

VisitScotland

Biodiversity Duty Report

2017-2020



Red Deer Stag, © Neil McIntyre

VisitScotland Biodiversity Duty Report 2017-20

VisitScotland has a responsibility under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 and the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 to further conservation of biodiversity in Scotland and publicly report on its related activities. This is VisitScotland's Biodiversity Duty Report for 2017-2020.

1. Introductory Information

The purpose of VisitScotland, the national tourism organisation, is to grow and develop the sustainable economic benefit of tourism to Scotland's visitor economy.

Scotland's natural heritage is a key asset for Scotland as a tourism destination, being one of the main drivers for many people to visit and therefore a crucial element of VisitScotland's activities to promote Scotland as a must visit destination.

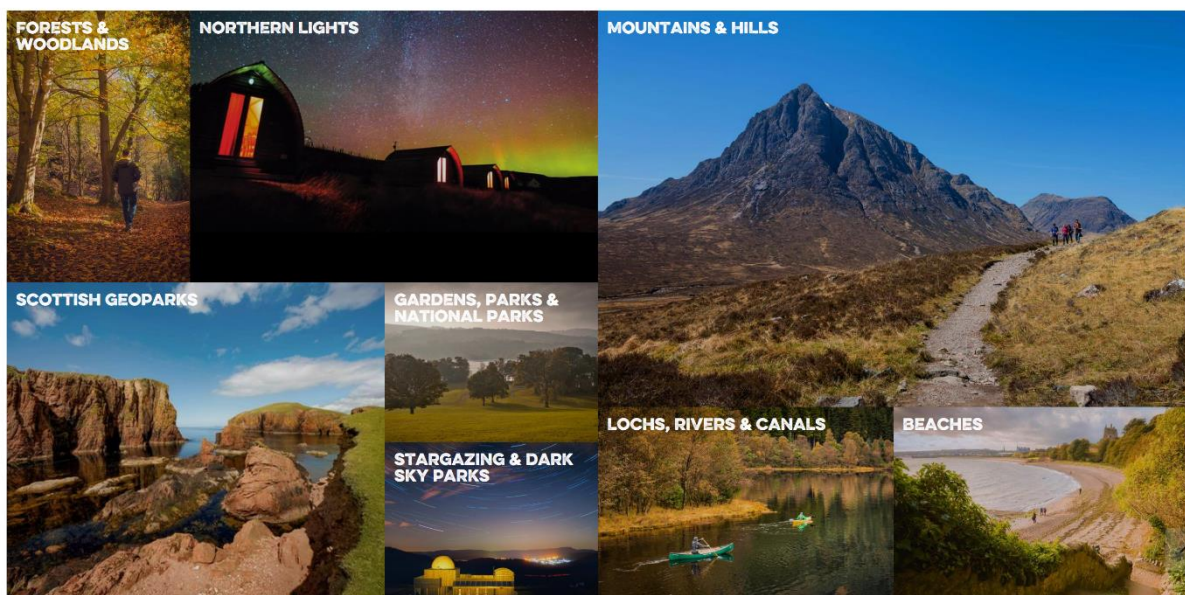
We understand the success of Scotland's tourism industry rests not only on its economic competitiveness but also on protecting and enhancing the Scottish environment, society, and culture, which are vital to the brand, the industry, and sustaining Scotland's economic growth. We are committed to ensuring that our natural and built environment, upon which tourism within Scotland is so dependent, is safeguarded for future generations to enjoy.

VisitScotland will contribute to a more sustainable future for Scotland through taking direct action on issues under our control and playing an influencing and supporting role where this is not possible, through engagement with strategic partners, businesses and visitors.

Our Sustainability Objectives which include our biodiversity commitments are outlined in our [Sustainability policy](#).

VisitScotland works and operates in 14 local offices and 26 iCentres (visitor information centers) across Scotland. VisitScotland has minimal ownership of land and no land management responsibilities, which results in a smaller set of opportunities to promote biodiversity.

