**Dear Supporter**

Welcome to the first Campaigns Update of the new decade, our newsletter for supporters eager to stand up and speak up, to give nature a voice and help the RSPB influence public policy. It has now been five years since we started our campaign letter writing in its current form and during that time, we have achieved some fantastic successes together.

Those especially worthy of note include the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. This was the culmination of ten years hard work and extensive campaigning. This is a truly historic Act of Parliament that will finally give Marine wildlife the protection it so desperately needs. This campaign in particular has shown that taking the short time to support a campaign by writing a letter or an email or attending a lobby can really make a lifetime of difference.

With your help and hard work in 2008, we also achieved a landmark Climate Change Act that succeeded in securing a Government commitment to reduce the UK’s emissions by 26 percent by 2020 and by 80 percent by 2050. These ambitious figures are the targets we all worked very hard to attain. We must now make sure the Government meets them.

The Via Baltica campaign in Poland to stop an expressway being built through some of Europe’s most precious wildlife habitats, has won the battle to get the road diverted away from these wildlife-rich areas after the Polish Government announced an alternative route (read more about this on page 4).

Once again, thank you for all your continued hard work, support and patience, we quite simply could not do any of this without you. Have a fantastic new decade!

Steven Roddy  Martin Abrams  
RSPB Parliamentary Campaigns Team

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**Have you signed the RSPB’s Letter to the Future?**

You may have heard about this new campaign from the RSPB, indeed you may very well have signed the pledge. So, what’s it all about? Right now, governments are spending billions to solve the financial crisis. Our letter calls on the UK Government to spend that money in ways that ensure future generations enjoy a healthy environment, rich in wildlife. If we speak up, there is a chance the UK Government will put more investment into green jobs and environmentally friendly industries and services. If we don’t, it’s likely to be business as usual – huge amounts of money for dirty industries and developments that harm wildlife.

In a nutshell: recession spending must help, not hurt, the natural environment. That is why this is a vital time to speak up for nature. And we hope that our campaign will aid our advocacy efforts.

The Letter to the Future campaign will be the RSPB’s priority campaign for the first half of 2010, a General Election year, when we expect political parties will be vying for votes. We hope supporters like you will sign the letter in large numbers and by doing so, help to influence debates about Government spending. Since its launch, the letter has already been signed by over 93,000 people, which is a fantastic response. You will find a Letter to the Future pledge card enclosed with this Newsletter, please sign your name and send it back to help save nature’s future. If you have already signed, please pass it on.
Government gets its Marine Act together

After many years of tireless campaigning, on 12 November 2009, the UK Marine and Coastal Access Bill received Royal Assent and finally became law.

The UK’s marine wildlife above and below the waves surrounding England and Wales, and in offshore waters around the whole UK, should now be afforded the level of protection it so desperately needs.

Under this new law, the UK and Welsh Assembly Governments gain exciting new powers to protect marine wildlife and manage our seas effectively. These include the creation of new marine protected areas or reserves called, Marine Conservation Zones, to ensure important areas for our marine species and habitats are properly protected; a new marine planning system to coordinate the range of human activities in our seas; and improved management of inshore fisheries in England and Wales.

This landmark piece of legislation would never have been achieved without the active support and hard work of RSPB members and supporters. Furthermore, persistent campaigning on key points won important changes to help secure better protection for our marine wildlife as the Bill progressed through Parliament, strengthening the legislation. Many of you actively supported the campaign at various stages to help secure better protection for our marine wildlife.

But this is just the start. The UK and Welsh Assembly Governments must now use these new powers to designate the protected areas for creatures as diverse as basking sharks, seabirds and corals, and their habitats.

In Scotland and Northern Ireland we’re continuing to campaign for effective legislation to cover their national waters, to ensure all the UK’s seas are fully protected.

Scottish Marine Bill

We want to ensure that Scotland’s long-awaited Marine Bill is as strong as it can be. Together with our partners at Scottish Environment LINK we’ve been asking our supporters to continue to put pressure on the Scottish Government.

