

# What the Scottish public value about the natural heritage

## Introduction

The Scottish public clearly value the natural heritage. This briefing note summarises a number of surveys about what aspects of our nature and landscapes the Scottish public think are important.

## Polling results

**Scotland's people recognise the multiple functions that our natural environment performs.** With 88% agreeing that Scotland's coast, rivers and countryside are just as important for tourism, recreation and enjoyment as for food, water and timber. 88% of people recognise the importance of the countryside as a home for our native wildlife, and 93% the important role the Scottish countryside plays in natural processes like producing oxygen, soaking up waste, and pollination of plants.

**A number of species are held dear by the Scottish public.** 89% of the public agree that Scotland's celebrated woodland creatures such as red squirrels and Capercaillie are part of Scottish culture and help make our countryside special. 83% agree that it is important to them that rare birds that live on our grasslands, such as the Corncrake, don't become extinct in Scotland. 80% wish to see more butterflies in the countryside, 86% would like to see more wild birds in the uplands, 84% believe it is important that otters are able to live in all of Scotland's rivers; 91% are glad that wild salmon are in Scotland's rivers, and 90% like to see birds in their garden or local parks.

The **places people most enjoy being at** (in order of preference) are the beach and coast, lochs and rivers, gardens, woodlands, and mountains<sup>1</sup>. Whilst the place people least like to visit, by a large margin, is derelict land<sup>1</sup>. This is followed by peatlands and then urban streets<sup>1</sup>. However, whilst peatlands are generally not seen as places to go to for an enjoyable visit, they are seen as an important part of our Scotland's heritage and 86% of people think they should be protected for future generations (only 10% of people see them as unimportant).



**What SNH is using this data for:**  
The data contained in these surveys can be used for a number of projects. In the first instance it was commissioned to incorporate public preferences concerning the natural environment into a new indicator (the Natural Capital Asset index) being developed by SNH. The aim of the indicator project is to help estimate the sustainability of Scotland's development as measured by the stock of natural ecosystems.

The information contained in the surveys can also be useful in identifying which policies are likely to have greatest public support and where efforts could be targeted to increase public awareness about the benefits the natural environment provides Scotland's people through products and services, employment opportunities as well as potential health and well-being improvements.

<sup>1</sup> These findings are from the earlier telephone omnibus survey conducted by Progressive Scottish Opinion.



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## Further analysis

The analysis is developed by placing a weighting on the degree of support or disagreement people express in their response to the questions to be able to compare the relative strength of feeling people have about different aspects of nature.

This analysis, carried out by SNH, shows that people value the Scottish countryside for the following functions (in order of preference):

- **natural processes** (like producing oxygen, soaking up waste, and pollination of plants),
- a place for **tourism, recreation and enjoyment**,
- a **home for our native wildlife**,
- a **source of food, water and timber**.

When asked about the **importance of protecting the quality of places for future generations** the importance scores reveal that rivers and lochs are most highly valued, followed by coast and beaches, and then urban greenspace, followed by woodland, and then heather moorland.

When asked about the importance of different aspects of the natural environment and its management the following **list of preferences** resulted, in order:

1. High water quality around the coast
2. Litter-free beaches
3. Well-maintained urban parks
4. Wild salmon in Scotland's rivers
5. End to bird of prey persecution
6. Thriving urban bird populations
7. Iconic creatures (such as red squirrels and Capercaillie) protected
8. Coastal, woodland, upland, and farmland birds thriving
9. Rare grassland birds protected
10. Clean rivers and lochs
11. Otters able to live in all Scottish rivers
12. Preventing heather moorland loss to bracken
13. Increased butterfly populations
14. New wildlife ponds created in the countryside
15. Native wild plants retained in our lochs and rivers
16. More native broadleaves in woodlands
17. Traditional wildflowers seen more often on hill grasslands

## Regional analysis

The data can also be broken down by region, and regional profiles of public preferences developed. See separate briefing report – Regional environmental preferences.

## Notes

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. For the first wave of the survey the total sample size was 1004 adults, and fieldwork was undertaken between 9th - 11th August 2011. For the second wave of the survey the total sample size was 1007 adults, and fieldwork was undertaken between 23rd - 26th August 2011. For the third wave of the survey the total sample size was 1016 adults, and fieldwork was undertaken between 30th August - 1st September 2011. The surveys were carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

### Methodology:

A number of surveys were conducted. An initial telephone omnibus survey was conducted by Progressive Scottish Opinion in March 2011 to determine which places the Scottish public most enjoyed visiting. The more detailed surveys on preferences were conducted using an online interview administered by YouGov Plc in August 2011. An email was sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample according to the sample definition, inviting them to take part in the survey and providing a link to the survey. The responding sample is weighted to the profile of the sample definition to provide a representative reporting sample. The profile is normally derived from census data or industry accepted data. Three such surveys were conducted, with a sample of 1000+ adults for each survey. Additional analysis of responses was conducted by SNH by weighting positive and negative responses to determine a net 'importance value' for each preference. The regional analysis is based on the full Scottish dataset, which is split into eight regions.

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