

## Our Environment

Overall Summary

Air and Climate

Built Environment

Land

Natural Resources

Society

Water

### Wildlife

Estuaries and Seas

Farmland and Lowland

Mountains and Uplands

Rivers and Lochs

Wetlands

Woodlands and Forests

Environmental Monitoring

Library Search

Get Interactive

Get Involved

Trends and Indicators

Sectors and Issues

Life+ Project

## Wildlife

### Scottish habitats are rich and diverse. Healthy ecosystems are vital for our survival but are threatened by some land management practices.

Wildlife and the habitats it lives in underpin the ecosystem services that provide us with food, fresh air and clean water. Healthy ecosystems are vital for our survival.

Scotland's habitats are rich and varied. They have been shaped by natural variation in the rocks, soils, landforms, the surrounding seas and climate, as well as the way the land has been used and managed by humans – both today and in the past. These habitats support thousands of species, some of which have their stronghold in Scotland.

However, our wildlife is under threat from a variety of pressures and significant biodiversity loss has been documented over the last 50 years.

The primary drivers of change affecting habitats and species have been: the loss or damage of natural habitats; nutrient deposition; exploitation of natural resources (especially marine fish); pollution of air, water and land; invasive non-native species and climate change.




It is essential to conserve wildlife and its habitats for the health, enjoyment and well-being of the people of Scotland, both now and in the future.

[Click for explanation of diagram.](#)



© Laurie Campbell

[Comment on this page](#)

Topic	Summary
<p><b>Estuaries and seas</b></p>  <p>Scottish marine and coastal biodiversity is rich, diverse and fragile. Sustainable management will improve the health of our seas and the dependent Scottish communities.</p>	<p>Scotland's marine and coastal biodiversity is a major asset. Our marine and coastal ecosystems consist of a wide range of habitats, from open seas to sheltered sea-lochs, and from underwater cliffs and gorges to wide expanses of sand and mud. These provide niches for thousands of species.</p> <p>It is essential to recognise our relationship with this ecosystem and to sustainably manage the resource.</p>
<p><b>Farmland and lowland</b></p>  <p>Scotland's farmland hosts a diverse range of plants and animals – some of which are in decline, but others are faring well.</p>	<p>Arable and grassland fields, crofting land, horticultural areas and lowland heaths and unimproved grasslands all make up the farmland and lowland ecosystem.</p> <p>The biodiversity of this ecosystem is highly influenced by land use change and land management practices, with very recent losses of set-aside land and applications of herbicides and pesticides affecting some areas.</p> <p>By October 2010, around two-thirds of habitats and species assessed by SNH were found to be in a favourable or recovering condition.</p>
<p><b>Mountains and uplands</b></p>  <p>Scotland's uplands are uniquely wild and distinctive, and have some of our most highly rated wildlife and habitats</p>	<p>Scotland's uplands have some of our most distinctive and important wildlife and habitats – embracing mountains, moorlands, blanket bog and rough grasslands. Birds such as the golden eagle, golden plover and red grouse epitomise the uplands, and heather and bog mosses help define the landscape and support much of its nature.</p> <p>Much of the uplands have been damaged by grazing, drainage, afforestation and atmospheric deposition to the extent that near-natural habitats are rare.</p> <p>A range of monitoring studies reveals that many of the upland habitats and associated wildlife are declining in extent or condition.</p>
<p><b>Rivers and lochs</b></p>	<p>Freshwater wildlife is largely in good condition, reflecting long-term quality improvements. Some habitats and species remain adversely affected by physical modifications and water abstraction, although the overall ecological condition of Scottish</p>



Despite good and improving water quality, nutrient enrichment, water use, habitat change, invasive species and climate change still threaten freshwater wildlife

rivers and lochs is generally good.

Despite improvements over several decades, some problems remain. For example, water voles and freshwater pearl mussels continue to decline, and nutrient enrichment threatens vulnerable populations of plants such as river jelly lichen and slender naiad.

Climate change and invasive non-native species have introduced new challenges to be addressed.

#### Wetlands



Scotland's wetlands, including peatlands, are home to a special range of plants and animals, and contribute uniquely to storing carbon as well as to sustaining clean water

Scotland's wetlands are special habitats in their own right and provide a living space for a wide variety of plants, such as orchids and animals.

Found from the sea shore to mountain tops, most wetlands within protected sites are in favourable condition, with the exception of lowland raised bogs.

Peatland (a type of wetland) stores and accumulates significant quantities of carbon, with around 1600 million tonnes stored in Scottish peat soils.

Further down the catchment, wetlands can help reduce flooding, and provide valuable grazing.

#### Woodlands and forests



Scotland's woodlands are diverse and support a variety of species. Our woodlands are in a good state and are improving.

Woodlands support a high proportion of Scotland's terrestrial wildlife. Rare and threatened species are more often associated with semi-natural woodlands, but many have also colonised planted forests. Woodland ecosystems of all types supply a wide range of social, environmental and economic services to society.

There are many potential threats to woodland biodiversity; however much is being done to address these threats and take advantage of opportunities to enhance biodiversity.

A fundamental requirement for future success is for woodlands to be managed for multiple uses. Without sustained management, wildlife would ultimately suffer in a country where no woodlands are truly natural.