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Episode 3: Scotland Species on the Edge Programme Launch, Update on the REUL Bill & Global Temperatures Set to Break Records

Transcript

Speaker 1 - Sophie

Hello and welcome to the Nature In A Nutshell podcast. This is the podcast which breaks down the latest ecology and environmental news. My name is Sophie and I'm the Marketing Officer at the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, also known as CIEEM. Joined by my 2 colleagues once again and co-hosts Jason and Douglas, who will be explaining the big news items from the past month that are affecting people and nature.

Speaker 2 - Jason

Hi, I'm Jason. I'm CIEEM's Head of Policy.

Speaker 3 - Douglas

And I'm Douglas, CIEEM's Policy Officer.

Sophie

So who's going first, Doug? I'll pass over to you.

Douglas

Thank you very much. Yeah. So this is the Scotland's Species On The Edge programme - their sort of new launch. So this is a new multi species conservation programme, so Species On The Edge has been launched by Nature Scot alongside 7 Nature Conservation charities. So that's the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Bat Conservation Trust, Bug Life, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation, Plant Life and RSPB Scotland. So there's a real mix there of different sort of experts in various wildlife and parts of nature.

So the Species On The Edge Programme will deliver work over 4 1/2 years, generally aiming at tackling impacts of habitat change on wildlife, bringing benefits for nature and people.

The programmes identified 7 landscape scale areas around Scotland, so all around the coast and islands. That's where this is sort of focused on - that's why it's called On The Edge. So these are places where as habitat changes and climate change sort of increases, species that are pushed onto the edge of their territories, so that's where the sort of the name is, but it's the Solway Coast, the Inner Hebrides, Argyle, La Harbour, the Outer Hebrides, North Scotland Coast, Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands and the East Scotland Coast.

So some really varied areas there and some quite rugged landscapes, so they'll be working with local communities in Scotland's most remote areas, really trying to provide a lifeline for national and internationally vulnerable wildlife. To achieve this programme they'll survey, they'll work with



communities, they'll enhance habitat quality, they'll plant vital plants, plant planted plants for vulnerable species so sort of from bumblebees and things like that, that need pollinators. They'll exclude predators from sensitive sites so often this is sort of invasive species or different mustelids or rats as well, trying to stop those getting onto sites with nesting birds. They'll remove invasive, non-native species. They'll provide advice to the land owners, provide volunteering opportunities and across the communities.

And I think one of the best things to come out of this actually was during the opening of the programme, they managed to find some really rare beetles on one of their islands, so they found on the Outer Hebrides when they launched it, the short necked oil beetles, there was a workshop on this incredibly rare species. And so I think lots of enthusiasts for the beetle were there, and I think it was a really exciting day with this really quite charismatic little beetle. Uh, yeah, so that's the new Species On The Edge programme.

Sophie

Thanks Doug. I think we're going to move over onto an update on the REUL Bill. Is that right, Jason?

Jason

Yes, thanks, Sophie. So I'll give a bit of an explanation to this. So we call it the REUL Bill but it's R E U L so it's, for those who don't know, it's the retained EU Law bill. So the full name is the Retained EU Law Revocation and Reform Bill. It was introduced to Parliament during the Liz Truss' very brief premiership by Jacob Rees-Mogg, and the aim was to basically remove all EU derived laws and case law from the UK Statute book, so it would mean that all of this law would simply fall away and no longer be relevant and it was due to happen at the end of this year.

It's an absolutely crazy proposition, not least because the government is still updating the list of the laws they think are actually derived from the EU. So they've got a dashboard for this. At the moment, there's just under 5000 laws on there, but they keep updating it so they keep finding new laws that they're adding so they don't actually know the full scale of this and it would apply to the whole of the UK. But there's some obvious issues with that then in that lots of areas of legislation are devolved, meaning that the Scotland and Wales, Northern Ireland and England separately can actually choose to do things in different ways, and in particular for our sector, environment and farming is affected like that for countries to do their own things.

And the Scottish and Welsh Governments have already said that they're not interested in implementing this if it goes through so there's already some tensions there. So a seriously unworkable piece of legislation, if it were to go through as it was originally intended. But we've moved on a little bit so where are we now?

