrage	Saxifraga rivularis	L	Habitat management
Plant		Andrew Jarvie	Juniper	Juniperus communis	W	Habitat management
Plant			Lesser Butterfly Orchid	Platanthera bifolia	L	Habitat management
Plant			One Flowered	Moneses uniflora	L	Habitat management
Plant		David Fraser	Scottish Primrose	Primula scotica	Healthiness Ancient	Habitat management
Plant			Twinline	Linnaea borealis	Pinewoods	Habitat management
Plant			Whortle-leaved Willow	Salix myrsinites	Alpine Scrub Zone	Habitat management, climate change
Plant			Woolly Willow	Salix lanata	Alpine Scrub Zone	Habitat management, climate change
Plant			Downy Willow	Salix lapponum	Alpine Scrub Zone	Habitat management, climate change
Plant			Alpine Sibbaldia	Sibbaldia procumbens	L	Habitat management, climate change
Red algae			Common Maërl	Phymatolithon calcareum	W	Marine Protected Areas, habitat disturbance
Red algae			Coral Maërl	Lithothamnion coralloides	L	Marine Protected Areas, habitat disturbance
Reptile	Y	Alasdair Christie	Adder	Vipera berus	L	Habitat management
Reptile			Common Lizard	Zootoca vivipara	W	Habitat management
Reptile			Slow-worm	Anguis fragilis	L	Habitat management
Spider			Strawberry Spider	Araneus alsine	L	Habitat management

CHECK CLLR SMITH STILL WANTS THE SLOW WORM - he was not on original list

W =  
L = Localised  
CNPA