As it enters its second year, the Westminster species champion project is going from strength to strength. Eight MPs have signed up since last summer’s newsletter, bringing the total to 38.

It’s been fantastic to see MPs such as Rachael Maskell, Therese Coffey, Kerry McCarthy and Angela Smith speaking up for their species in Parliament. In December the Fishing Industry debate heard Scott Mann raise the critical level of bass stocks. And of course Oliver Colvile has been a regular champion in Parliament – mentioning hedgehogs on at least 7 occasions!

With the Government’s draft 25 year plan for the Environment soon to be released for consultation, and the opportunities and challenges for nature posed by Brexit, now is a key time for MPs to speak out for their species.

In March, we’re looking forward to celebrating those champions who have made a real impact (for more details, see overleaf).

Last year there was cause for celebration when it was revealed that collaborative conservation work had lifted the UK cirl bunting population to over 1,000 pairs, bucking the overall downward trend for most farmland birds. Once widespread, declines in food and nest site availability meant that by the late 1980s just 118 pairs remained, confined to an area of south Devon. Twenty five years ago a ground-breaking conservation project began which saw RSPB working in partnership with local farmers and Natural England to encourage land management practices that would benefit cirl buntings. With the support of the farming community we hope that numbers will continue to grow.
Do your bit for Invasive Species Week

When humans move species into areas where they are not naturally found, the introduction of new predators, competitors and novel diseases to an ecosystem can be devastating for local wildlife, so much so that invasive non-native species are now considered one of the principal drivers of global biodiversity loss, second only to habitat loss.

In the UK ‘variegated yellow archangel’ is a popular garden plant, but if introduced to the wider countryside it spreads rapidly, outcompeting native plants. This invasive species is often found at sites where native spreading bellflower, championed by Bill Wiggin, also grows.

From 27-31 March over 150 organisations will come together to raise awareness of invasive non-native species as part of Defra’s third annual Invasive Species Week.

Want more information?
For more information on the Species Champions project visit our microsite at: www.buglife.org.uk/specieschampions

Fun Fact
While we struggle to help the survival of the most threatened species, it’s worth remembering how long they might live – if they were given the chance.

The Natterjack toad for instance could happily live to 40, while the maximum age of a Manx shearwater recovered by ringers is almost 51. The greater horseshoe bat would rest content with 30 candles on his birthday cake. But the most impressive of all is the European Eel, which has reached 85.

Species Champions in England is coordinated by:

Working in partnership with:
The Angling Trust, The People’s Trust for Endangered Species and The British Hedgehog Preservation Society