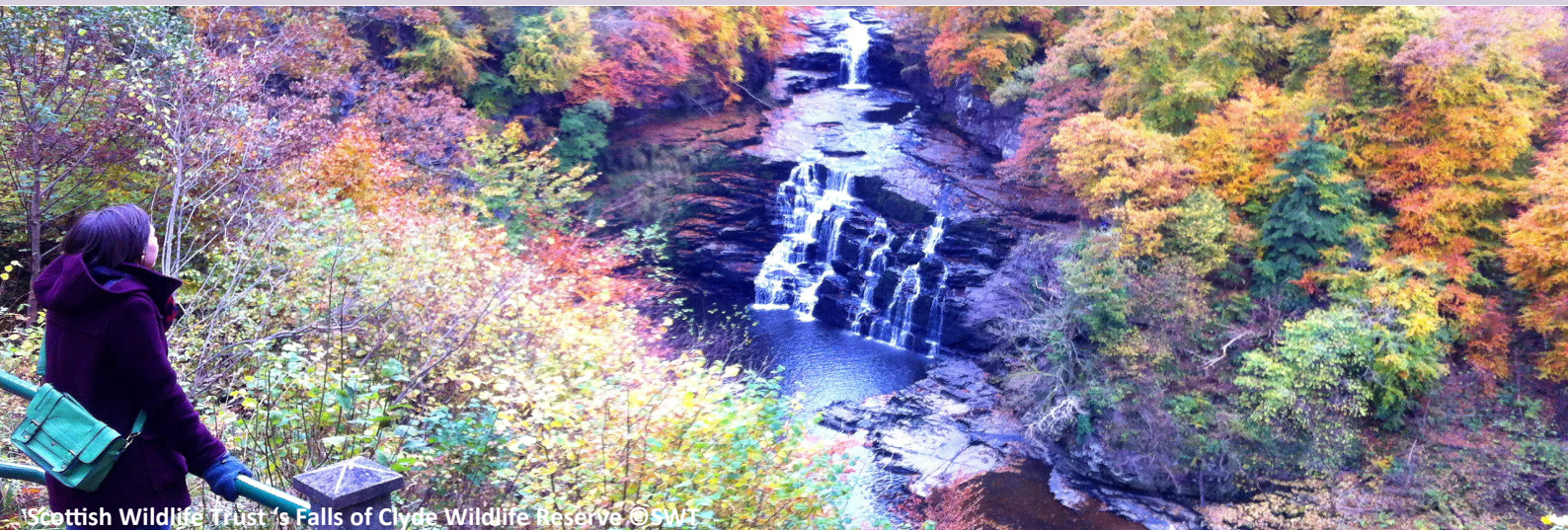


Nature in brief

9: Protected sites



In Scotland, over **one million hectares** of land is protected for nature conservation.¹ Protected sites are Scotland's '**jewels in the crown**' for biodiversity.² The wildlife they support - think osprey, red squirrel, Atlantic salmon, ancient Scots pine and Scottish primrose - prove an **attractive draw for visitors**; wildlife tourism is worth **£1.4 billion per annum** to Scotland's economy.

Being **species rich**, protected sites provide a range of 'free' **services** such as provision of recreation, tourism and other cultural opportunities, carbon sequestration, flood prevention and improved soil and water quality.

Protected sites are the **foundation** from which Scotland's **healthy ecosystems can be re-built**. But there has to be **ecological coherence** to allow species to move more easily between sites and across the landscape - thereby decreasing the likelihood of extinctions, increasing genetic exchange and thus improving ecosystem resilience in the face of climate change. We would call such a 'joined up' landscape with protected sites at the heart - a **national ecological network**.

Not all of the 'jewels' are in the best condition that they could be; **Scotland has yet to reach the target** of 95% of sites in favourable condition³ - in 2013 78% are favourable or recovering, which is a 3% improvement on the 2007 figure.

Key threats include: overgrazing, habitat fragmentation, invasive non-native species, climate change, pollution, poorly located and designed development and unsustainable land management.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust owns or manages **121** wildlife reserves of which **75** are covered by **statutory designations** and **94%** of these are in **favourable or recovering condition**.

What we would like the Scottish Government do:

- **Move towards an ecologically coherent 'network' of protected sites on land**
- **Support a National Ecological Network** and include it in National Planning Framework 3
- **Champion biodiversity** across all government directorates be they involved in health, economy, transport or planning etc.
- **Give appropriate levels of funding to SRDP**, including modulating 15% of Pillar I to Pillar II
- **Use statutory measures to bring deer numbers under control** where they are 'out of balance' with the environment and through overgrazing and trampling pressure are damaging protected sites
- **Champion the use of the new Interactive Habitat Network User Tool** to 'scenario-plan' new land use options such as new developments and agri-environment spend with the aim of maximising the benefits to wildlife by decreasing landscape scale fragmentation and increasing the connectivity of protected sites
- **Develop a suite of high level Ecosystem Health Indicators** at national and regional level which will provide an annual 'report card' on the health of Scotland's natural environment

¹ See also Nature in Brief on Marine Protected Areas

² They also cover geological features

³ Applies to SSSIs