EXPLORE DIFFERENT LANDSCAPES



2. Mainstreaming

Although VisitScotland has limited opportunities to promote biodiversity, within the organisation's sustainability policy one of the key objectives is to protect and enhance Scotland's natural and cultural heritage, which we aim to do by:

- Integrating considerations for the protection of natural and cultural heritage and support of biodiversity into our organisation's activities and developments.
- Engaging with our staff, visitors, partners and the tourism industry to enhance our opportunities to support Scotland's natural and cultural heritage.
- Promoting Scotland's natural and cultural heritage to visitors and encourage businesses to do the same, ensuring all regions of Scotland are represented, as well as carrying capacity considered to reduce potential negative impacts.
- Playing a supporting role to protect and enhance vital national assets and protected areas, working in partnership with relevant agencies, including Historic Environment Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the National Trust for Scotland.

The responsibility for implementing the Sustainability lies with the whole organisation including the board, the management team and all staff members. There is a sustainability steering group which provides leadership on the implementation and reporting of the sustainability policy. Each VisitScotland site also has a Green Champion.

3. Actions completed in 2017-20 to Improve Biodiversity Conservation

From a broad perspective, VisitScotland has undertaken a wide range of actions in support of its Sustainability policy, many of which in turn support biodiversity directly or indirectly, such as resource use and waste reduction, supporting low carbon transport, implementing sustainable purchasing practices, reducing carbon emissions. For more detail on the broader sustainability activities undertaken during 2017-2020 please refer to our [Annual Sustainability Reports](#).

Below are some of the actions undertaken by VisitScotland, which contribute to the improvement of biodiversity conservation in Scotland.

Internally:

- VisitScotland is committed to reduce its carbon emissions and undertake climate change mitigation measures within its operation, as well as encouraging tourism industry partners to do the same. As of 31 March 2020, VisitScotland has achieved a 73% reduction in CO₂ emissions from 2009, which exceeds the 2020 target of 56% set by Scottish Government.



- All VisitScotland sites are members of [Green Tourism](#) certification program, with over 87% of the sites achieving Silver or Gold. As part of the certification criteria, consideration is given to overall sustainability activities, including support for biodiversity and more specifically, for example, awareness of invasive species.
- VisitScotland also works in partnership with Green Tourism or similar organisations, encouraging tourism businesses to be more sustainable and participating in sustainable tourism certification.

- We have encouraged reduction of single use plastics and disposable containers in our staff to reduce litter, pollution and resource use, which can negatively affect wildlife and biodiversity. For example, we issued all our staff members with a re-usable KeepCup to encourage them to reduce their use of disposable cups, we also issued all our staff members with a reusable cool-bag to encourage bringing their own lunch to work to reduce litter through single use plastic and disposable containers. We have worked with Dine, our Ocean Point food provider, to successfully remove single use plastic from our café.
- We utilised the money collected from the 5p carrier bag charge to adopt a beehive in 2017 through Plan Bee which supports the Scottish Government Pollinator Strategy. It produced its first batch of honey in 2018, we shared important messages on bees and biodiversity in general with staff and visitors and arranged for the bees to visit some of our offices.
- In 2018 we ran an internal staff nature photography competition #VSGoesWild and in 2019 we ran another staff photography competition with the Year of Coast and Waters theme to encourage all staff to share pictures from across Scotland.
- We made the switch in February 2020 to only order recycled paper to encourage staff to be more conscious of the consumables we use.
- Through our iCentre network, we have supported over 300 local suppliers and craft makers through our Shop Local initiative
- VisitScotland staff have undertaken volunteer activities such as litter picking, beach clean and clearing invasive species.

Externally:

- We work with communities across Scotland to improve the visitor and community experience through our Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund – ensuring that facilities on offer to visitors meet the demand and don't impact negatively on communities
- In the period of this report VisitScotland has incorporated [sustainability actions into its Quality Assurance program](#) to encourage and support 4000 Quality Assured tourism businesses a year to undertake sustainability actions, including supporting bio-diversity, increase resource efficiency, reducing waste and support and promote natural and cultural heritage.
- As part of our [2020-21 Coast and Waters](#) themed year we have a focus on unique, authentic experiences and sustainable tourism and work with many organisations work such as SNH, Wild Scotland, RSPB, RNLI, Keep Scotland Beautiful and Marine Conservation Society
- Through our website we encourage visitors to [Become an Eco Tourist in 10 Simple Steps](#) by spending more time in one destination, considering travel and accommodation options such as Eco Camping and seasonality.
- Through our continuing work with Sustrans, we now promote 15 new [cycle routes](#) through our website
- To date through our ScotSpirit breaks over 90 businesses and organisations from across the tourism industry have enabled 1,627 families to experience the magic of a short break or day out in Scotland. That's 6,225 people, including 3,495 children. ScotSpirit breaks is a social inclusion initiative offering holidays in Scotland to those that would normally not be able to have a break. This offers positive impacts on domestic tourism numbers, helps address seasonality and supports local year-round employment.
- We have over 1000 businesses registered for our Taste Our Best Scheme to promote local food provenance.

