

Scottish Canals

Report on the Scottish Biodiversity Duty for 2011-14

This report highlights Scottish Canals' activities 2011-14 with regard to [biodiversity](#) on our estate. Under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act (2004), all public bodies in Scotland are required to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act (2011) further requires public bodies in Scotland to provide a publicly available report, every three years, on the actions which they have taken to meet this biodiversity duty.

Section 1 Introduction

[Scottish Canals](#) is a public corporation which is responsible to the Scottish Government for the management and development of five Scottish canals as well as the surrounding estate. As custodians of this resource, which we operate for multiple benefits, Scottish Canals has to strike a careful balance in its management approach. This is set in the context of our biodiversity duties and other statutory responsibilities with regard to the historic environment, safety and navigation.

Scottish Canals' Director of Heritage, Enterprise and Sustainability is responsible for biodiversity management. The business employs environmental advisors with ecological expertise and liaises closely with Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency.

In addition to public body biodiversity duties, Scottish Canals also has a legal duty under the British Waterways Act 1995 to assess environmental impacts and consider opportunities to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, flora and fauna of our waterways. Since 1996, we have used an internal environmental appraisal process to assess the potential impact of our activities on a range of environmental parameters, including biodiversity, and we seek to avoid or mitigate these impacts

Over 200 years of colonisation of our man-made canal network has resulted in a unique and special biodiversity resource in local, Scottish and international terms. The diverse range of wildlife habitats on our estate from wetland to woodland, coupled with low intensity management across the majority of our land, means that canals are excellent for biodiversity. Our canals provide a refuge for protected animals such as otters and bats, and plants that are rare elsewhere in the UK. This value is recognised through the designation of internationally, nationally and locally important wildlife habitats (e.g. 11 Sites of Special Scientific Interest on our land).

As linear features in the landscape, canals provide important living connections with other wildlife habitats. These habitat networks can contribute to the long term survival of some species. The Lowland Canals, for example, provide an important green-blue corridor through the heart of the [Central Scotland Green Network](#).

The Scottish Canals [Corporate Plan](#) (2014-17) has the ambition '*to effectively manage the green canal corridors and the wildlife that inhabits these spaces*' which will be delivered through the development of an Environment Strategy. Biodiversity Management is one of the 10 key themes of the Scottish Canals first [Environment Strategy](#) to be published in 2015.

Section 2 Action taken to improve biodiversity conservation on the ground

The following are examples of work undertaken by Scottish Canals and its partners to protect and promote biodiversity on our land:

Vegetation management

- An estimated 87% of our land is not subject to any form of vegetation management. Vegetation on the non-towpath sides of our canals is predominantly left undisturbed and provides a wildlife refuge.
- The maintenance regime of our vegetated land and water varies by location (grass cutting, aquatic plant management, woodland and tree management and invasive non-native plant species control) and is designed to promote biodiversity whilst facilitating safe access for our customers and protecting our built heritage.
- Tree and shrub management takes full account of roosting bats and nesting birds.

Non-native invasive species management

- We have a non-native invasive plant management programme. Japanese knotweed, Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam are treated with non-residual herbicides approved for use adjacent to the water environment.
- We promote the '[Check Clean Dry](#)' campaign which aims to reduce the risk of spread of aquatic invasive species.

Water management

- We have statutory duties to protect the water environment and to use water sustainably. By doing so, the canal network supports diverse and important water dependent ecosystems and species.
- Scottish Canals has three water use licences issued by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency which set conditions for our use of water from reservoirs and rivers and streams to supply the canal network.
- Since 2001, we have been involved in the implementation of the [European Water Framework Directive](#) (WFD) which aims to achieve 'good status' for all ground and surface waters in the European Union (including rivers, lakes, transitional waters, coastal waters). Artificial water bodies (e.g. canals) and heavily modified water bodies (e.g. reservoirs) are also included. Good status is assessed according to biological, hydro-morphological and physical-chemical quality criteria.
- A variety of activities in Scotland put pressure on the water environment. A [River Basin Management Plan](#) has been developed to describe the actions required (measures) to address these pressures, improve the water environment and meet the requirements of the WFD.
- Scottish Canals and our predecessor body, British Waterways Scotland, have been actively involved in the River Basin Management Planning process through a number of Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)-hosted groups (e.g. the National Advisory Group and the Clyde, Forth, Highland and Argyll & Lochaber Area Advisory Groups).
- As part of the Scotland River Basin Management Plan 2009, SEPA has assessed the ecological status and potential of the canal network. The canal network is split up into 43 water bodies (26 canal sections, 11 rivers and 6 lochs) and was classified in 2013. Only 2 canal water bodies were less than good due to historic mercury contamination. The river and loch water

bodies were less than good due to a range of issues including barriers to fish migration, water flows (hydrology) and water chemistry.

