

Cairngorms Capercaillie Project

Project Board meeting notes and actions

Meeting date: 13 April 2021, 14.00 - 16.00

Attendees: Adam Smith (Independent)
Carolyn Robertson (Project Manager, CNPA)
Claire Smith (Senior Conservation Officer, RSPB)
Debbie Greene (Operations Manager, NatureScot)
Doug McAdam (CNPA Board member)
Kirsty Rose Parker (Director, The Evaluator)
Naomi Kaye (Project Administrator, CNPA)
Pete Mayhew (Director of Conservation and Visitor Experience, CNPA)
Priscilla Gordon-Duff (Independent)
Will Anderson (Chief Executive, Seafield and Strathspey Estates)

Apologies: Andy Ford (Head of Conservation, CNPA)

Venue: Zoom

1. Actions from previous meeting

All actions had been completed. An updated draft of the MoA was circulated prior to the meeting. More time was requested to review the draft. The draft Communications Plan (shared in the previous meeting) has now been shared with the Operational Management Team and CNPA Comms Team for comment. Tracking progress on predator control and fence work will be discussed as part of the project's Monitoring and Evaluation Plan. And an amend was requested to the previous meeting notes - related to the facilitated session regards monitoring and evaluation, it was felt that capercaillie should be given more profile.

2. Review Quarter 4 Highlight Report

A Highlight Report detailing the project's activities and progress from January to March was discussed. Good progress is continuing to be made across all areas of work. No major concerns were raised. The issue affecting habitat improvement work in the previous quarter has now been resolved. The issue was a bottleneck applying for FGS funding. All outstanding FGS applications have now been submitted. It was recommended that the risk around the project's community-led work (noted in the Risks and Issues Log) should change from Likelihood: Low / Impact: High, to Likelihood: Medium / Impact: Medium; as more of the community-led work comes onstream the likelihood of risk increases, but the impact will be lower due to the project's ongoing learning and as buy-in from communities and people's understanding of the project increases.

It was raised that the risks related to Covid-19 revolve mainly around internal ways of working and the Operational Management Team (OMT) in particular. It's hoped that members of OMT will soon be able to meet in person to enable more dynamic and responsive ways of working, particularly given the project's fast-moving and community-led context.

It was recommended that the budget information in the Highlight Report should include detail that allows income and expenditure to be tracked against what's expected each quarter, and it should be noted if the expenditure on staff (listed in the report) includes other costs, e.g. equipment.

A discussion was had around the second Community Ranger post due to be recruited in June. Since the project submitted its second round application to NLHF in 2019, Ranger resource in the National Park has increased significantly and includes a permanent CNPA Ranger Team, which is now available to support the project. To ensure the project budget is used to best effect, and the project's actual delivery needs are met, it was suggested that the responsibilities of the second Community Ranger post could be fulfilled by the CNPA Ranger Team. The budget for the second Community Ranger post could then be allocated instead to address a rising need for more staff resource at a strategic level within the project to support work with the mountain biking, business and visitor communities.

In the context of the project, these communities all operate in the same geographical area and strategically they are all aligned around responsible enjoyment of the National Park. As a result, opportunities for these communities to work more closely together within the project are beginning to arise, for example related to actions around messaging, marketing, signage and infrastructure. It was suggested that the Highland Development Co-ordinator, employed by Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland, is in an ideal position to provide this additional resource. The post is already supporting the project in-kind working with the mountain biking community. But scope exists to expand the remit of the post within the project. This would see the postholder working strategically across the mountain biking, business and visitor communities to help develop and co-ordinate actions and areas of overlap. Board members agreed in principle with this recommendation.

3. Monitoring and evaluating the project

The draft Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for the project was presented by Kirsty. Board members were invited to read the draft plan at their convenience and feedback.

4. Legacy

An initial discussion was had about the need to start preparing the ground for the project's end in 2023 to ensure continuity and support (as required) for the communities the project is working with and to ensure a return on all the project's investments, e.g. research into the genetic diversity of the capercaillie population in the National Park. It was agreed that a lack of legacy planning (or timely planning) is a risk to the project and should be included in the Risks & Issues Log. Board members were invited to consider forming a smaller legacy planning group.

AOB

- The Board's contributions are highly valued and it was suggested that future meetings could be longer to allow more time for discussions.
- It was confirmed that any communication to the Board from members of the public will be responded to by the Chair, on behalf of the Board.

Actions

1. **Carolyn:** Follow-up with NatureScot potential amends to the MoA. Update the MoA in response (if required) and circulate to Board for sign-off.
2. **Carolyn:** Share the Communications Plan once updated following feedback from the Operational Management Team and CNPA Comms Team.
3. **Carolyn:** Update the Highlight Report and Risks & Issues Log as discussed (see items 2 and 4)
4. **All:** Share feedback on the draft Monitoring and Evaluation Plan with Kirsty.
5. **All:** Inform Carolyn if interested in forming a legacy planning group.