

Cairngorms Capercaillie Project

Progress Report: 1 Jan - 31 March 2022

The information in this document is submitted and discussed as part of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project's quarterly reporting to the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Project summary

The Cairngorms Capercaillie Project is working to secure the long-term survival of capercaillie in the UK. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund until July 2023, the project's actions for capercaillie are being delivered across the Cairngorms National Park.

The project's key actions are:

- to enable communities to develop and deliver their own community-led actions for capercaillie;
- raise awareness of the plight of capercaillie and how people can help;
- research the genetic diversity of capercaillie in the Cairngorms National Park to help inform action;
- improve and create more habitat for capercaillie and undertake predator control in key areas;
- strengthen current capercaillie monitoring to enable more informed decisions

The project is led by the Cairngorms National Park Authority and delivered in partnership with the Badenoch & Strathspey Trail Association, Balmoral Estate, Brook Forestry, Cairngorms Business Partnership, Carrbridge Capercaillie Group, Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland, Forestry and Land Scotland, Groves Forestry, Rothiemurchus Estate, RSPB, Scottish Forestry, NatureScot and Seafield and Strathspey Estates.

Project start date	22 July 2020
Grant expiry date	30 July 2023

Progress towards the project's approved purposes

Green	Delivery is on track
Amber	Minor issues are impacting delivery
Red	Major issues are impacting delivery

The project's three-step model for enabling community-led action for capercaillie

Stage 1: Why?	This stage is about defining the cause. Why does (or might) capercaillie conservation matter to the community? This is about identifying the key interest groups and leaders in the community and listening to them to identify the issues and themes at play related to capercaillie conservation.
Stage 2: How?	This stage is about identifying how the community feels about the cause by identifying the views held in the wider community, how widespread those views are and where the common ground is.
Stage 3: What?	This stage is about enabling the community to take action for the cause using the data and analysis from Stage 2 and helping the community plan how to monitor and evaluate the actions they deliver in response.

Approved purpose	Summary of progress	Status
Empower communities to help ensure the survival of capercaillie through community-led conservation, by implementing the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy and developing, agreeing and implementing action plans with additional communities.	<p><i>Carrbridge community – Stage 3</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All landowners in capercaillie sensitive areas around Carrbridge confirmed that they wish to re-install the signage trialed in 2021 to promote responsible access from April to August, during lekking and breeding season, as part of the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy. An additional landowner, who was not part of the 2021 trial, confirmed that they also wish to install the signage this year. Plans were developed to safeguard lek sites around Carrbridge this April. Safeguarding local lek sites is an annual activity as part of the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy. Residents were invited, via Carrbridge Capercaillie News, to share their thoughts on the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy: Action Plan for 2022/23. The Carrbridge Capercaillie Group produced a draft Action Plan for the Project Board to review. Residents were informed (via Carrbridge Capercaillie News) of the Carrbridge Capercaillie Group's decision not to proceed with the path improvement proposals due to the community consultation results not providing a sufficient mandate to do so. <i>Issue: The Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy: Action Plan for 2022/23 is still being finalised.</i> 	

Approved purpose	Summary of progress	Status
	<p><i>Mountain biking community – Stage 3</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A second online consultation regarding the MTB Recreation Management Plan was held with Forestry and Land Scotland, Seafield and Strathspey Estates, RSPB, Rothiemurchus Estate, CNPA, NatureScot and members of the Trail Feathers group including the Badenoch & Strathspey Trail Association. ▪ The MTB Recreation Management Plan is designed to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enable data driven decisions about trail development, maintenance and promotion in Badenoch and Strathspey to ensure mountain biking recreation develops sustainably and sensitive habitats and species are safeguarded. 2. Enable greater levels of responsible access by the mountain biking community in Badenoch and Strathspey including resident and visiting riders. 3. Enable the mountain biking community, land managers and agencies to communicate more effectively. ▪ Members of the Trail Feathers group presented and discussed the MTB Recreation Management Plan with the Abernethy Visitor and Access Group and the Local Outdoor Access Forum (LOAF). LOAF members were invited to consider the plan in the context of other access takers, and what opportunities exist to use the plan as an example to inspire and enable community-led action by other recreational user groups. 	
	<p><i>Business community – Stage 3</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A workshop was held by the Cairngorms Business Partnership for members of the business community to learn about the visitor research, specifically the segmentation model and its potential to enable businesses to help more of their customers to enjoy the National Park responsibly. ▪ An overview of the draft action plan developed in response to the results of the online survey for businesses was also shared and discussed at the workshop and members were invited to feedback on the draft plan. 	
	<p><i>Visitor community – Stage 3</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The research regarding visitors to Glenmore Forest Park, Abernethy and Rothiemurchus was published on the project website at cairngormscapercaillie.scot/communities/visitors ▪ Work is now underway with Forestry and Land Scotland, Rothiemurchus and RSPB to identify actions informed by the research that will enable high quality sustainable visitor experiences and thriving capercaillie areas in Glenmore, Rothiemurchus and Abernethy. 	

