



Newsletter Issue 9 | Winter 2022

Welcome to the MP Species Champions Project Newsletter

We're excited to bring back the MP Species Champions Newsletter, after it went into hibernation in 2020. Here is our reflection on the past year and our priorities for this year.

Looking back on 2021

2021 was a critical year for nature in the UK, offering real opportunities to make progress in tackling the climate and nature crises. In domestic law, after 685 days and efforts spanning across 3 Parliaments, we finally have the **Environment Act**. Whilst ultimately a framework Act, within its broad reach it seeks to embed environmental principles in government policy, creates the Office for Environmental Protection, and outlines long term legally binding targets in 4 priority areas: air quality, biodiversity, water and waste.

On an international level, the UK hosted **COP26** and made nature one of the key themes of the COP. The agreed Glasgow Climate Pact included commitments to end deforestation by 2030, phase down coal use, and limit emissions to keep the 1.5C temperature target alive. Importantly, nature's role in tackling the climate emergency was recognised and countries were encouraged to integrate the conservation, protection and restoration of nature into their national policies.

Looking forward to 2022

This year promises to be another crucial year for nature, with work to be done to flesh out the framework established by the Environment Act and to agree an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework at the **Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) COP15**. A key provision of the Act is the world-leading 'Species Abundance Target', aimed at halting species declines in England by 2030 and which sits alongside the long term targets. Government will also be working on a refresh of the **25 Year Environment Plan** for early 2023. Parliamentarians will need to ensure the revitalised Plan clearly sets out the steps to meeting the new targets.

On CBD, any further delays on this agreement would be globally disastrous for nature and the UK must leverage its influence to work with other countries to create solutions to allow COP15 to happen as soon as possible. The UK must also take a leadership role in raising the level of ambition and action around CBD to ensure a global goal of halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity by 2030 is agreed, for the benefit of all people and the planet. This goal must be underpinned by concrete actions to deliver it, and crucially the framework must be supported by the means and resources to ensure effective implementation and accountability.



▲ Starlings in winter, championed by Layla Moran (Ben Andrew)

Key areas for Champions to push on in 2022:

- **Environment Act** - the deadline for targets to be set is October 31st and it is imperative that Parliamentarians call for an ambitious and joined up set of targets that will deliver for people and wildlife. The environmental principles policy statement must be published, without further delay.
- **CBD** - raise the profile of this multilateral environmental agreement up the Parliamentary agenda and encourage the UK to negotiate for a global goal to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.
- **30x30** - hold the Government to account over its commitment to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030, and ensure all designated sites are well-managed for nature, properly protected, and have the resources needed to underpin this.

It's our birthday next month!

On March 1st, the Species Champions project will be 6 years old! We want to thank all our 51 MP Species Champions for working hard to help save our threatened wildlife. We encourage you all to celebrate this important anniversary with us on social media. You can share your support for the project, facts about your species, or your achievements championing them. If you are on Twitter, please use the hashtags **#SpeciesChampions** or **#MPs4Nature**.

Olivia Blake's hen harrier tagging expedition

Olivia Blake, Hen Harrier Species Champion, joined experts in an expedition to tag **hen harrier** chicks in the Peak District. This was the only nest in the entire National Park last year and these tags help shine a light on the lives of these rare birds after they fledge. Hen harriers were once again featured on the UK Red List in the latest Birds of Conservation Concern report and illegal persecution continues to drive their decline.

Olivia said: *"Hen harriers are beautiful creatures, but – along with other raptors – I'm hugely concerned about their persecution and illegal killing by gamekeepers. We need much stronger penalties and enforcement of the law for people caught killing these animals, and rather than relying on brood management techniques that run contrary to the bird's behaviour, we*

need to see more concerted efforts to breed new hen harriers."



▲ Newly tagged hen harrier chicks, nesting in the Peak District (image taken during Olivia's visit)

What you can do to help our species this season

To thrive, our championed species and wider UK wildlife need help and protection all year round. For many of our species, winter is the calm before the storm of activity that spring brings. **Water voles, smooth snakes, noctules and ruderal bumblebee**

queens are among those hibernating; resting to ensure their reserves last them until spring. **Violet click beetle** larvae will be metamorphosing buried in deadwood hollows and **wood whites** are overwintering in elegant chrysalises. Wildflowers, like **round-headed rampions**, are dormant with the seed dispersed from the plant and lying in the soil, waiting until the conditions are right for germination.

Despite the cold weather, reduced light and food supplies, many species remain active throughout winter. **Beavers** make use of cached vegetation and fat stores in their tails to keep them going, and **corn buntings** will flock in large groups for warmth, security, and to share information. **Seagrass** will lose blades through decay, but this is natural and does not impact their carbon storage capacity.

You can help create a winter wildlife haven on your doorstep by piling old vegetation and deadwood together to provide shelter from the elements, preparing your garden early for spring to ensure hibernating wildlife emerge in the best conditions, and installing bird homes and feeders.

Q&A with Chris Grayling, Hedgehog Species Champion

What's your earliest memory of hedgehogs?

When I was a child we had hedgehogs in the garden, and we used to put out food for them. I remember them being around our back door in the evenings, making a snuffling sound.

What do you love most about hedgehogs?

They just look really appealing, almost cuddly except for the prickles! And they really are a symbol of Britain.

What has been your proudest achievement as a Species Champion so far?

I would love to say that it was the introduction of the hedgehog road sign, but my old Department is being really difficult about allowing it to be used by local authorities. I am keeping up the pressure. I have also secured a

promise from DEFRA to include better protection for hedgehogs in their forthcoming green paper on how to restore biodiversity.

As the Hedgehog Species Champion, what do you want to achieve in the coming year?

I want to see legislative change that provides protection for hedgehogs and other species when a developer begins work on a site. I think there should be a requirement for a broad ranging wildlife survey when a site is earmarked for development and there should be a legal requirement to relocate and provide new habitat for any vulnerable species found on the site. I will be pushing for this to be set in law at the next appropriate moment, possibly in the forthcoming Planning Bill.

What can other MPs do to help species like the hedgehog?

I think that MPs should be champions of biodiversity in their areas. For example, in my area I have won an agreement from the County Council to expand a local nature reserve to provide increased habitat for hedgehogs and other species.



▲ Chris Grayling, pictured holding a hedgehog (wildlife aid)

Who are the Species Champion MPs? • Debbie Abrahams • Harriett Baldwin • Hilary Benn • Jake Berry • Saqib Bhatti • Olivia Blake • Steve Brine • James Cartledge • Thérèse Coffey • Robert Courts • Tracey Crouch • Jon Cruddas • Thangam Debbonaire • Philip Dunne • Ruth Edwards • Roger Gale • Mark Garnier • John Glen • Robert Goodwill • Chris Grayling • Andrew Griffith • Matt Hancock • Emma Hardy • Sally-Ann Hart • Helen Hayes • Kevin Hollinrake • Tim Loughton • Caroline Lucas • Anthony Mangnall • Scott Mann • Julie Marson • Rachael Maskell • Kerry McCarthy • Alison McGovern • Huw Merriman • Damien Moore • Layla Moran • Caroline Nokes • Matthew Offord • Neil Parish • Rebecca Pow • Victoria Prentis • Barry Sheerman • Alex Sobel • Gary Streeter • Desmond Swayne • Derek Thomas • Kelly Tolhurst • Anne-Marie Trevelyan • Charles Walker • Daniel Zeichner •

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

Species Champions in **England** is coordinated by the **Rethink Nature** partnership



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