Government have come to their senses a little bit and decided it wouldn't actually be prudent to just drop all of that law at the end of this year and without a plan to review or replace any of it at all as well, so we've had a bit of a change of tack from governments and they've decided to drop what's called the Sunset Clause, which is the piece of legislation or a bit in the legislation that we just mean that everything would just drop away. There's still the plan to review everything that's EU derived



and potentially revoke things or change things in the future, but this Sunset Clause, everything automatically ends at the end of the year, hey dropped that instead.

What government has done is put together a schedule of laws that they do want to drop at the end of this year, but that list is about 600, there's about 350 or just under 350 that would be applicable to Defra around the environment, but most of those laws are things that are obsolete, or they've already been superseded by something else.

A couple of maybe a little concerns in there, but most of them are kind of the obvious ones that you know, we're quite happy to let go because they're just not relevant anymore. However, there was still another issue beyond that, which is that the Bill would still give government ministers powers to revoke or review laws and EU derived laws without any kind of parliamentary scrutiny, which has been a major piece of contention that we've been going on about that and their environmental NGOs have been going on about and others more broadly, who have been looking at the law are upset about as well and don't think is very transparent.

But the Bill's been back in the Lords, in the House of Lords, in the last couple of weeks and they've actually voted through an amendment to add some more scrutiny so that pieces of legislation that government does want to drop as a process for them to essentially to come through Parliament for some scrutiny, which is really great. So the House of Lords have voted for that. It will of course need to go back to the Commons with them to approve that as well, so we have to see what happens there.

And then just as the Lords have been the sort of voice of reason over the last few years as well, they've actually added another amendment that they voted in as well around no regression on Environmental Protection standards, which is really great, but another one where we'll have to see what happens as it goes forward.

So we'll be keeping an eye on this. It's really great news that we're just not gonna have this blanket dropping of all the law at the end of the year, which would have just been chaos. So good news in the short term, we'll have to make sure or we'll be keeping an eye on what happens with the scrutiny element of it, which has been great, that the laws pass that through or voted that through. So yeah, watch the space a little bit of good news there before the end of the year.

Sophie

OK. And we're going to segway on from some good news into some bad news. Douglas, take it away. We're going to talk about the global temperatures that are set to break records during the next five years.

Douglas

Unfortunately, I'll be taking us through some slightly less positive environmental news. We'll get through it and we'll see where we are at the end.

So the World Meteorological Organisation has recently released data predicting that in the next five years global temperatures are set to surge to record-breaking levels. So the research says there is



now a 66% chance that we will pass the 1.5 degree C global warming threshold at average global temperature sort of increase between now and 2027.

So that's five years' time and there's a 98% chance that at least one of the next five years will beat the previous record said in 2016 for the hottest year. This isn't good obviously, this shows that temperatures are increasing still despite whatever efforts we put in place to try and prevent them and mitigate them. We are still causing some serious emissions and climate change is still happening quite seriously and quite rapidly, so hitting this threshold means the world is around 1.5 degrees C warmer on average than it was during the second-half of the 19th century so that's prior to the real boom in industrialisation.

So that's not long ago. I mean that's, you know, less than 200 years time we've increased the temperature by a real significant margin and 1.5 degrees C doesn't seem like much. You know, if that changed, sort of in your day-to-day, you'd be quite happy I think if that went up. But on average around the world, that's huge because it just exacerbates all the extremes.

So this rise in global temperatures is due to unexpected, this is anticipated El Nino event. Coupled with greenhouse emissions caused by human activities, so I'll just quickly touch on what an El Nino is. So El Nino is a periodic variation in the Pacific Ocean surface temperature that results in significant changes to air pressure as well as increased global temperatures sort of following its development. This is something that happens naturally. We've just come out of a period of cooling which is referred to as La Nina, and we're now going into a period of warming called El Nino. So this is normal, but when it happens it causes a much bigger exacerbation in global temperatures because there's loads of warm water on the top of the Pacific. There's no sort of cool upwelling, and that means you get more storms and also just all that heat, that energy goes somewhere. So it goes up into the atmosphere and it travels around, so that's how it sort of affects the global temperatures.

And the prediction is that these two coupled events will result in sort of a disproportionate amount of Arctic warming. So we're still beginning to see much warmer Arctic summers, and this is going to continue on over the next 5 to 10 years. And there's also going to be some quite large changes in rainfall patterns, so there'll be increased rainfall in northern Europe. So we're going to be a bit wetter within the Sahel and Northern Siberia, and there'll be decreased rainfall in the Amazon and Australia, sort of the South Pacific as the El Nino changes where the energy in the ocean is.