- We manage our water resources carefully to further biodiversity. For example, on the Crinan Canal, we liaise with Scottish Natural Heritage and take account of black throated divers during the nesting season in our reservoir use to promote breeding success.

Habitat creation, enhancement and protection

- As part of the [Helix](#) project near Falkirk– 30,000m³ new canal channel excavation material was reused to create a landscape feature with wildflower meadow in 2014.
- Scottish Canals has been involved in the development of a number of Sustainable Urban Drainage Schemes (SUDS) which will create new wetland habitats linked to the canal network e.g. [The North Glasgow Integrated Water Management Project](#) which aims to promote regeneration in the area through the development of biologically diverse SUDS which connect with the Forth & Clyde Canal.
- Scottish Canals works closely with the charity, the [Scottish Waterways Trust](#) (SWT) to facilitate volunteer projects which enhance the canal environment. In 2014, 430 people took part in wildlife surveys and other conservation activities. Since June 2013, 165 disadvantaged 16-25 year olds gained practical environmental management training via SWT's Canal College project. Specific projects included a Nature Trail at the Falkirk Wheel and wildflower seed planting on the Caledonian Canal.
- Fly tipped waste and litter can adversely impact on canal wildlife and habitats. Scottish Canals regularly inspects its estate, reports incidents of fly tipping and littering and manages the waste appropriately.
- Suitable sediment which arises from canal dredging projects is used to improve the ecological value of the land where it is deposited.
- The canal-side grasslands support a diverse range of flowering plants which, in turn, attract nectar loving insects. Canal honey is being produced from beehives at Auchinstarry marina on the Forth & Clyde Canal.

Asset management projects

- The maintenance of canal built structures and canal development projects take account of biodiversity. (e.g. bridges are checked for evidence of bird nesting and bat roosting prior to any refurbishment works). Protected species surveys (Water vole, otter, badger and great crested newt activity) were undertaken prior to works commencing on our Living on Water new boat mooring sites).

Incident reporting

- We record and respond to incidents relating to wildlife reported by our staff and customers.

Section 3 Mainstreaming

Canals as catalysts for sustainable places

- Regeneration of urban and rural areas is a major part of Scottish Canals' work which can deliver positive environmental outcomes. A key element of the [Scottish Canals Corporate Plan, 2014-17](#) is to support the delivery of sustainable developments with environmental benefits, including biodiversity, at a number of locations across our estate.

- Scottish Canals participated in the [Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative \(SSCI\)](#), launched in June 2008, to encourage the creation of places, designed and built to last, where a high quality of life can be achieved. In 2011, [three projects based around canals](#) were selected as part of this initiative because they clearly demonstrated how sustainable communities can be delivered. The environmental elements of these projects included action for biodiversity.
 - **Maryhill Locks, Glasgow. Forth & Clyde Canal** Glasgow Canal Regeneration Partnership.
 - **Speirs Locks, Glasgow. Forth & Clyde Canal** Glasgow Canal Regeneration Partnership.
 - **Whitecross, near Linlithgow , Union Canal** Morston Assets Ltd.
- Scottish Canals is currently actively engaged with local communities developing projects in Inverness, in Bowling, the western terminus of the Forth & Clyde Canal and at Port Dundas in central Glasgow which will take biodiversity into account.

Canals and wellbeing

- The Scottish Canal network provides 24 hours-a-day, 365 days-a-year free access to everyone. Our canal towpaths provide easy access to wildlife and their habitats in urban and rural areas.
- Scottish Canals, through its partnership with the local community, Falkirk Council and the Central Scotland Forest Trust has helped to deliver the Big Lottery Funded [Helix](#) project. The Helix is a new eco-park between Falkirk and Grangemouth which opened in April 2014. A major element of this project was the development of new wildlife habitats including wetlands, open water, woodland and grasslands across the 350 hectare site. Large numbers of local people and visitors (more than 800,000 per annum) now use the extensive path network on the site for healthy activity and to watch and enjoy nature.
- Volunteers help us with practical biodiversity management projects across the network.