Approved purpose	Summary of progress	Status
	<p><i>Deeside communities – Stage 3</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The second stage of research in Deeside was completed. The first stage involved listening sessions (conducted by an objective third party) with 30 key people connected to the area, including landowners and land managers, businesses related to tourism and recreation, and representatives from interest groups including field sports and mountain biking. The views shared in the listening sessions are summarised on the project website: cairngormscapercaillie.scot/communities/Deeside ▪ The views shared by the majority through the listening sessions were used to create an online survey for Deeside residents and visitors to complete to identify how widespread the majority views are. 768 Deeside residents and visitors completed the survey. The high number of respondents secured a 95% confidence level in the results. Almost all respondents (98%) feel that we should protect capercaillie in Deeside for future generations to enjoy; that even if they never see a capercaillie in Deeside, it is important to them that they exist in the area (97%); and they feel fortunate to have capercaillie in Deeside (97%). In response to this mandate a draft action plan has been developed. 	
<p>Raise awareness and increase understanding of the challenges facing capercaillie through a variety of means including social media activities and events, a new online engagement platform, volunteer work, a public app, new resources for schools and genetics analysis.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This quarter the project website attracted 326 returning visitors; up 37% on the last quarter, and 1,819 new visitors; up 52%. The project Facebook page has over 1,392 followers; up 39% on the last quarter. ▪ The following media have featured the project this quarter: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - BBC Highland Radio - BBC Scotland - Deeside Piper - Northern Times - Press & Journal - Scottish Daily Mail - Scottish Field - Scotsman - Strathspey Herald - STV ▪ A presentation about the project and capercaillie was given to the Aberdeen & Aberdeenshire Scottish Wildlife Trust Local Group. ▪ Volunteer sessions were delivered with Forestry and Land Scotland, Seafield, Rothiemurchus and Balmoral Estate. The sessions involved volunteers improving capercaillie habitat by marking fences, restoring forest bogs and removing non-native saplings from areas of regenerating Scots pine. ▪ To date volunteers have donated 2,345 hours to the project. ▪ A team of Fence Monitoring Volunteers were recruited to help check fences across the National Park to ensure they don't pose a collision risk to capercaillie. ▪ A tender was published on Public Contracts Scotland for developing and producing learning resources to help more primary school pupils (and their teachers) to learn about capercaillie. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contact was made with wildlife guiding companies operating in the National Park that pose a high risk to capercaillie, e.g. they are actively promoting capercaillie as a target species April to August. One company has changed their practices in response. Guiding companies that have adopted and are publicly championing best practice regarding capercaillie watching were also contacted to thank them for their proactive approach. ▪ The first phase of work to pilot a genetic lek survey was completed. The second phase begins in April when droppings will be collected as part of existing lek survey work. The aim of the genetic lek survey is to establish whether the use of genetic material provides a feasible alternative to current survey methods used to estimate population size which are reliant on capercaillie sightings. If successful, genetic lek surveys also stand to reduce the residual disturbance caused by existing lek survey methods as genetic material can be collected once birds have dispersed. ▪ Work is ongoing by RZSS to identify the genetic diversity of the Cairngorms capercaillie population using feathers collected by the project from across the National Park. Comparison samples from Sweden, Poland, Germany, Austria, Norway, France, Belarus and Slovakia have now been secured, in addition to UK samples thought to be pre-extinction. The final report on the genetic diversity of the capercaillie population in the Cairngorms will be published in August and an action planning workshop in response to the report will take place in September. 	
<p>Work with landowners to implement plans to improve and manage around 9,000 hectares of habitat across six estates for the benefit of capercaillie; enable landowners to play their part in capercaillie conservation via a third-party grant scheme targeting landholdings in capercaillie areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The following habitat improvement work was delivered this quarter, improving over 8,900 hectares of habitat for capercaillie: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Abernethy: Cutting the field layer in the forest using a robocutter to enable blaeberry to grow and capercaillie to move around more freely. - Balmoral Estate: Removing non-native trees to allow Scots pine to regenerate and blocking man-made ditches to re-wet and restore forest bogs; an essential habitat for capercaillie. - Rothiemurchus Estate: Cutting the field layer in the forest using a robocutter. Foxes and crows have been controlled to enhance capercaillie survival. Grit piles have been created in the forest to reduce the need for capercaillie to visit tracks to pick up grit. Spruce saplings have been removed from an area of regenerating Scots pine and a track in a capercaillie area has been screened to reduce disturbance. - Seafield Estate: Foxes and crows have been controlled. Marking has been replaced on strategic fences to avoid collisions. Habitat has been expanded by replanting an area with Scots pine and native broadleaves and an area of natural regeneration has also been established. ▪ The project grant scheme to enable landmanagers of all sizes to improve and create more habitat for capercaillie opened for applications in February. Grants are available for actions that are not currently funded through existing schemes including predator control over 1.5km from an active lek and marking fencing over 1km from an active capercaillie lek. ▪ <i>Issue: Deer control to improve over 300 hectares of habitat for capercaillie in Tom an Uird Forest is under review as a whole forest approach to deer management in Tom an Uird Forest is no longer viable through FGS funding.</i> 	