4. Partnership Working and Biodiversity Communications

VisitScotland works with a range of relevant partners such as Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), National Trust for Scotland (NTS), Forestry Commission, the National Parks, Historic Environment Scotland (HES), WildScotland, the Scottish and Adventure Tourism Association, supporting and promoting their work, which is key to the protection of Scotland's biodiversity.

As Scotland's Natural Heritage is a key asset for Scotland as a tourism destination, and one of the main drivers for visitors to travel here, it is one of the main themes in our promotional activity. Through a wide range of communication channels, (i.e. website, social media, print and on-line advertising, iCentres) VisitScotland provides potential visitors and those in Scotland with a wide range of information on Scottish wildlife and its natural heritage. We want to encourage Scots on a day trip, UK visitors, as well as international visitors to enjoy the best of Scottish landscapes and its flora and fauna.

For example, the VisitScotland website includes a range of information on [Scotland's landscapes and nature](#), as well as its [wildlife](#). We also encourage visitors and locals to get enjoy nature through a range of [Outdoor activities](#). We support safe and responsible enjoyment of the outdoors, by clearly promoting the Outdoor Access Code.



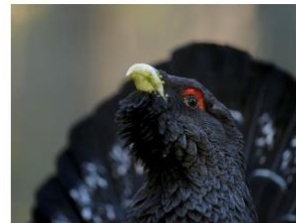
WILDLIFE ATTRACTIONS



SCOTTISH BIRDS & BIRD WATCHING



WILDLIFE WEBCAMS

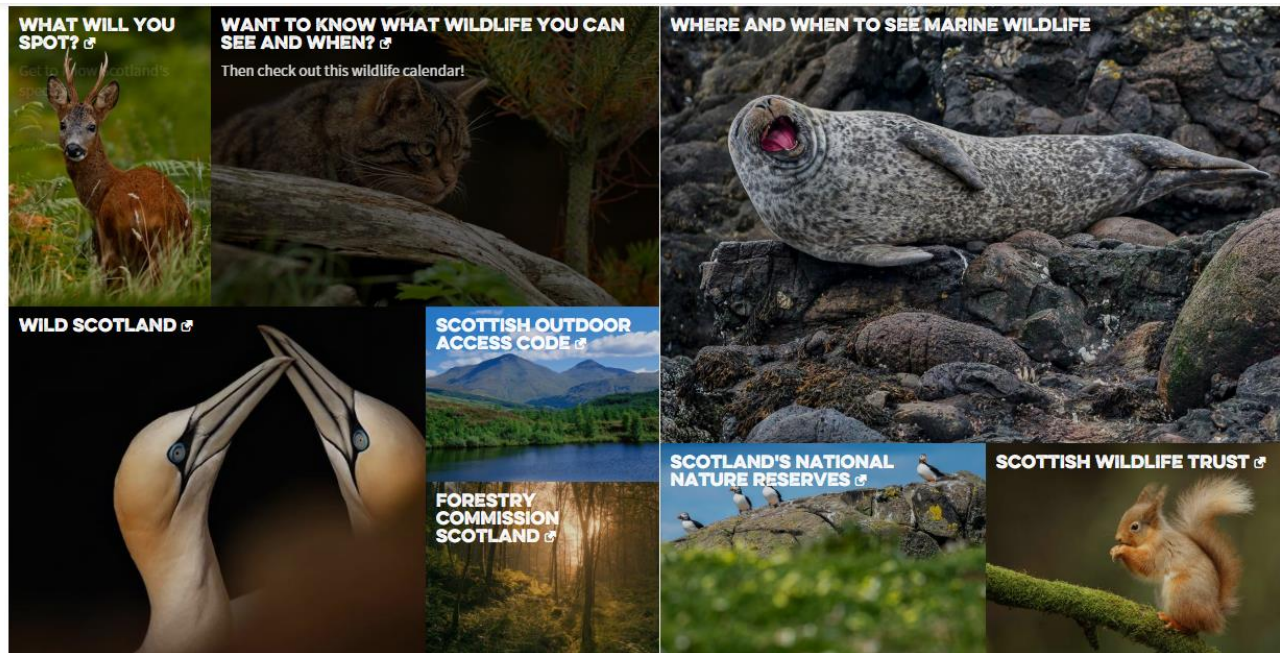


WILDLIFE FAQS

5. Biodiversity Highlights and Challenges 2020 onwards

One of the key highlights of VisitScotland's sustainability related achievements is that VisitScotland has achieved a 74% reduction in CO₂ emissions, which means it has already exceeded the 2020 target for a 56% reduction set by Scottish Government. This supports climate change mitigation, to reduce the impact on biodiversity.

The range and quality of promotion of Scotland's iconic landscapes and wildlife to visitors and Scots alike, encouraging them to spend time in and experience nature, are also a key highlight of VisitScotland's work.



In 2020/21 and beyond, there will be further opportunities to increase our support of biodiversity in Scotland directly and indirectly, through several projects

Internally:

- The introduction of a new Agile working policy which will encourage staff to work from home, utilising video conferencing facilities and reducing our commuting CO₂ footprint
- Our leased car scheme will be continue to promote low emissions vehicles cars over the next 3 years which will contribute to a reduction on our emissions of over 45 tCO₂e.
