

# UK National Parks Conference

16-18 September 2026

📍 Macdonald Aviemore Resort



Cairngorms  
National Park  
Pàirc Nàiseanta a'  
Mhonaidh Ruaidh



Sponsored by SSEN Transmission and Tarmac



## Pathway to 2030

Scotland's electricity transmission network is at the heart of the energy transition, connecting the nation's world class renewable energy resources to homes and businesses across the country.

This landmark investment will support a cleaner, more secure energy future for generations, built on affordable, home grown electricity that reduces our reliance on volatile global markets.

The programme will create thousands of skilled jobs across the UK, with a significant concentration in the north of Scotland, bringing lasting economic opportunity to the communities at the centre of this transformation. Alongside job creation, the investment will deliver meaningful community and environmental benefits, including community benefit funds, and new affordable housing in the north of Scotland.

An investment in infrastructure, in people, and a cleaner, more secure energy future for generations to come.



# Fàilte | Welcome

**It's a pleasure to welcome you all to the Cairngorms National Park for the 2026 UK National Parks Conference. Events like these are a wonderful opportunity to bring together our family of national parks to reflect, share learnings and build on the inspiring work being done right across the UK.**

We have a packed programme for you, which hopefully gives a glimpse of the huge range of work being done here in the Cairngorms National Park. From canoe trips to exploring the ruins of historic townships, there is much to see, do and discover. And it would be rude of us not to put on a ceilidh and offer an (optional) dram – we are in the Scottish Highlands, after all.

Of course, this event comes soon after a major wildfire in Glenmore and Strath Nethy, just along the road from here. It's been a challenging time for many – from those out on the front line bringing the blaze under control, to the businesses and communities affected – and of course the lasting impact on habitats and wildlife in this precious and treasured place.

We are not the only national park to have been affected by wildfires this year, a stark reminder of the realities we're facing as our climate changes. The conference field trips were planned long before this devastating incident and sadly you will be able to see first hand just how much damage has been done. Recent experiences – both here and in other national parks – will no doubt inform our workshop around wildfire management on Friday.

This conference is rooted in the spirit of Dùthchas, a Gaelic word for which there is no direct translation, that encompasses ideas of kinship, heritage and deep-rooted connections between nature, people and place. As we seek to adapt to a changing climate and bring people with us on that journey, these connections will be more important than ever.

We extend a warm welcome to you all.



**Sandy Bremner**

Convener | Cairngorms National Park Authority

# People and nature thriving together

**Every two years, the UK's national parks come together with our partners and stakeholders to discuss our role in society, consider key challenges, share ideas and celebrate our successes.**

This year's conference is being hosted by the Cairngorms National Park Authority at the Macdonald Aviemore Resort. Our theme is the Gaelic word Dùthchas, which encompasses ideas of kinship, heritage and connections between nature, people and place.

It is a concept that has inspired our five-year Cairngorms 2030 programme, supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund. The programme is putting the power to tackle the nature and climate crisis in the hands of the people who live, visit and work in the UK's largest national park.

At this year's event, we will be joined by some of the UK's leading conservation and community experts to considering the crucial role national parks play in helping people and nature thrive together, exploring the symbiotic relationship between our natural world and the people who live, visit and work in these spectacular landscapes.

Front cover image of a ranger talking to a visiting family © Ed Smith. Other images © Peter Cairns, Laurie Campbell, Mark Hamblin, Brenna Jessie, James Lee, David Lintern and Scotland: The Big Picture..



## Programme

**10:00 Registration open**

**12:00 Exhibition stands open**

**13:00 Lunch on arrival plus networking**

Meet partners, sponsors and other stakeholders  
(Peregrine Suite)

**14:00 Opening and welcome**

Sandy Bremner, Convener,  
Cairngorms National Park Authority

**14:10 Ministerial address**

Gillian Martin MSP, Cabinet Secretary  
for Climate Action and Rural Affairs

**14:30 First keynote address**

Prof David Reay,  
Just Transition Commission (2023-26)