Approved purpose	Summary of progress	Status
<p>Monitor, test and evaluate ideas throughout delivery, applying learning from the project to refine activities including habitat improvement work, survey techniques, promotional activities and the community action planning model.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A draft Evaluation Framework was produced and evaluation sessions held with members of the mountain biking community, project staff and partners to reflect on the project’s community action planning model, capture learning and update the model in response. ▪ Phase 1 of the pilot genetic lek survey was completed. This involved establishing the most effective storage method for droppings. This learning will now be applied to Phase 2 which will see droppings gathered and stored accordingly during the coming lek season. 	
<p>Develop an innovative and replicable model for community-led species conservation that enables communities to successfully coexist with their natural heritage, sharing the project’s findings internally and externally with UK organisations, and further afield, to create a legacy of learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The aforementioned Evaluation Framework includes a number of tools to help evaluate and refine the model which has been developed to enable community-led species conservation. ▪ Work by James Hutton Limited is ongoing to document on film the process and outcomes of the Trail Feathers project, i.e. the project’s work with the mountain biking community, to provide inspiration, learning and evidence in a way that can stimulate further debate and learning. 	

Milestones

Green	Delivery is on track
Amber	Minor issues are impacting delivery
Red	Major issues are impacting delivery

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Recruitment				
Recruit Project Officer, Communications Officer, Project Administrator, Community Ranger and Capercaillie Advisory Assistant				
Raising awareness				
Develop a Comms Plan				
Launch a new project website				
Commission the design of capercaillie related resources for primary schools				
Develop an online capercaillie hub				
Genetic research				
Analyse DNA from capercaillie feathers collected from across the National Park				
Deliver an action planning workshop in response to findings from the DNA analysis				
Trial a genetic lek survey				
Habitat improvement				
Improve over 300 hectares of habitat for capercaillie in Abernethy Forest				
Improve over 30 hectares of habitat for capercaillie in Baddengorm Woods				
Improve over 400 hectares of habitat for capercaillie on Balmoral Estate				
Improve over 300 hectares of habitat for capercaillie in Tom an Uird Forest				
Improve over 4,500 hectares of habitat for capercaillie on Rothiemurchus Estate (includes predator control)				
Improve over 3,000 hectares of habitat for capercaillie on Seafield and Strathspey Estates (includes predator control)				
Launch a grant scheme to enable further habitat improvement for capercaillie				

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Capercaillie monitoring				
Launch a public capercaillie monitoring app				
Conduct brood, lek and occupancy surveys				
Project monitoring and evaluation				
Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework				
Community-led action - Carrbridge community (researching community views was completed in the previous phase)				
Plan actions				
Deliver actions				
Community-led action – mountain biking community				
Research community views				
Plan actions				
Deliver actions				
Community-led action – visitor community				
Research community views				
Plan actions				
Deliver actions				
Community-led action – business community				
Research community views				
Plan actions				
Deliver actions				
Community-led action – Deeside communities				
Research community views				
Plan actions				
Deliver actions				

