

Cairngorms Capercaillie Project Project Board meeting notes and actions

Meeting date: 13 October 2021, 14.00 - 16.00

Attendees: Adam Smith (Independent)
Carolyn Robertson (Project Manager, CNPA)
Debbie Greene (Operations Manager, NatureScot)
Naomi Kaye (Project Co-ordinator, CNPA)
Pete Mayhew (Director of Nature and Climate Change, CNPA)
Will Anderson (Chief Executive, Seafield and Strathspey Estates)

Apologies: Andy Ford (Head of Conservation, CNPA)
Claire Smith (Senior Conservation Officer, RSPB)
Doug McAdam (CNPA Board member)
Priscilla Gordon-Duff (Independent)

Venue: Zoom

1. Actions from previous meeting

All actions have been completed. The Communications Plan is ready to be shared and a blog about the project's latest activities will be published on the project website in tandem with the Highlight Report for Quarter 2.

2. Update from the Operational Management Team (OMT)

The last OMT meeting took place on 28 September. A number of partners were unable to attend due to various clashes. Carolyn has been working directly with partners outwith the OMT meeting. Andy will step down as Chair and become Chair of the Project Board once he assumes his new role as Director of Nature and Climate Change from mid November. Sarah Henshall is the newly appointed Head of Conversation. She starts in January so Carolyn will act as interim Chair for OMT. The next OMT meeting is 30 November.

3. Review and discuss project progress (July - Sept) risks and issues

A Highlight Report detailing the project's activities and progress from 1 July to 30 September was discussed. Good progress is continuing to be made across the majority of work areas. Work with the mountain biking community and research to support work with the visitor community were highlighted as particularly strong areas. Issues impacting the delivery of the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy, Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, and habitat improvement work on Rothiemurchus Estate and Tom an Uird forest were discussed. Board members were satisfied that the issues were in hand, would be resolved by Quarter 3 and provided some advisory support.

4. Review and discuss project budget

Income and expenditure is largely on track. The issues raised in the previous item have budget implications. These were discussed. Board members were again satisfied that the issues were in hand and any potential impact on the budget could be resolved. The cost of work to develop a new approach to estimate the size of the UK capercaillie population using genetic material, has increased significantly since the original project budget was developed. This is due largely to increased lab costs as a result of the pandemic and Brexit. Work is underway to explore ways in which the projected shortfall could be addressed.

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

Comms activities over the next quarter will cover the habitat improvement work which has now been completed funded by the project's grant scheme; the project's activities over the last three months in tandem with publishing the Q2 Highlight Report; advertising upcoming volunteering sessions on Balmoral, Rothiemurchus and Seafield Estate and Ranger-led guided wildlife walks in Carrbridge.

6. Update on Scientific Advisory Committee sub group and National Survey

Preparations are now underway to complete the Capercaillie National Survey this winter. The survey results will be published Autumn 2022. A sub group of the NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee, currently reviewing scientific evidence related to capercaillie, will also produce a report by the end of the year. In June, the CNPA convened a meeting of key stakeholders to progress discussion on factors affecting capercaillie conservation outwith the approved purposes of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project. A sub group of the NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee was convened in response. A member of CNPA Board sits as an observer on the sub group.

It's anticipated that the project website will host information about the Capercaillie National Survey. It was felt that this was an opportunity to talk about the fact that the project does not include action for all factors affecting capercaillie. Instead is it part of and complementary to a much bigger picture regarding capercaillie conservation. A discussed was had about new ways to help the public see the project in this wider context.

Actions

- 1. Carolyn:** Work with Molly to contact John Risby (Scottish Forestry) for advice re the Tom an Uird deer management application and explore alternative options suggested for fence marking on Rothiemurchus Estate.