**14:55 Second keynote address**

Craig Bennett OBE, CEO, The Wildlife Trusts

**15:20 Break**

**15:45 Panel discussion and Q&A**

Dr Deborah Long (Scottish Environment LINK),  
Fiona Milden (Oxygen Conservation),  
Jonnie Hall (NFU Scotland) and  
Sarah-Jane Laing (Scottish Land & Estates)

**16:45 Sponsor address**

Richard Baldwin, Head of Consents and Environment,  
SSEN Transmission

**17:00 - Closing remarks**

**17:15**

Sandy Bremner, Convener,  
Cairngorms National Park Authority

**18:00 Exhibition stands close**

**18:20 Journey on the Strathspey Railway**  
*(as featured on BBC's The Traitors)*

# Thursday

17 September

## Programme

### 08:30 - Field trips

17:00

Staggered gathering times for field trips. Check your delegate badge for the start time of your trip. Gather in the Peregrine Suite at your allotted start time

See  
page 8  
for details

### 17:00 Arrive back in Aviemore

Free time to relax and explore the town

### 18:00 Whisky tasting (optional)

Brought to you by The Cairn Distillery

### 18:30 Drinks reception

At Macdonald Aviemore Resort (foyer)

### 19:00 Formal dinner

Peregrine Suite

### 20:30 Ceilidh





## Programme

### 09:15 Welcome

Photos and reflections from the previous day's field trips

### 09:30 Workshops

1. Wildfire management
2. Water management
3. National Parks Partnership
4. Widening participation

See  
page 11  
for details

### 11:00 Break

### 11:15 Team Nature

Nature recovery in our national parks

### 12:00 Wrap up and feedback

Discussion on the opportunities and challenges ahead

### 12:30 Close of conference

Handover from the Cairngorms to the Pembrokeshire Coast, hosts of the 2028 event

### 12:45 Optional buffet lunch

In Macdonald Aviemore Resort food court

# Field trips

## Back from the brink

1

Visit to Rothiemurchus Estate and Glenmore Forest Park, focusing on some of Scotland's rarest species. Explore Scots pine forests and see habitat managed for capercaillie, learn about robocut areas and woodland grazing by cattle, and discuss wildcat tracking data and vole sign surveys. Includes a visit to the pine hoverfly breeding centre at the Highland Wildlife Park.