- We will encourage through campaigns and our Green Champion network reduction of water usage, landfill waste, energy usage and business travel and encourage an increase in our waste recycling levels and progress towards a Gold Green Tourism award for all our sites
- We are reviewing our gas heating systems to find alternative more sustainable sources

Externally:

- Our Events directorate are working with partners such as Resource Efficient Scotland to support Scotland's events and festivals sector in the development and delivery of sustainable events
- EventScotland is an Ambassador to the Resource Efficiency Pledge which encourages events to demonstrate commitment to business efficiency and the environment through a simple and effective pledge process
- In planning our next Thistle Awards due in 2021, we will keep responsible tourism as a key focus throughout discussions for the upcoming programme and beyond
- We will strengthen our partnership with strategic stakeholders, such as with Keep Scotland Beautiful and Green Tourism, who are all planning and implementing activity to address climate change and make Scotland a sustainable destination.
- We encourage and promote the use of low carbon transport on our website and, through our discussions on the VisitScotland Public Transport Working Group, we identify how public transport can support Responsible tourism development.
- We are working with our partners in National Park Authorities, SNH, Wild Scotland and STA to promote safe and responsible travel & wild camping around Scotland's countryside and coastlines.
- A series of Responsible Itineraries are being developed in line with recent trends showing an increasing concern over natural resources, climate change and the natural environment. Individuals are increasingly aware of the personal impact of their behaviours and this is also affecting travel. Our aim as part of VisitScotland rests on protecting and enhancing the Scottish environment, society and culture, which are vital to the brand, the tourism industry and supporting Scotland's sustainable economic growth.
- We will share with industry, case studies on best practice for Responsible Tourism from the different regions of Scotland
- We will continue to engage with Travalyst, the sustainability travel initiative to encourage responsible travel.

VisitScotland will be one of the key agencies delivering [the Year of Scotland's Coasts and Waters 2020 -21](#) theme years, which will provide an excellent opportunity to promote the biodiversity of these habitats.

