

# **Cairngorms Capercaillie Project**

## **Operational Management Team - Meeting Notes**

**Meeting date:** 19 January 2021, 13.30 - 15.00

### **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)  
Mark Tate (CEO, Cairngorms Business Partnership)  
Neil Wilson (Badenoch and Strathspey Trail Association)  
Peter Ferguson (Biodiversity Manager, Rothiemurchus Estate)  
Richard Gledson (Factor, Balmoral Estate)  
Ruari Watt (Highland Mountain Bike Development Coordinator, DMBinS)  
Uwe Stoneman (Senior Site Manager - Abernethy, RSPB)

### **Apologies:**

Keir Smith (Senior Operations Manager, Scottish Forestry)

### **1. Actions from previous meeting**

All completed

### **2. Working with the business community to promote responsible enjoyment of the National Park**

Mark shared an overview of the Cairngorms Business Partnership's (CBP) work so far within the project: In March 2020 an open workshop was held by the CBP, on behalf of the project, to explore a potential role for businesses in promoting responsible access in the National Park. 16 businesses attended the workshop including estates, accommodation providers and tour guides. All felt they had a role to play in promoting responsible access and helping visitors to enjoy and enhance the special qualities of the area in order to have a positive influence on capercaillie and other species. A follow up workshop, attended by around 30 members of the business community, was held in December 2020 to explore ideas in more detail and how to get more businesses involved.

The outcomes of both workshops are currently being mapped against other project work to identify opportunities to compliment and strengthen the emerging themes. A draft implementation plan, to deliver the common themes, will then be developed by the CBP in February and members of the business community will be consulted on the plan. It will be reviewed by OMT in March and development and delivery will begin in April.

Themes arising from businesses so far include needing very simplistic, clear messages that they can deliver, and messages need to be positive and aimed at helping people do what they would like to do in a responsible way. A discussion was had about raising awareness of capercaillie through messaging and potentially increasing disturbance of the bird. It was agreed that positive messaging and engagement is very important, and messaging doesn't always need to be species specific to capercaillie but highlight responsible access in general.

### **3. Working with visitors to Glenmore Forest Park, Abernethy Forest and Rothiemurchus Estate**

Uwe shared an update on the work of FLS, RSPB and Rothiemurchus Estate, who are working as a collective within the project to develop high quality sustainable visitor experiences and thriving capercaillie areas in Glenmore Forest Park, Abernethy Forest and on Rothiemurchus Estate. The group have developed a research brief that is aimed at building a deeper understanding of what visitors to Abernethy Forest, Glenmore Forest Park and Rothiemurchus Estate need in order to have a high quality experience; who the visitors are; how they're using the areas; their attitudes and values to the area and conservation so that FLS, RSPB and Rothiemurchus Estate can refine their offer and seek to better meet the needs of visitors in a way that also enables capercaillie to thrive. The group discussed the current visitor makeup and the fact its atypical due to COVID and there is no knowing if visitor patterns will revert to exactly what they were before. Uwe explained that this is highlighted in the research brief and the consultant will be required to develop and deliver a research plan accordingly.

The group discussed how the loss of capercaillie watch at Loch Garten has left a gap and it is unclear now how to signpost visitors who have an interest in seeing capercaillie. It was agreed that potential exists for Uwe to meet with the Carrbridge Capercaillie Group to explore options for a high quality immersive 'capercaillie experience', potentially using virtual technology, that could cater for some visitors.

A discussion was had around the issues of zoning, the various interpretations of what is a 'core area' and the pros and cons of refuge areas. It was highlighted that the visitor research has the potential to significantly inform thinking on this as refuge areas are one of many tools to help capercaillie. By understanding more about how visitors think and feel potential exists to review whether we have the right tools in the right place, and whether some tools are still necessary.

### **4. Work with Balmoral Estate and Deeside communities**

Richard provided an overview of the struggling capercaillie population on Deeside and the various measures that Balmoral Estate and other estates in the area are taking to improve matters. Balmoral Estate staff are seeing capercaillie and signs of them beyond the usual areas and are planning to do further habitat improvement and fence work there. Hens have also been spotted much further east near Ballater.

The capercaillie population in Deeside is a genetic lifeline to the larger Strathspey population and Balmoral Estate has been undertaking habitat improvement work since the 90s to improve conditions for the bird, including marking and removing fences, allowing the forest to regenerate and expand, reducing deer numbers, blocking ditches to rewet areas, strimming the forest understory and predator control. Some of this work is being delivered through the project and this year work will also begin with the local communities, as part of the project. Capercaillie on Deeside are now far less relevant to people's everyday lives due to the low numbers in the area. This lack of relevancy and awareness is a risk to the remaining birds and so too to future populations if numbers increase or birds were to be translocated. Richard shared examples of current options to raise awareness through ranger staff, engagement with schools and volunteer activities. The estate is also very interested in the project's research into the genetic diversity of the UK capercaillie population and what this could mean in terms of future conservation measures.

## **5. Review draft Partnership Agreement**

A draft Partnership Agreement was shared. The agreement sets out the responsibilities of all members of OMT and the CNPA in supporting the development and delivery of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project. No concerns were raised by the group, but all members were invited to contact Carolyn to discuss the draft agreement in more detail if needed.

## **6. AOB**

The next OMT meeting will take place on 31<sup>st</sup> March. The plan for the meeting is to spend half of the time reviewing each community's action plan, what's in it and the outline costs. The other half will be spent discussing external communications across the partnership and the project. The project's Communications Plan will be shared in advance of the meeting.

## **ACTION POINTS**

- 1. Issie & Uwe** – liaise re the idea of Uwe attending a Carrbridge Capercaillie Group meeting to share ideas around a high quality immersive 'capercaillie experience'.
- 2. All** – contact Carolyn re any concerns or questions regarding the draft Partnership Agreement.