Risks and Issues

Risk / Issue	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation	Priority
1. The diverse range of interests, organisations and groups involved in the project presents challenges to effective partnership working.	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All partners and areas of work are represented on the Operational Management Team. ▪ The Operational Management Team operates under a Partnership Agreement. ▪ Members of the CNPA Board and Senior Management Team are members of the Project Board. ▪ The Project Board operate under a Memorandum of Agreement. 	High <i>No change</i>
2. Community-led elements are not conducted in an effective, transparent and defensible way limiting benefits and causing disengagement and mistrust in communities.	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All learning captured from the development phase (and ongoing learning in the delivery phase) is being applied. ▪ The Operational Management Team (responsible for helping to strengthen the project's community-led work) comprises of representatives from all the community groups and organisations involved. ▪ A three-stage model is in place to ensure work with other communities is only carried out if it's considered within the scope of the project and the community is considered viable to work with with the project resource available. 	High <i>No change</i>
3. Project information is used to undermine public support for the project.	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project Board have strategic responsibility for project communications. ▪ A Comms Plan is in place. ▪ All project documents are written for a public audience and published on the project website (as far as appropriate). ▪ A project Facebook page provides opportunities to dispel myths and correct misunderstandings. 	High <i>No change</i>
4. Habitat improvement work delayed or unviable due to changes onsite, delays in the process of applying for FGS funding and or conflicting advice.	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partners applying for FGS funding are experienced in the process and have a good track record of securing funding. ▪ Additional resource is provided by the project to help strengthen applications. ▪ Scottish Forestry and NatureScot are project partners and members of the Operational Management Team. 	High <i>No change</i>

Risk / Issue	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation	Priority
5. Monitoring and evaluation information and processes are not used effectively to strengthen the project; inform legacy planning; and help safeguard the project from inherent risks.	Low	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An Evaluation Framework has been developed. A culture of reflection is embedded in the project and professionally facilitated where possible. 	Medium <i>Was High</i>
6. Covid related restrictions limit project activities and pace.	Low	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactive approach taken to ensure activities continue within current guidelines and meetings take place in person where possible to improve productivity and help build relationships. 	Medium <i>Was High</i>
7. The project increases capercaillie disturbance or is perceived to do so.	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff are working closely with landowners, landmanagers and community members to stay informed and respond to any issues or perceptions related to disturbance. The Operational Management Team is in place and able to identify ways forward when necessary to address issues or perceptions related to disturbance. Comms assets are actively shared with partners and third parties to reduce the need for capercaillie filming and photography. All survey work is completed under licence and all habitat improvement and monitoring work is carried out in accordance with relevant legislation. The project operates within the Capercaillie Data Sharing Policy. 	Medium <i>No change</i>
8. Project activities conflict with other initiatives, e.g. wader conservation.	Low	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisations involved in potentially conflicting activities are project partners represented on the Operational Management Team and Project Board, operating respectively under a Partnership Agreement and Memorandum of Agreement. 	Low <i>Was Medium</i>
9. Continued cold and wet weather during capercaillie nesting and breeding season could overwhelm the benefits of the project.	Low	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue delivery - the project's work is vital to enhance capercaillie survival, even in difficult years; maintain proactive comms internally and externally; review the issue at Project Board to identify a way forward. 	Low <i>Was Medium</i>
10. Genetic analysis reveals capercaillie population in the UK is at risk of becoming functionally extinct.	Low	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue delivery and fast track the action planning work scheduled in response to the genetic analysis; review the issue at Project Board to identify a way forward. 	Low <i>Was Medium</i>

Budget

Income	Expected	Received to date
National Lottery Heritage Fund	2,036,100	360,239
CNPA	60,280	50,280
NatureScot	50,000	35,000
Scottish Forestry	28,000	16,000
Forestry Grant Scheme	127,473	0
RSPB	40,000	25,000
RSPB Abernethy	10,000	3,080
Seafield and Strathspey Estates	224,144	107,036
Rothiemurchus Estate	41,669	23,512
Balmoral Estate	11,500	2,500
Baddengorm Woods	48,240	0
Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland	75,000	1,440
Volunteer time (in-kind)	120,000	40,925
RSPB in-kind (technical support for the app and online hub)	27,800	3,500
Total	2,900,206	668,512

Breakdown of income / contributions received

Partner / Funder	Nature of contribution	Total to date
National Lottery Heritage Fund	Grant	360,239
CNPA	Donation	50,280
NatureScot	Donation	35,000
Scottish Forestry	Donation	16,000
Rothiemurchus Estate	Estate contribution to predator control work	23,512
RSPB	Donation	25,000
RSPB Abernethy	Contractor payment - field layer survey prior to heather cutting	3,080
Seafield and Strathspey Estates	Contractor payment - replanting	38,184
Seafield and Strathspey Estates	Contractor payment - fence removal & repair prior to replanting	36,092
Seafield and Strathspey Estates	Contractor payment - groundwork prior to felling and replanting	17,460
Seafield and Strathspey Estates	Contractor payment – fence removal, replacement and marking	15,300
Balmoral Estate	Contractor payment - removal of 1,100m of deer fence	2,500
Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland	Contractor payment - trail maintenance and inspection training	1,440
Total		624,087

