

Cairngorms Capercaillie Project

Operational Management Team - Meeting Notes

Meeting date: 17 Nov 2021, 14:00 - 15.30

Attendees: Andy Ford (Director of Nature and Climate Change, CNPA)
Anne Elliott (Area Officer, NatureScot)
Carolyn Robertson (Project Manager, CNPA)
Colin Leslie (Environment Forester, FLS)
Jocasta Mann (Communications Officer, CNPA)
Naomi Kaye (Project Co-ordinator, CNPA)
Ruari Watt (Highland Mountain Bike Development Coordinator, DMBinS)
Uwe Stoneman (Senior Site Manager - Abernethy, RSPB)

Apologies: Ewan Archer (Head Keeper, Seafield Estate)
Issie Inglis (Carrbridge Capercaillie Group)
Keir Smith (Senior Operations Manager, Scottish Forestry)
Mark Tate (CEO, Cairngorms Business Partnership)
Neil Wilson (Badenoch and Strathspey Trail Association)
Peter Ferguson (Biodiversity Manager, Rothiemurchus Estate)
Richard Gledson (Factor, Balmoral Estate)

1. Where are we now - an overview of all project activities

A short presentation was given to provide an update on all project activities. The following points were highlighted:

- Initial consultation is underway with landmanagers and the Trail Feathers (MTB group) regarding a strategic plan for mountain biking recreation in Badenoch and Strathspey.
- The business community will meet in January to review the views gathered from businesses regarding responsible enjoyment of the National Park and the draft action plan developed in response.
- The visitor research that will inform the visitor community action plan will be presented and discussed with partners and other interested parties in December and with the business community in January.
- An online survey for Deeside residents and visitors will go live late November to identify how the wider Deeside community feels about capercaillie conservation. The survey questions are based on the majority views shared by key players in Deeside. The results of the survey will inform the Deeside community action plan to be developed in January.
- All habitat improvement work, including work being delivered through the project grant scheme, is underway. The work includes screening tracks to help prevent disturbance, predator control, marking fences to avoid collisions, ditch blocking to restore forest bogs and thinning and robocutting to improve the field layer.

- The research to identify the genetic diversity of the capercaillie population in the National Park will now be completed in May instead of March due to delays sourcing lab equipment. More time is now available to secure other DNA samples to compare against those collected in the Cairngorms, including from Belarus and Slovakia. Samples from Sweden, Poland, Germany, Austria, Norway and France have already been secured, in addition to UK samples thought to be pre-extinction.

2. Where are we going - an overview of project activities coming up

An overview of key actions to be delivered over the next 2 - 3 months was shared and discussed.

The actions include:

- Moving from research to action planning phase with the business, visitor and Deeside communities
- Saying thank you to Douglas at the end of his MTB Mapping Internship in January
- Identifying a 6th community of place or interest to work with
- Preparing a tender to scope and develop capercaillie related resources for primary schools
- Conducting a full cost review of the project budget
- Publishing a new quarterly blog sharing project highlights to date
- Announcing the successful applications to the project's grant scheme for habitat improvement
- Running a winter programme of volunteer sessions to improve capercaillie habitat
- Staying in touch with new high level discussions about capercaillie

3. Reflections on ways of working

A discussion was had about ways of working over the last year and what is going well as a team and what could be improved. Members present felt well informed about project activities and respect the fact that it's not always possible to know too far in advance what activities will arise within the community-led work, but the process is clear. Members present want to continue adding value where they can and would also like to involve colleagues to provide additional support where relevant. To do this regular informal updates outside of OMT meetings and opportunities to meet and discuss discrete pieces of work are welcomed. To increase the sharing of adhoc updates and information outside of meetings it was agreed that a WhatsApp group would be set up and trialled.

4. Update on NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee sub-group & National Survey

It was confirmed that the 6th National Capercaillie Survey has begun and survey results will be available in August. A discussion was also had about the sub group of the NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee. The group formed following a meeting convened by CNPA to progress discussions on factors affecting capercaillie conservation outwith the approved purposes of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project. Factors include protected species management and translocation. The group have been reviewing the science around these and other issues outwith the scope of the project and are due to produce a draft report by the end of the year.

Actions

1. **All** - contact Uwe if interested in visiting Craigmore to see the habitat work underway for capercaillie.
2. **Carolyn** - share with Project Board the thoughts of OMT members re the 6th community that the project could work with and keep OMT members up to date on this matter.
3. **Naomi** - set up a WhatsApp group for all members.