

Cairngorms Capercaillie Project

Project Board meeting notes and actions

Meeting date: 13 July 2021, 14.00 - 16.00

Attendees: Adam Smith (Independent)
Andy Ford (Head of Conservation, CNPA)
Carolyn Robertson (Project Manager, CNPA)
Claire Smith (Senior Conservation Officer, RSPB)
Debbie Greene (Operations Manager, NatureScot)
Naomi Kaye (Project Administrator, CNPA)
Pete Mayhew (Director of Nature and Climate Change, CNPA)
Priscilla Gordon-Duff (Independent)
Will Anderson (Chief Executive, Seafield and Strathspey Estates)

Apologies: Doug McAdam (CNPA Board member)

Venue: Zoom

1. Actions from previous meeting

All actions have been completed. The draft Communications Plan is currently with NLHF for feedback and the action related to legacy planning will be carried forward to the next meeting when baseline monitoring and evaluation data will be available for discussion.

2. Review Quarter 1 Highlight Report

A Highlight Report detailing the project's activities and progress from 1 April to 30 June was discussed. Good progress is continuing to be made across all areas of work. No major concerns were raised. It was recommended that the risk related to the project's community-led work (#6 in the Risks and Issues Log) should include the sixth community (yet to be identified).

It was noted that all tenders and research reports commissioned through the project are now available on the project website; the project is due to launch a Facebook page soon to help extend it's reach; volunteering activities are due to re-start in September and potential exists to monitor the effectiveness of tasks completed by volunteers, e.g. screening tracks. It was also noted that the research stage with the business, visitor and Deeside communities will end in the next quarter. The action planning stage will then begin and budgets will be developed accordingly. The budgets for the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy and mountain biking work are also due to be updated during the next quarter.

3. Discussion re emerging National picture for capercaillie and legacy planning

There has been a shift in the national picture since the last Project Board meeting with capercaillie moving from amber to red in the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan. This is in response to the most recent lek counts (Spring 2021) which show a year by year decline from 230 males in 2015 to 150 males in 2021, a 36% decline in 6 years. In response, a 'High level group' led by the CNPA CEO has formed and an independent Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) is currently being convened by NatureScot to review the science and present options by October. It was agreed that this action is a positive step for capercaillie and will have an influence on the project's legacy planning. A line of communication must therefore be maintained between the 'High level group' and the Project Board.

4. Reflections on ways of working

Board Members took the opportunity to reflect on ways of working over the last 12 months, since the beginning of the delivery phase. The project has been moving at pace over this period and the Board's support has been key. Members have maintained a flexible approach and been able to provide specific support where required. In future, the project Comms Plan and Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (including the baseline data currently being gathered) will enable the Board to look ahead more. It was agreed that updates and insights from both plans should be integrated into future Board meetings. Updates from the Operational Management Team and 6 monthly budget forecasts should also become standing agenda items.

5. A look ahead at project comms planned for the next quarter

An overview of comms activities planned for the next 3 months was shared. It was suggested that a quarterly update, potentially in the form of a blog from the Project Manager, should be included in the media calendar to complement and build on the more factual Highlight Report. Comms activities over the next quarter will include announcing the successful applications to the project's grant scheme for habitat improvement; the next stage of the community consultation on path improvements in Carrbridge; volunteering sessions re-starting; research beginning in Deeside; results from the visitor and business research; promoting the capercaillie monitoring app; and a blog series about forestry operations in capercaillie areas linked to the project. The project will also be launching a Facebook page.

AOB

- The RSPB are currently recruiting a second Capercaillie Advisory Officer to undertake work outside the project as Molly (the existing Capercaillie Advisory Officer) is reducing her hours. From this autumn, Molly will only work on the project.

Actions

1. **Carolyn:** Update the Risks & Issues Log as discussed (see item 1).
2. **Carolyn:** Table updates from the Operational Management Team; a quarterly look ahead at comms; and monitoring and evaluation insights as standing agenda items for future Project Board meetings; and 6 monthly budget forecasts as a standing agenda item for alternate meetings.
3. **Carolyn:** Share the Comms Plan once updated following feedback from NLHF.
4. **Carolyn:** Liaise with Jocasta re the idea of a quarterly blog about the project's activities to complement the Highlight Report.
5. **Carolyn / Naomi:** Make arrangements for the next Project Board meeting on 13 October to be in person.