## Living with the land: the Cairngorms as a cultural landscape

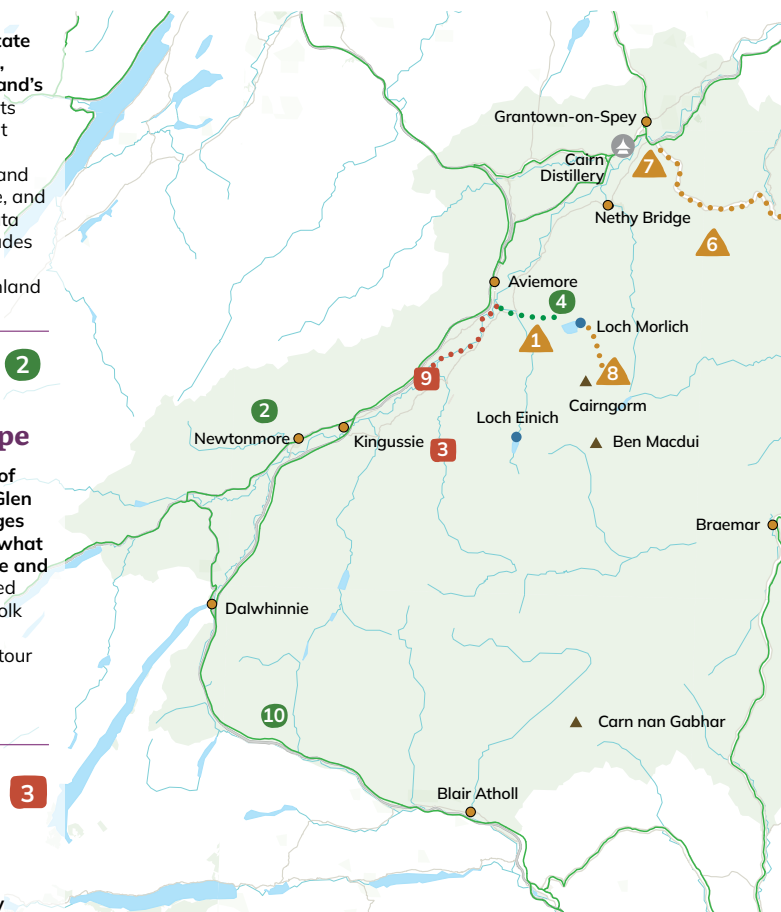
2

Explore the ruins of some of the historic townships of Glen Banchor, discussing changes in land management and what that's meant for the people and culture of the glen. Followed by a visit to the Highland Folk Museum in Newtonmore, including a guided archive tour and information on cultural heritage projects such as Badenoch: The Storylands.

## Connections in the Cairngorms

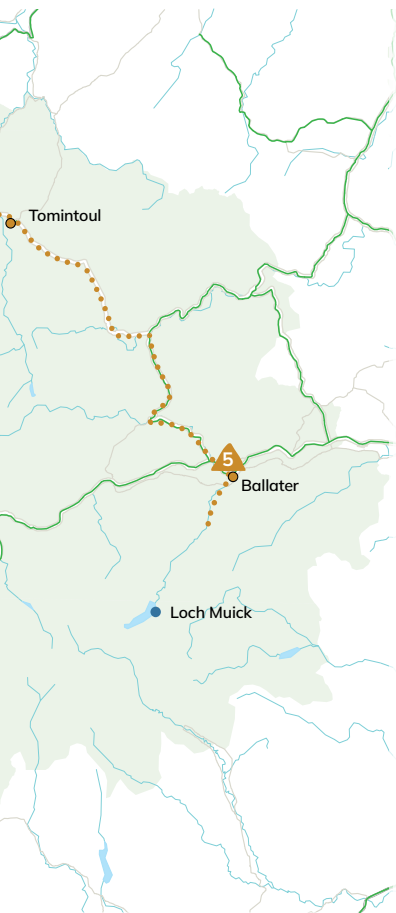
3

Explore Glen Feshie, a landscape which is regenerating at scale to restore ecological diversity and function. Showcasing WildLand's vision and the work of the wider Cairngorms Connect partnership. Topics will include deer management, natural regeneration, woodland restructuring and species recovery. Please note: this trip involves walking approximately 10km on uneven, steep ground.



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- EASY
- ▲ MODERATE
- STRENUOUS



## Nature, wellbeing and encouraging cycling

4

Cycle ride (e-bike or standard bike) from Aviemore to Badaguish, learning about how we are supporting active travel across the Cairngorms. Visit our Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre, learn about the nature prescriptions service and participate in a guided forest bathing session. Cycle rides will be at a gentle pace for a total of 10km.

## Connecting with communities: empowerment and innovation

5

### Scenic minibus trip over the SnowRoads to Royal Deeside.

Walk along the River Dee (3km) and hear from the local flooding issues group about their work, followed by a visit to natural flood management and restoration projects in Glen Muick. Discuss river restoration strategies, trade-offs and practicalities, with the option of helping install a leaky barrier on a small tributary.

## Peatlands: carbon, culture and care

6

See peatland restoration in action on Dorback Estate, followed by a whisky tour at The Cairn Distillery near Grantown. Observe peatland restoration work being carried out by contractors and discuss what this means for carbon storage, climate action and local communities. Please note: this is an outdoor field trip requiring a good level of fitness, including walking over uneven, exposed ground.

## Fields of the future

7

Join our Agricultural Advisor on his family farm. Includes a demonstration of virtual fencing collars and grassland toppers used in a new loan scheme, a talk on species-rich grassland management, aspen woodland restoration and our work with rare invertebrates. Lunch featuring the farm's own shorthorn beef burgers, followed by a tour of The Cairn Distillery.

## Cairngorm mountains

8

Explore the Cairngorm mountains from a range of viewpoints. Hear about visitor management at Loch Morlich, visit the community-owned Glenmore Visitor Centre and learn about landscape change from a visual artist at Coire na Ciste, before taking the funicular up Cairngorm Mountain. Optional guided walk to the summit. Please note: this is a full day outdoors in an exposed setting.

