

Letter to the Editor from Scottish Natural Heritage

*Letter from Dr Mike Cantlay OBE
Chairman, Scottish Natural Heritage*

Dear Editor,

Scotland is world-renowned for its incredible landscapes and varied wildlife: earlier this year, the readers of Rough Guide voted ours the most beautiful country in the world.

But it's important to remember our stunning vistas do so much more than simply bring us joy. Nature-based tourism benefits our economy, and nature benefits each of us personally: research shows access to green spaces improves our health and well-being.

At Scottish Natural Heritage, we have long extolled the benefits we all get from the natural environment as well as the need to create better places for nature.

Over the past year, we have worked on a number of high-profile initiatives to help connect people with nature and protect our wildlife and habitats.

We continue to lead the development of the National Cycling and Walking Network to encourage people to enjoy the countryside and to help bring more tourists to Scotland.

To help improve Scotland's carbon stores, we restored 400ha of peatlands under the Peatland Action programme. These areas are also home to many of our well-known plants and animals.

We are implementing the Scottish Government's Green Infrastructure initiative, part of the European Regional Development Fund programme, with a reopening of the Community Engagement Fund in early 2018 – and are working with a range

of partners to help improve the quality, quantity and accessibility of green spaces in Scotland's towns and cities.

Our Edinburgh team is focussed on engaging people with the city's shoreline and using the Green Infrastructure Fund initiative to address some of the access problems that currently exist.

We will continue to work on these projects in the coming year.

Looking ahead, the Scottish Government has designated 2018 the Year of Young People.

It's so important to provide our young people with access to nature. Research shows childhood access to green space can reduce the risk of anxiety and depression as adults. Early and continuing contact with nature also helps develop and maintain a sense of stewardship and an interest in looking after our natural assets.

That's why we've just launched the Future Routes fund to encourage youth across the country to share ideas that will help young people engage with nature. Working with Young Scot, we will help develop their ideas and bring them to life in the coming year.

As the new year begins, many of us will be making New Year's resolutions. At SNH, ours are always to ensure everyone in Scotland has continued access to green places and that our natural habitats and wildlife are valued and looked after.

What are your goals for engaging with nature this year?

You can find ideas for getting involved with nature in your community and your local nature reserve on our new website, nature.scot

Have a happy and healthy New Year!

Mike Cantlay

Chairman, Scottish Natural Heritage



Walking at Corroul, Rannoch Moor.

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