

Conservation news

UK's first Hope Spot declared

The UK's first Hope Spot was declared around the Argyll Coast and Islands on World Ocean's Day, 8 June 2019 (Mission Blue, 2019, mission-blue.org/2019/06/first-ever-hope-spot-in-mainland-united-kingdom-declared-along-scotlands-argyll-coast-and-islands). This announcement, by Mission Blue, the international non-profit established by Sylvia Earle, celebrates the beauty, history and vibrant biodiversity of this part of Scotland's west coast, and recognizes the actions of local communities to protect it.

The Hope Spot covers c. 791 km² comprising an intricate coastline of sea lochs, peninsulas, deep water sounds (with depths up to 200 m), narrows and islands, encompassing or contiguous to 12 existing Marine Protected Areas and Special Areas for Conservation. The variation in geomorphology along this coast supports a wide range of species, from coastal specialists such as northern feather stars *Leptometra celtica* to deep water species such as the Critically Endangered flapper skate *Dipturus batis* (Neat et al., 2015, *Aquatic Conservation*, 25, 6–20). The area is renowned for supporting six species of cetaceans, including Risso's dolphins and humpback whales. This is one of the few remaining strongholds for the flapper skate in the UK. Management within the Loch Sunart to Sound of Jura Marine Protected Area protects the skate from boats using fishing methods that contact the seabed while trawling for prawns or dredging for scallops. Where these methods are allowed within some parts of the marine protected area they may cause harm to skate and other vulnerable marine species on the seabed, such as the northern sea fan *Swiftia pallida*.

Four community groups (the Community Association of Lochs and Sounds, Craignish Restoration of Marine and Coastal Habitats, Friends of the Sound of Jura and Save Seil Sound) have come together under the umbrella of the Coastal Communities Network (Coastal Communities Network, Scotland, 2019, communitiesforseas.scot) to highlight the need to protect the valuable and threatened waters of the Argyll Coast and Islands Hope Spot. These community groups aim to use this Hope Spot designation to demonstrate the vital connection between coastal communities and their local waters. Along with significant biodiversity, these waters also contain a number of sites of cultural importance, including shipwrecks spanning 400 years from the Spanish Armada to World War II.

The communities are calling for more effective management for marine protected areas within the Hope Spot, and enforcement of the law to prevent illegal dredging of closed areas. They also aim to ensure the surrounding communities can fully appreciate the significant natural and cultural heritage values of these waters, and can realize opportunities for

economic enhancement associated with these under-recognized assets.

The Argyll Coast and Islands Hope Spot provides an opportunity to bring together local sea users to discuss issues affecting the marine wildlife and habitats of this area, and to engage the Scottish government on local priorities with regard to relevant policy and management decisions. Plans are underway to extend community-led surveys to better understand the biodiversity of these seas and provide a baseline for long-term monitoring.

Local community groups hope that the Hope Spot designation will provide opportunities to realize wider economic benefits whilst ensuring better management of these waters, and they will work across sectors to promote low impact, sustainable fisheries, and to promote high value income opportunities associated with ecotourism. They are already promoting widespread awareness of, and engagement with, the Hope Spot. Ultimately, their aim is for the Argyll Coast and Islands Hope Spot to restore the full value of these seas for both biodiversity and local people.

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Endangered crowned solitary eagle in the threatened Amazonian savannah

The crowned solitary eagle *Buteogallus coronatus* is one of the largest and most severely threatened eagles of the Neotropics, categorized as Endangered on the IUCN Red List because of its small and fragmented population (total number of reproductive individuals < 1000), significant range contraction and continuing decline (Canal et al., 2017, *Conservation Genetics*, 18, 235–240). The main threats to the species include habitat loss, human persecution and electrocution by power lines. Like other large eagles, the species has a naturally low population density, late sexual maturity and low productivity, characteristics that when combined with human-induced threats can drive species to extinction. The crowned solitary eagle inhabits open dry forest and savannahs across central Brazil, eastern Bolivia, Paraguay and northern Argentinian Patagonia (Bird Life International, 2016, datazone.birdlife.org).

Savannah enclaves on the periphery of the Amazon forest comprise heterogeneous mosaics of open areas and forests