Species Champions

MPs standing up for our most threatened wildlife

Project celebrates first birthday

On Monday 3 July MPs attended an award ceremony in Westminster, hosted by Richard Benyon MP, to mark the first anniversary of the Species Champions project and celebrate the recruitment of 39 MPs from across the political spectrum. The most actively involved MPs received awards from TV presenter Steve Backshall, recognising their efforts for nature conservation in Parliament and out in the field.

Rachael Maskell wins champion of the year

Labour MP for York Central Rachael Maskell won the Parliamentary Champion of the Year award for her work championing the Tansy Beetle. Other winners were Sarah Wollaston, who won the species award for Cirl Bunting, and Matt Warman who won the Muddy Welly award for his work surveying Redshank in his Boston & Skegness constituency.

Congratulations to all the winners; we look forward to working with you all next year as the project continues to go from strength to strength.

The project partners welcome Thangam Debbonaire (Labour, Bristol West) who is championing the Shrill Carder Bee, David Drew (Labour, Stroud) who is Large Blue champion and Chris Grayling (Conservative, Epsom and Ewell) who is the new Hedgehog champion.

EU Withdrawal Bill: what does it mean for nature?

As recess comes to a close, MPs’ minds will naturally be drawn to the parliamentary session on the horizon and, in particular, the legislation around Brexit. First up is the EU Withdrawal Bill, which could have big impacts for wildlife in the UK.

The Species Champions partner organisations welcome the decision to transpose all EU law into UK law. However, we do have concerns with the bill as currently drafted.

The bill does not set out how key environmental principles, such as the precautionary and polluter pays principles, will be enshrined in UK law. It also does not provide any certainty on environmental enforcement post Brexit. Effective environmental protection relies on authoritative institutions to monitor and enforce the law.

New arrangements will need to be made to replicate the functions of the ECJ and Commission. Finally, we are concerned that future Governments should not be given sweeping powers to change existing law without full parliamentary scrutiny.

Working with colleagues in the ngo sector through Greener UK and Wildlife and Countryside Link, we will be proposing a number of amendments to the Bill. We enclose with this newsletter a fuller briefing, and hope to receive your support.

▲ Rachael Maskell with her Tansy Beetle Award for Best Parliamentary Champion

▲ UK Puffins breed almost exclusively in European protected areas
Bringing Species Back from the Brink of Extinction

In March the Heritage Lottery Fund agreed to provide £4.6 million for the country’s most threatened species in the “Back from the Brink” project.

Natural England and the species champions partners will be coordinating their efforts to conserve England’s most important wildlife. The project aims to get thousands of people involved in learning about and protecting some of England’s most endangered species. MP species benefiting from the project include the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, the Willow Tit, the Marsh Fritillary, Duke of Burgundy, Large Blue and Wood White Butterflies, the Greater Horseshoe Bat, the Noctule Bat and the Shrill Carder Bee.

Who are the Species Champion MPs?

- Harriett Baldwin • Richard Benyon
- Jake Berry • Steve Brine
- Therese Coffey • Tracey Crouch
- Jon Cruddas • Thangam Debbonaire
- David Drew • Philip Dunne
- Mark Garnier • Chris Grayling
- Helen Hayes • Peter Heaton-Jones
- Nick Herbert • Kevin Hollinrake
- Norman Lamb • Caroline Lucas
- Scott Mann • Rachael Maskell
- Kerry McCarthy • Alison McGovern
- Huw Merriman • Caroline Nokes
- Neil Parish • Claire Perry
- Jess Phillips • Rebecca Pow
- Barry Sheerman • Angela Smith
- Caroline Spelman • Gary Streeter
- Desmond Swayne • Derek Thomas
- Kelly Tolhurst • Anna Turley
- Charles Walker • Matt Warman
- Bill Wiggin • Gavin Williamson
- Sarah Wollaston • Daniel Zeichner

Want more information?

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

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Case Study: Willow tits

As part of the project the patterns of movement and the structure of habitat used by Willow Tits will be studied by local volunteers and RSPB science staff by attaching miniature radio transmitters to the birds. This information will be used to support this species by providing a network of habitat in the landscape in partnership with landowners such as water companies and local councils.

MPs on Summer Site Visits

Anna Turley was treated to the sight of 150 Little Terns when she visited a conservation project in Teesside dedicated to reversing the fortunes of the little tern, one of the UK’s most threatened seabirds.

The sun shone for Tracey Crouch’s visit to Plantlife’s Ranscombe Farm in Kent, internationally important for its arable flowers. She said: “These spectacular poppy fields are a fantastic sight for local people to enjoy. We’re so lucky to have this on our doorstep and I’m looking forward to doing my bit to champion this beautiful flower.”

Caroline Nokes visited a wood near Stockbridge, Hampshire, where the Duke of Burgundy is thriving alongside other threatened wildlife in ancient woodland that has been in continual coppice management for centuries. Butterfly Conservation has been working with landowners to support woodland management and create the open, sunny glades and rides vital for this declining butterfly.

Fun Fact

The striking red poppy of Remembrance has been a symbol of new life since Ancient Egypt – perhaps even earlier.

It’s incredibly resilient; the seeds can lie dormant for 80 years or more. When the soil is disturbed (as in wartime battlefields), they spring back to life – producing around 17,000 seeds per plant! Once a common farm ‘weed’, it’s now mostly found among margins and gardens.

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

Rachael Maskell by Matt Williams, Puffins by Kevin Groocock, Willow Tit by Tim Melling, Caroline Nokes by Butterfly Conservation, Poppy field by Tim Pankhurst

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