## River revival

9

Canoe trip down the River Spey, from Loch Insh to Aviemore. Paddle through three beaver territories and some of Scotland's finest riparian woodland. Hear from our team about our work with species including freshwater pearl mussels and beavers, and from a local landowner who has reintroduced beavers on their land. Lunch will be provided nearby, with tea, coffee and cake.

## Changes for the future

10

Once managed as a traditional sporting estate, Dalnacardoch has recently been acquired by the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust. See how the estate is shifting towards restoring natural ecological processes, working with local communities and neighbouring land managers. We'll also consider the historical use of Dalnacardoch and see how estates are diversifying their economic base.

Click here  
for more  
information

## ***The Perfect Partnership***

Our Nature-based Solutions team combines expertise in conservation, land management and green finance. We work alongside National Parks and local partners to develop projects that are investment-ready, while remaining aligned with local priorities and National Park objectives.

With demand for high-integrity UK carbon credits and biodiversity enhancement continuing to grow, now is the time to explore the potential across our landscapes.

**Talk to our Nature-based Solutions team to discover how nature, carbon and biodiversity net gain could help unlock investment in your National Park.**

## **National Parks Partnerships**

Sign up to National Parks Partnerships newsletters:

Connecting  
Colleagues



The Green  
Thread



### ***Holly Story***

Head of Nature-based Solutions  
[holly.story@nationalparks.co.uk](mailto:holly.story@nationalparks.co.uk)



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# Workshops

## Wildfire management

1

Wildfires, like the one we saw this year in Glenmore, threaten man-made assets like houses, windfarms, fences and other built infrastructure, as well as natural assets like forests, peatlands and less mobile species and habitats. This workshop will discuss reducing the risk of wildfire, preparing for wildfires that do start, mitigating impacts of wildfires in the landscape, and what role park authorities can play in tackling these issues.

## Water management

2

The changing climate is leading to more droughts and flooding. This workshop will look at river restoration techniques, financing this work, some of the key barriers to overcome, and what role park authorities can play in delivering resilient catchments.

## National Parks Partnerships

3

National Parks Partnerships will explore how national parks are attracting private finance for nature, sharing real-world case studies that generate income to support landscape-scale action. The session will also outline an upcoming public and philanthropic campaign which aims to strengthen our collective brand, diversify income and position national parks as leaders in nature, climate and community.

## Widening participation

4

A key theme of the Cairngorms 2030 programme is widening participation and building long-term relationships with under-represented audiences. In this interactive workshop, the Cairngorms 2030 engagement team will share practical ways of widening participation and deepening engagement with national park communities. This session builds on discussions that took place at the last UK National Parks Conference in Newcastle.

[Click here for more information](#)

# Speakers

(A to Z)

## Richard Baldwin

SSEN Transmission



Richard is Head of Consents and Environment at SSEN Transmission and leads the teams responsible for securing the planning, environmental and marine consents needed to deliver major electricity network infrastructure across the north of Scotland. With more than 20 years' experience, Richard works closely with communities, government agencies, regulators and industry partners to balance network development with environmental stewardship.

## Craig Bennett OBE

The Wildlife Trusts



Craig is Chief Executive of The Wildlife Trusts, Honorary Professor at Alliance Manchester Business School, Associate Fellow of Homerton College (Cambridge) and Fellow of the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership. He is a Commissioner on the UK Government's Clean Power 2030 Advisory Commission. Formerly CEO of Friends of the Earth, he led campaigns on bees, fracking and against airport expansion.

## Jonnie Hall

NFU Scotland



Jonnie is Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Policy at NFU Scotland. Prior to that, he spent nine years with what is now Scottish Land & Estates. His career in agricultural and rural development policy now extends to well over 40 years, having graduated from Newcastle and Oxford universities with three degrees in agricultural economics in the 1980s.

