

Cairngorms Capercaillie Project Operational Management Team

Summary of the Operational Management Team meeting on 17 November 2020, held via VC

Attendees: Andy Ford (Head of Conservation, CNPA)
Anne Elliott (Area Officer, NatureScot)
Carolyn Robertson (Project Manager, CNPA)
Ewan Archer (Head Keeper, Seafield Estate)
Issie Inglis (Carrbridge Capercaillie Group)
Joan Cumming (North Region Environment Adviser, FLS)
Keir Smith (Senior Operations Manager, Scottish Forestry)
Mark Tate (CEO, Cairngorms Business Partnership)
Molly Doubleday (Capercaillie Advisory Officer, RSPB)
Neil Wilson (Badenoch and Strathspey Trail Association)
Peter Ferguson (Biodiversity Manager, Rothiemurchus Estate)
Ruari Watt (Highland Mountain Bike Development Coordinator, DMBinS)

Apologies: Richard Gledson (Factor, Balmoral Estate)
Uwe Stoneman (Senior Site Manager, Abernethy, RSPB)

Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy

The background to the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy was presented to the group. The strategy has now been updated to include an Action Plan which outlines the Carrbridge Capercaillie Group's priorities for the next six months based on the results of the community consultation about the strategy (which took place this summer) and restrictions related to Covid-19. The Action Plan is available [here](#)

The group discussed the Action Plan and were asked to reflect on whether or not there was anything in the plan that they objected to. No objections were raised. A discussion was had around the action within the plan to *'create a high quality, immersive 'capercaillie experience' that doesn't put the birds at risk'* This action is borne out of the data on which the strategy is based, which identified community support for people being given an opportunity to experience capercaillie lekking using virtual technology.

This led to a wider conversation about the issue of how to manage the desire by birdwatchers and photographers to see capercaillie. How can this be done responsibly vs. the need to discourage individuals going to look for capercaillie. The group concluded that the issue needs further discussion and collaboration to move forward, and the Carrbridge Capercaillie Group were encouraged to present ideas at a future meeting.

Working with the mountain biking community

An exciting new partner in the conservation world and the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project in particular. Neil and Ruari gave a background on mountain biking, specifically its history in Strathspey. They explained the reasons for the growth and popularity in more 'natural' trail building, such as that seen in High Burnside on Seafield Estate. The role of the Badenoch and Strathspey Trail Association was explained and the purpose of the Highland Mountain Biking Development Plan 2019 – 2023.

The mountain biking community are almost ready to follow in the footsteps of Carrbridge community and begin developing their own action plan to help capercaillie. To help inform this work a question was put to the group as to what wider and more enhanced role the Trail Association could play in the project, for example working with specific partners on particular issues or opportunities.

Grant scheme for habitat improvement

Molly and Carolyn gave background on the grant scheme that has been developed through the project. Consultation with landowners and managers during the 'development phase' identified the need for a grant scheme which would enable landowners and managers across the National Park to undertake locally relevant actions for capercaillie which are not currently funded through existing schemes; and enable more landowners to access and secure funding to create and improve more habitat for capercaillie.

The plan is to open the grant scheme in Spring 2021 and the aim is to make it as simple as possible for applicants. A scoring matrix has been devised to assess applications. Molly, Carolyn and Helen (Capercaillie Advisory Assistant) will assess and score the applications and make recommendations to the OMT. OMT will review these recommendations, before sharing them with the Project Board for approval.

In total £50,000 will be available through the grant scheme and applicants can apply for a grant of up to £5,000. OMT were asked if they are happy with the proposed process for reviewing the applications and making recommendations to the Project Board to award grants accordingly. OMT indicated that the information presented to them should be as succinct as possible and communicated in a way that it can be widely understood. Comments were also shared about some of the wording within the grant scheme information. (See actions)

Action Points:

1. **All members** - follow up with the Carrbridge Capercaillie Group any questions or concerns about the Carrbridge Action Plan and the principle of supporting it as project partners.
2. **Carrbridge Capercaillie Group** - present ideas for an immersive 'capercaillie experience'
3. **All members** - follow up with Neil any thoughts and ideas about how the Trail Association could play a wider and more enhanced role in the project.
4. **Molly and Carolyn** – amend wording in the grant scheme information as recommended.