Scottish Canals and climate change adaptation

- Scottish Canals has been working on a number of initiatives to adapt to climate change by enhancing the sustainable urban drainage and flood alleviation potential of the canal network. In Glasgow, we have been involved in the [Metropolitan Glasgow Strategic Drainage Partnership](#) and [The North Glasgow Integrated Water Management Project](#).

Greenspace and connecting places for nature

- Scottish Canals is a partner in the [Central Scotland Green Network](#) which aims to deliver across Central Scotland a high-quality ‘green network’ that will meet a number of environmental, social and economic goals designed to improve people’s lives, promote economic success, allow nature to flourish and help Scotland respond to the challenge of climate change. The Lowland Canals (Forth & Clyde, Monkland and Union Canals) form an important part of this network.

Section 4 Monitoring

- Scottish Canals does not directly undertake biodiversity monitoring. Other organisations monitor aspects of the biodiversity on our estate e.g. Scottish Natural Heritage carries out Site Condition Monitoring of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and the British Trust for Ornithology conducts wetland bird surveys on some of our canals. Volunteers have undertaken biodiversity surveys e.g. vegetation on the Union Canal in 2014 and wildlife surveys across the canal network between 2008 and 2011.
- We record unusual wildlife sightings e.g. an albino starling on the Caledonian Canal in 2011 was reported to the British Trust for Ornithology.

Section 5 Partnership working and Biodiversity Communications

Partnership working

- By working in partnership with a wide range of organisations, Scottish Canals protects and enhances the biodiversity value of the canal network. Examples of partners and activities include:

Partners	Example activities
Central Scotland Green Network	Membership. The Lowland Canals form an important element of the aquatic and terrestrial habitat linkages across Central Scotland.
Local Authority Biodiversity Action Partnerships	Scottish Canals is a corresponding member of a number of partnerships across Scotland.
Local communities, canal societies and other volunteer groups	Local biodiversity projects.
Metropolitan Glasgow Strategic Drainage Partnership	Membership.
National Species Reintroduction Forum	Corresponding member with interest in progress with the beaver reintroduction programme near to the Crinan Canal in Argyll & Bute.
The North Glasgow Integrated Water Management Project	Key partner in the investigation of the canal network as part of a sustainable urban drainage network in North Glasgow which will create wetland habitats.
Primary, Secondary and Tertiary educational institutions	Various activities including research projects and school visits.
Scottish Environment Protection Agency	River Basin Management Planning through National Advisory Group and Area Advisory Group membership; Non-native species management through promotion of the ' Check Clean Dry ' campaign.
Scottish Natural Heritage	Advice and support, with regard to statutory nature conservation sites and protected species.
Scottish Waterways Trust	Environmental education and practical biodiversity management projects.

Biodiversity communications

- Biodiversity information is shared via *in situ* interpretation panels, through the media and via various stakeholder forums.
- We undertook popular wildlife surveys between 2008 and 2011 which allowed members the public to get involved in citizen science and tell us about they were encountering on our waterways.
- We have promoted the '[Check Clean Dry](#)' campaign to reduce the risk of spread of aquatic invasive species.

- Scottish Canals' website public area provides information about wildlife and habitats on the canal network. In the staff area of the website, colleagues can find contact details for their in-house environmental advisers and regulators, download environmental governance documents, learn from tool box talks on topics from bats to pollution prevention, catch up on news and see our top tips for responsible environmental management.

Building capacity

- Scottish Canals' staff members have received training on environmental appraisal of our activities, including enhancing and protecting biodiversity, wildlife incident reporting, protected species recognition and management, tree management and blue green algae management.
- Customer publications, for example the [Scottish Canals Towpath Code of Conduct](#) and [The Green Blue](#) provide information about responsible recreation on our waterways which takes wildlife into account.

Section 6 Biodiversity Highlights of the Past Year (2014)

- Development of the Biodiversity Management theme, strategic aims and targets as part of Scottish Canals first Environment Strategy due for publication in 2015.
- In the coming years, we look forward working with others to deliver further biodiversity improvements on the ground in line with our Environment Strategy.

Contact us

Email: enquiries@scottishcanals.co.uk