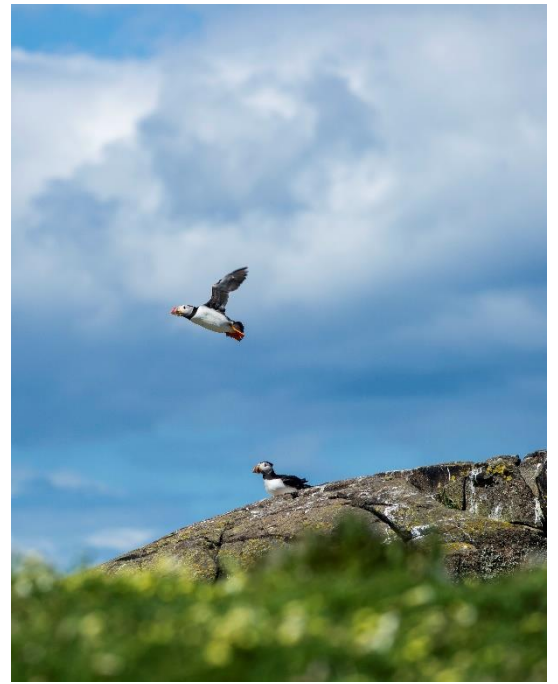
6. Monitoring

VisitScotland does not directly undertake any biodiversity monitoring. We do monitor a range of aspects as part of our sustainability activities, crucially our carbon emissions. All VisitScotland monitoring and evaluation can be found in the [Annual Sustainability reports](#).

With Scotland's Natural Heritage being a key asset for Scotland as a Tourism destination, we do gather and collate insights into visitor's attitudes, preferences and behaviour, with regards to their motivations, what places they visit and what activities they undertake when here.

The scenery and landscape are among Scotland's essential assets, and according to the [Scotland Visitor Survey \(2015 & 2016\)](#), they are also the most popular motivation to visit, attracting half of all overseas and domestic travellers nationally. Domestic data from the *Great Britain Tourism Survey* (GBTS) suggests that among the British residents that undertook an overnight trip in Scotland between 2017 and 2019, 4.6% went to The Cairngorms National Park and 3.4% to The Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. This equates to 566,000 and 425,000 domestic overnight trips per year, respectively. Nature and biodiversity are powerful motivations for day trippers as well. According to the *Great Britain Day Visits Survey* (GBDVS), of 141 million domestic day trips in Scotland per year between 2017 and 2019, 4.4% included birdwatching and wildlife watching, 2.3% included visiting a wildlife attraction or a nature reserve, 3.7% involved visiting a country park and 4% visiting a garden.

VisitScotland's Insights team also provide specific information on Key Topics and sectors including [insights on Nature Based Tourism](#). In 2017 the team published summaries from the Scotland Visitor Survey 2015/16 on [Scotland's National Parks](#) and will be working on a updated Wildlife topic paper in 2020/21.



7. Contribution to Targets

Our activities contribute to a number of the key steps in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy “2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity”, with some of the main ones outlined below.

Targets/key steps from the “2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity”	Contribution to key step?	Justification
(3.1) Provide opportunities for everyone to experience and enjoy nature regularly, with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups	YES	Promotion of Scotland’s natural heritage, (incl. landscapes and wildlife) and outdoor activities to visitors and locals alike through network of iCentres and marketing activity
(3.2) Support local authorities and communities to improve local environments and enhance biodiversity using green space and green networks, allowing nature to flourish and so enhancing the quality of life for people who live there	YES	Encourage staff to reduce their resource consumption and carbon footprint and support staff volunteering
(3.5) Encourage public organisations and businesses to review their responsibilities and action for biodiversity, and recognise that increasing their positive contribution to nature and landscapes can help meet their corporate priorities and performance	YES	Through VS Quality Assurance encourage businesses to undertake sustainability actions, including supporting biodiversity, reducing resource use and waste production, low carbon transport. Encourage sourcing of local/ Scottish food and drink through Taste Our Best accreditation for businesses Encourage staff to use their KeepCups in local cafes to reduce the number of disposable cups Encourage staff to utilise Video Conferencing facilities available reducing our carbon footprint. Sustrans Workplace Journey Challenge, 1 st place in our category in 2019 and 2020 – encourages staff to commute to work by walking, cycling, public transport or lift share. In 2020 this saved 4.5 tCO2.
(4.1) Ensure that the management of protected places for nature also provides wider public benefits	YES	Promote notable seasonal wildlife and natural phenomena to visitors and locals and where they can go to see these. Promote a wide range of protected and nature conservation areas, (eg NP, NNR, Geoparks) and public events run by partner organisations.
(6.4) Achieve good environmental status for Scottish seas	YES	VisitScotland works closely with a range of Marine Tourism organisations and businesses, keen to support the responsible use of the Marine environment by the leisure industry. The Year of Scotland’s Coast and Waters will be celebrated in 2020-21 VS staff participate in beach clean activities.

If you need this document in an alternative format please contact us by emailing: info@visitscotland.com or telephoning: 0131 472 2222.