The Bill is currently in its second stage, an important part of the parliamentary process. At this crucial time it’s vital that MSPs know the strength of public opinion, so we recently asked you to email them and the results are in - a whopping 4,756 messages were sent! Thanks to all those who took part, and to everyone who’s taken a Marine Bill action throughout our campaign. We’ll keep you up to date with the progress of the Scottish Marine Bill as it moves through its final stages. See www.savescotlandsseas.org for more details.

New year, new target?

In 2001, EU Heads of State set a target to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010. At the same time, the Welsh Government made its own commitment to meeting this goal. As the New Year begins, it is widely accepted that this ambitious commitment has been missed and we are still losing biodiversity at an alarming rate.

The United Nations has declared that 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity: a time to celebrate the variety of life on earth. It would be a tragedy to let this year pass without questioning why we have not met the target, and instead let this tragic loss of wildlife continue.

In November 2009, RSPB Cymru launched a petition calling on the National Assembly for Wales to hold an inquiry into the reasons why the 2010 target has been missed, and to make recommendations to the Welsh Assembly Government on how Wales can honour its future commitments, including the Wales Environment Strategy goal of reversing biodiversity loss by 2026.

The petition closed on 10 January 2010, and was both formally presented to, and considered by, the Assembly Members of the National Assembly for Wales’ Petitions Committee on 19 January. There was significant media coverage of this event, and the AM’s initial reactions to the petition were promising, but RSPB Cymru will be pushing hard in coming months to harness this momentum and ensure that the inquiry goes ahead. Our wildlife and habitats are important for so many reasons, be they social, cultural or economic, and deserve nothing less.

Hunterston proposal

Earlier this year we asked our supporters to write to DONG Energy raising their concerns about the proposed 1600MW coal fired power station at Hunterston in North Ayrshire. In October, DONG announced that they were pulling out as an investor. A huge thank you goes to all our supporters who responded to our Hunterston campaign. It is in part due to your efforts that DONG Energy has now rejected this highly polluting coal energy development.
Despite this good news, the proposal may still go ahead and RSPB Scotland remains extremely concerned. The Hunterston proposals as they stand would destroy 32 hectares of the best remaining intertidal mudflats left on the Clyde. Most of the areas like this one have already been lost from the Clyde forever. We are now urging Peel Energy, the other partner in this proposal, to also reject highly polluting coal energy, and to instead invest in renewable energy projects.

If you live in Scotland you can still help by writing to your MSPs to ask for their views on the matter. Please check the Hunterston pages of our website for further details at www.rspb.org.uk/campaignwithus.

Keeping Northern Ireland’s wildlife ‘Safe and Sound’

The people of Northern Ireland can be rightly proud of their natural heritage. From the globally recognised Giants Causeway to the EU protected bird populations of Belfast Lough - these special places deserve our collective attention.

RSPB Northern Ireland has re-launched its ‘Safe and Sound’ campaign to celebrate our local Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) in Northern Ireland. ASSIs are important for the biodiversity that they support, their geological features and the benefits, which they bring to local people and communities. In addition, the local environment sustains over 32,000 jobs and contributes £573 million to the regional economy. In short, our environment is an invaluable asset, which we cannot afford to ignore or allow to fall into further disrepair.

Unfortunately, years of under-funding and neglect has led to many important areas for wildlife becoming at risk from damage and destruction due to inadequate protection. We need your help to protect our ASSIs for future generations.

As part of our campaign, the RSPB will be fighting to ensure maximum protection for our biodiversity and habitats. We will be undertaking a series of meetings with politicians, the Minister for the Environment and relevant statutory agencies to ensure that all existing ASSIs are properly maintained and that all qualifying sites are declared as soon as possible.

As part of this campaign, we held a photography exhibition highlighting and celebrating our local ASSIs and a public photography competition to find out about people’s favourite wildlife and special places. This event took place on 23 November 2009, in the Long Gallery Stormont and brought together politicians from all of the main parties as well as officials from the Department of the Environment.

Look out for details on this campaign and how you can get involved, on our website: www.rspb.org.uk/northernireland, or for further information, please contact Colum Delaney, Policy Advocacy Officer on 02890 491547.