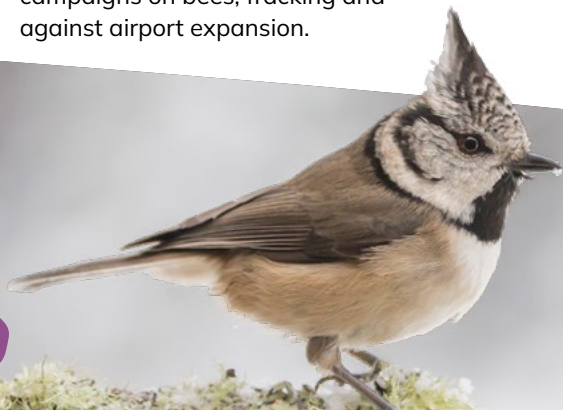
## Sarah-Jane Laing

Scottish Land & Estates



Sarah-Jane is Chief Executive of Scottish Land & Estates. The first

woman to lead the organisation, she oversees SLE's work to influence policy, support sustainable land management and champion rural Scotland. Before joining SLE in 2004, she spent a decade working in local authorities and housing associations. She lives on her family farm in the Scottish Borders.



## Dr Deborah Long

Scottish Environment LINK



Deborah is Chief Executive of Scottish Environment LINK, an active and growing network of environmental NGOs in Scotland. She is a board member of multiple charities in Scotland in conservation, environmental rights and community development. In February 2023, Deborah became a Just Transition Commissioner, providing advice on working with communities to achieve a just transition.

## Gillian Martin MSP

Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs



Gillian Martin is Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs, and has represented Aberdeenshire East as a Member of the Scottish Parliament since 2016. Prior to her MSP role, she lectured in television production at North-East Scotland College and ran her own video production company. She also designed safety courses for the energy industry and was the manager of an emergency media response team for companies operating in the North Sea for 10 years.

## Fiona Milden

Oxygen Conservation



Fiona is Managing Director at Oxygen Conservation, a private organisation acquiring and managing land for long-term, landscape-scale restoration. Fiona has nearly two decades of experience working within the natural and built environment. Before joining Oxygen, she served as Group Planning and Environment Director at Vistry Group, where she advised the plc board on regulatory change and led the organisation's response to major planning reforms.

## Prof David Reay

University of Edinburgh



Dave is Chair in Carbon Management and Education at the University of Edinburgh. He chaired the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan steering group in Scotland, the UK Climate Change Committee's workforce and skills expert advisory group, and was part of the Green Jobs Taskforce for the UK Government. He was appointed as co-chair of the Just Transition Commission (2023-26).

## Our host

## Megan McCubbin



Megan is a zoologist, wildlife TV presenter, author and campaigner. Best known for co-hosting BBC Springwatch and Animal Park, Megan is passionate about our natural world and enhancing our relationship with it. Trained as a scientist, she has worked around the world as a bear behavioural specialist and shark researcher, before growing her career in the media as a science communicator.

# The Cairngorms National Park in numbers



**18,000**

people live here and over two million visit each year



**4 out of 5**

of the UK's highest mountains are found here



**9,000+**

hectares of peatland is under active restoration



**75%**

of new housing in the National Park will be affordable homes by 2030



**700**

miles of core paths for residents and visitors to explore



**25%**

of the UK's rare and endangered species are found here



**100+**

rangers and volunteer rangers help look after this special place



**£12m**

has been awarded to 400+ community projects since 2007

The name **Cairngorms** derives from the Gaelic Càrn Gorm, meaning 'blue hill', while in Gaelic, the National Park's mountain range is known as **Am Monadh Ruadh** – 'the russet-red mountains'.

# Guided by **community,** driven by nature.



We build lasting relationships with our communities and stakeholders, help to connect people with nature to inspire pride in biodiversity, and partner to support research that protects and enriches the environment and cultural heritage.

**Tarmac. From our quarries to your communities, we're proud to deliver the materials and partnerships that support essential construction and infrastructure across the UK.**

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 **National  
Parks**



# Dùthchas

[noun, 'du:xəs/]

A Gaelic word which encompasses ideas of kinship, heritage and connections between nature, people and place.



**Scottish & Southern  
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TRANSMISSION



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