



Marlyn Glen

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Speech in the Scottish Parliament
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Biodiversity

I am pleased to take part in this debate, and I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government is continuing with the previous Executive's biodiversity strategy. Indeed, I urge that it become a central focus of Government.

As other members have pointed out, the sustainability of biodiversity is threatened by climate change, the increase in the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and the raising of sea levels.

Climate change is a real threat to biodiversity. Whole hosts of species are migrating further north, and some of them will not survive.

Studies show that, on average, breeding birds are nesting nine days earlier and are extending their ranges north by 19km. We need to appreciate, understand and, above all, protect and conserve Scotland's biodiversity.

Thankfully, people throughout Scotland are engaging directly with the issue by joining local groups and, for example, taking part in surveys.

Even counting the birds in our gardens helps.

It makes us more human when we feel part of the natural world, although, that said, it is too easy for some of us to forget that the majority of Scots live in an urban environment. Not all of us commute back to the countryside of an evening—or on Thursday night.

Although four out of five of us live in urban Scotland, that balance is not reflected in the make-up of local authorities, and we must be aware of that if we are to preserve and encourage biodiversity.

Although theoretically there is an allocation for green spaces in grant-aided expenditure, the money is taken up with looking after formal parks, and little is left over for informal green spaces.

Projects such as the restoration of Dundee's Baxter park are laudable and essential, but they are not enough in themselves.

Insufficient attention has been paid to the huge potential for biodiversity that cities offer, and towns and cities must be encouraged and supported to preserve informal wildlife areas that, too often, are under severe pressure from the built environment.

Many species rely on cities to survive.

We should not plan concrete jungles that have no space for species like song birds.

We need stringent planning laws to oblige developers to provide green spaces, with street trees, hedgerows and open water to allow birds and small mammals to drink.

We need to plan our cities with wild nature in mind.

Farmers and farming are, of course, important to biodiversity, but so is everyone else.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Does the member agree that we might be able to do as she suggests if we ensured that all houses were planned with back gardens?

Marlyn Glen: Indeed. I have already said that we need to avoid building concrete jungles.

Too many people these days do not appreciate the importance of gardens and expect to be able to park their car within a foot or two of their front door.

I draw members' attention to Tayside biodiversity partnership, which is undertaking a major project on the swift to raise awareness, provide survey data and increase nesting sites in urban developments.

Other projects include the Scottish Wildlife Trust's nesting wall for sand martins at Broughty Ferry and the highly popular Tayside red squirrel project.

Such work needs to be encouraged.

Although a small loss to the environment may seem unimportant, the loss of any significant part of our biodiversity cannot be calculated.

We need look only at the recent headlines about the planned removal of the green site near the Gyle, outside Edinburgh, to see yet another threat to our green spaces.

Of course, the need for jobs and the way in which we plan our economy lie at the heart of the issue, but I might be forgiven for suggesting that if we decentralised more jobs we could retain more green space, support biodiversity and create more jobs for places like the city of Dundee.

I look forward to a statement from the Government on when it will meet the pledge that the SNP has made in each election since the Parliament's establishment to decentralise jobs to Dundee.

However, I do not want to break the consensus in the Parliament by adding that to the list of broken promises.

I conclude with a reference to those who are raising awareness about biodiversity through newspapers and websites.

One recently launched website is called "Bright New Scotland". Its aim is to become a one-stop shop for environmental education in Scotland, with a team of specialists and teachers. In a three-year period, it provided in-school support for more than 250 schools involved in the eco-schools green flag award—it

worked with more than half the schools that gained that prestigious award in Scotland in that period. We are fortunate that there is such commitment from people who seek to enlighten us about the interdependence of living organisms and their ecosystem.

Website link : Marlyn Glen www.marlynglen.org.uk