I guess what does this all mean? Regularly hitting 1.5 degrees of warming will result in significant numbers of species and habitats being exposed to potentially dangerous temperature conditions, especially around the equator, because you can imagine, you know, areas that are already hot if they start to hit even higher temperatures, it starts to become unliveable for lots of animals and humans. We're already starting to see massive heat waves in places like India where it's becoming unliveable for people to live in certain parts of it. And with increased temperatures, it just exacerbates these problems, they just get worse.

So we're going to see more extreme weather events like cyclones and heat waves, and they become more common and more severe.



So the hope is from the scientists that released this data, this is really a wake up call. You know governments are committing to lots of things for climate change, but it's still happening and it's still happening rapidly. I did see something quite positive though, and that was on the swords of the ozone treaties that came in a while ago had a significant impact, sort of the reduction in aerosols meant that we've reduced the rate at which the Arctic summers were increasing by I think 20 years. We gave ourselves sort of 20 years of breathing space by implementing those doors to reduce the use of aerosols and sort of repair the ozone.

We can do it. You know, we really can make a difference. And these laws and legislations do work, but we just need to keep putting them in and keep putting them in faster and faster and make that switch away from sort of greenhouse emissions

Sophie

We are now going to move on to our positive new segment. So I'm just going to kick it off, so Birmingham City Council has launched an ambitious 20 year plan where the City's main ring Road, so the A38 will be transformed into a 'green way' and this proposal would see green spaces doubled with tree lined parks, cultural spaces and green walkways that could rival the city of Vienna. I've never been, but apparently it's quite green! And it will also reduce the reliance on cars and an improvement in public transport. The plan also has the potential to create 74,000 new jobs and up to 35,000 new homes. So all in all a really positive and exciting step in the right direction, but let's just hope other councils take note of this.

Douglas

And I've got a little news story. And that's on ivory.

So the UK Government has introduced new regulations banning the sale of ivory originating from five more species than on the existing regulation. So currently it's only focused on elephant. But this new plan from the government and this new extension will ban the import export and dealing of ivory from orcas, so killer whales, hippos, walruses, narwhals and sperm whales.

So although you might not think that those species might be associated with ivory, ivory is just essentially teeth. It's just the same material, but it's just the sort of the scale of the elephant tusks mean that it can be carved, and that's sort of why it was used historically and hippo tusks are sort of the same thing, wart hogs can be used. Wart hog ivory is also traded and then sperm whale and orcas. It's the teeth, which are the sort of the interest for trading.

But these species are already at really significant risk in climate change and habitat loss, a lot of them being pushed to the edge and poaching from ivory really drives them close to extinction.

The Ivory Act 2018 is sort of, was one of the toughest bans of its kind, and charities showed that it really resulted in a significant decrease in the volume of ivory traded but before restrictions were introduced. Which did actually result in a surge in the trade of Hippo teeth as elephant ivory was much harder to trade with in the UK. So Hippo teeth started to sort of be on the up.

So it's really good to see that is now targeted within these new restrictions and bans like this are just they're super important for reducing the viability of poaching in the ivory trade and just, you know,



making it so much harder to buy and sell these goods and promote the poaching of these animals. So hopefully we see more of these regulations coming out in more countries and harsher regulations sort of to restrict the trading, the wildlife from really clamp down on these illegal trades.

Sophie

Yeah, that's really interesting, actually. Because when you think ivory, you just think elephants and rhinos. I had no idea about orcas so yeah, that's really interesting. Thanks for that one.

Jason

Yeah. So a little bit different, I suppose from me, but I was really pleased last month. The Irish President, Michael Higgins, gave a speech to a think tank at the end of April. And he was talking about economic growth he was condemning our obsession with it, and the fact that we base all of our parameters on prosperity, on economic growth and talks about our unnatural fixation on this narrowly defined parameter, which we all know in the environment sector, is a misnomer. We should be focusing on on a much broader set of parameters. You know, if we really want to talk about progress and prosperity, thinking about growth and GDP, it's a really limited way to do it. So I just thought it was really good to see a senior politician, albeit one with limited powers, but he's still very influential in Ireland, saying something that we in the sector will understand and know is the way we need to go.

Sophie

So thanks for listening to another episode of Nature In A Nutshell. Please do go ahead and rate and review the podcast, as it really does help us to reach more people and we will all see you next month. Bye!