Bulgarian campaign bears fruit

Thank you to everyone who responded to the letter-writing campaigns on Bulgaria in 2008, and more recently at the end of 2009. The RSPB has been helping the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB), the BirdLife partner in Bulgaria, with its long and ongoing battle to protect Bulgaria’s amazing wildlife and landscapes from being destroyed.

Bulgaria is home to many species and habitats of European and international importance, such as the globally threatened Red-breasted Goose. Under European legislation the Bulgarian Government has an obligation to protect these, but continues to allow damaging development and wind farm projects to go ahead on areas that are supposed to be protected. One of these areas is the Kaliakra peninsula on the Black Sea coast. Kaliakra is one of the most important wildlife sites in Bulgaria: a bottleneck for thousands of migratory birds travelling from Europe between Germany and the Urals to Africa and the Middle East along the ‘Via Pontica’, one of the two most important migratory flyways into and out of Europe.

Thanks to your efforts, several Members of the European Parliament wrote to the European Commission complaining about the situation in Bulgaria, and asking the Commission to take action. This helped persuade the Commission to open eight separate legal proceedings against Bulgaria for its failure to comply with EU environmental legislation. In December 2009, the Bulgarian Government at last declared a moratorium on all new wind energy development projects in Bulgaria until a strategic assessment has been completed into their environmental impacts.

This campaign, and BSPB’s battle to protect Bulgaria’s natural heritage, is not over, as the Bulgarian Government has not yet taken all the steps needed to stop the ongoing destruction and protect Bulgaria’s natural heritage. Watch this space for more information.
Landmark decisions on Via Baltica reprieve Poland’s threatened wildlife

Two pieces of great news! In October 2009, the Polish Government announced an alternative route for the entire Via Baltica expressway. The international road corridor in north-east Poland will now avoid important wildlife sites, including Biebrza marshes, Augustow Primeval Forest and Knyszyn Primeval Forest protected as Natura 2000 sites under European law. Then in December 2009, the Polish authorities issued a new consent for the Augustow Bypass scheme – Rospuda Valley is now officially safe and the bypass will be the first part of the Via Baltica corridor constructed on the new (less damaging) route! After years of campaigning by OTOP (BirdLife in Poland) supported by the RSPB this is a major victory.

However, the decision does not automatically halt the current road construction work inside the protected Knyszyn Forest or other environmentally harmful road development plans in north-east Poland.

Dr Helen Byron, RSPB’s senior international site casework officer, said: “after seven years of campaigning, this decision is great news! Sadly, this doesn’t mean our work is over entirely – we still need to protect sites along the ‘old’ Via Baltica route and ensure that construction on the new route goes ahead so that this isn’t just a paper victory. But this is an absolutely fantastic step forward.”

Many thanks to all our supporters who wrote to their MEPs about this case back in August 2006. Your letters played a key role in convincing the European Commission to champion the case, which has lead to this great outcome.

Climate Campaign hots up

Over the course of 2009, the RSPB’s climate and campaigns teams have been working very hard on a number of campaigns to secure stronger legislation in the fight against climate change. Coal is the most climate-polluting fuel for generating electricity. Its continued use without Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) represents a huge risk to the stability of our climate. In August, we launched a campaign to respond to the Governments coal consultation, and you did, in droves.

Altogether over 1,300 of you responded to our online action, and almost 140 of you wrote letters calling for an end to ‘dirty coal’ and the speeding up of the deployment of CCS and other clean coal technologies. This was a tremendous response, which certainly drove home our message to the officials at the Department for Energy and Climate change.

Other vital climate campaign actions include the call for the introduction of an Emissions Performance Standard (EPS). An EPS would set a legally enforceable maximum amount of carbon dioxide that can be emitted per unit of energy produced by any power station. This would create an emissions ceiling, which if set at the right level, would prevent the construction of new coal fired power stations that do not have the ability to capture and store carbon emissions from day one.

There has been a lot of support for an EPS. Firstly, over 80 of you wrote to your MP to ask them to support a Private Members Bill introduced by Charles Kennedy MP. Then, more recently, many more of you have supported a campaign asking for an amendment to introduce an EPS in the Energy Bill that is currently going through Parliament. We will keep you informed with the progress of the Bill and the EPS amendment.

For more information on campaigns, contact:

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The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. Nature is amazing, help us keep it that way.