VISITSCOTLAND BIODIVERSITY DUTY REPORT 2015-17

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 2015-2017.

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 11 local offices and 67 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 bio-diversity.

EXPLORE DIFFERENT LANDSCAPES

- Forests & Woodlands
- Northern Lights
- Mountains & Hills
- Scottish Geoparks
- Gardens, Parks & National Parks
- Stargazing & Dark Sky Parks
- Lochs, Rivers & Canals
- Beaches

Image taken from Landscapes and Nature page on visitscotland.com
2. Mainstreaming

Although VisitScotland has limited opportunities to promote bio-diversity, 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 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 2015-2017 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.

- 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 2017, VisitScotland has achieved a 57% reduction in CO₂ emissions from 2009, which exceeds the 2020 target of 42% set by Scottish Government.

- All VisitScotland sites are members of Green Tourism certification program, with over 95% 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.

- In the period of this report VisitScotland has incorporated sustainability actions into its Quality Assurance program to encourage and support ~3000 Quality Assured tourism businesses a year to undertake sustainability actions, including supporting biodiversity, increase resource efficiency, reducing waste and support and promote natural and cultural heritage.
• VisitScotland staff have undertaken volunteer activities such as litter picking, beach clean and clearing invasive species.

• In late 2017 VisitScotland has utilised the £3792 monies collected for the 5p carrier bag charge to adopt a bee hive for 3 years through Plan Bee, which supports the Scottish Government Pollinator Strategy. Over the coming years, this will allow for a range of communication activities to staff and the public on the importance of bees, the plight they are suffering and opportunities to support them.

• As part of Climate Week 2016, VisitScotland staff raised funds for the Scottish Wildlife Trust through donations for a dress down day.

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 Wildlife 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, websites) 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 Calendar](image-url)
5. Biodiversity Highlights and Challenges

One of the key highlights of VisitScotland’s sustainability related achievements is that VisitScotland has achieved a 57% reduction in CO₂ emissions, which means it has already exceeded the 2020 target for a 42% 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 2018 there will be further opportunities to increase our support of biodiversity in Scotland directly and indirectly, through a number projects.

- We will encourage 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 examples, we will issue all our staff members with a re-usable KeepCup to encourage them to reduce their use of disposable cups.
- With the Beehive in place and producing its first batch of honey in 2018, there will be lots of great opportunity to share important messages on bees and biodiversity in general with staff and visitors.
- The new staff volunteering policy in place also has the potential to see more staff participating in volunteering activities that support biodiversity.

VisitScotland will be one of the key agencies delivering the Year of Scotland’s Coasts and Waters 2020 theme year, 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.

Our recent Scotland Visitor Survey (2015 & 2016) indicates that Scotland’s scenery and landscape remain a key motivation to visit, with 50% of visitors indicating this as the main attraction to come to Scotland. The visitor survey also indicated that 10% of visitors visited Cairngorms National Park and 20% Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. Considering the activities visitors undertake when in Scotland, for example, 21% undertake wildlife / bird watching activities, 31% visit a forest / woodland.

VisitScotland’s Insights team also provide specific information on Key Topics and sectors including insights on Nature Based Tourism. In 2017 the team conducted a sector review of Scotland’s wildlife tourism sector for which the results can be found in the Wildlife Topic Paper.
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targets/key steps from the “2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity”</th>
<th>Contribution to key step?</th>
<th>Justification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(3.1) Provide opportunities for everyone to experience and enjoy nature regularly, with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>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</td>
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<td>(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</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Encourage staff to reduce their resource consumption and carbon footprint and support staff volunteering</td>
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<td>(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</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>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</td>
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<td>(4.1) Ensure that the management of protected places for nature also provides wider public benefits</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>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, (e.g. NP, NNR, Geoparks) and the public events run by partner organisations.</td>
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<td>(6.4) Achieve good environmental status for Scottish seas</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>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 VS staff participate in beach clean activities.</td>
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