Partner / Funder	Nature of contribution (Added value - not in the original budget)	Total to date
CNPA	6 month internship to support MTB community work	6,762
Forestry Grant Scheme	Fence marking on Seafield Estate	22,752
Forestry Grant Scheme	Scarifying to promote natural regeneration on Seafield Estate	5,672
Total		35,186

Volunteer time (in-kind contribution)	Total to date
Carrbridge Capercaillie Group	15,362
Mountain biking (Trail Feathers) group	11,906
Volunteers delivering habitat improvement work	3,036
Capercaillie monitoring	1,746
Digital volunteer (project website design and development)	8,875
Total	40,925

RSPB (in-kind contribution)	Total to date
Capercaillie monitoring app development	3,500
Total	3,500

Breakdown of expenditure / investment

Community	Community-led action	Total
Carrbridge	Revised national capercaillie population estimate to help inform action	2,400
	Study of predator activity in capercaillie areas in Kinveachy Forest to help inform action	7,260
	Printing and production of trial signs to encourage responsible access in capercaillie areas around Carrbridge	453
	Path surveys and feasibility work to enable thriving capercaillie areas around Carrbridge and paths and outdoor spaces for all residents and visitors to enjoy	4,965
Total		15,078

Community	Community-led action	Total
Mountain biking	Equipment to repair trails to reduce habitat loss and fragmentation	2,366
	Printing and production of trial signs to encourage responsible riding in capercaillie areas	160
	Trail Association website to increase visibility, build awareness and support	785
	Trail Association insurance to deliver community-led action	683
Total		3,994

Contractor	Work	Total
Highland Field & Forest / Instinct	Brood surveys to help measure impact of habitat improvement work, predator control and community-led action to reduce disturbance	5,172
RZSS	Researching the genetic diversity of capercaillie in the Cairngorms National Park to inform action	62,768
RZSS	Developing a new approach to estimating the size of the UK capercaillie population using genetic material	9,853
James Hutton Institute	Evaluation film to share the learning and achievements of the mountain biking community; working to deliver conservation solutions in the Cairngorms National Park	18,000
The Evaluator	Monitoring and evaluating the project to measure impact and share learning	9,100
The Evaluator	Researching public attitudes and beliefs about the Deeside area and capercaillie conservation to inform community-led action planning in Deeside	7,443
Heritage Pathfinder Ltd.	Researching visitor attitudes and beliefs to inform action to enable thriving capercaillie areas and high quality, sustainable visitor experiences	25,000
Heritage Pathfinder Ltd.	Monitoring and evaluating the project to measure impact and share learning	27,510
Total		164,846

Landholding	Habitat improvement work	Total
Abernethy	Heather cutting (with a robocutter) to improve c300 ha of habitat	50,000
Baddengorm	Replanting woodland with native species to expand habitat	6,800
Baddengorm	Marking fencing with wooden markers to avoid collisions	5,000
Balmoral Estate	Heather cutting, fence removal and marking fences with wooden markers to improve c400 ha of habitat and avoid collisions	18,900
Crannach Nature Reserve	Heather cutting to improve habitat	1,290
Lynamer, Nethy Bridge	Restructuring woodlands (removing non-native trees) to expand habitat	2,673
Rothiemurchus Estate	Screening trackside edges to reduce human disturbance	1,600
Rothiemurchus Estate	Heather cutting and creating grit beds to improve habitat	5,450
Rothiemurchus Estate	Marking fences to avoid collisions	1,600
Rothiemurchus Estate	Predator control to enhance capercaillie survival in key areas	83,315
Seafield and Strathspey Estates	Planting native trees to expand habitat by c90ha	58,290
Seafield and Strathspey Estates	Removing, replacing and marking strategic fences to avoid collisions	15,300
Tombain Plantation	Marking fencing with wooden markers to avoid collisions	4,944
Total		255,162

Project staff	Work	Total *
Capercaillie Advisory Assistant (P/T)	Capercaillie monitoring to inform work and measure impact	44,700
Capercaillie Advisory Officer (P/T)	Strategic support for capercaillie monitoring & habitat improvement	59,350
Communications Officer (P/T)	Raising awareness and understanding about capercaillie & the project	91,350
Community Ranger	Supporting Carrbridge community-led action	103,150
Gamekeeper	Predator control on Seafield Estate	168,014
Highland Development Co-Ordinator	Strategic support for community-led action	40,000
Project Coordinator (P/T)	Supporting project delivery and providing administration support	77,200
Project Manager	Managing the project as a whole, including staff and contractors	170,700
Project Officer (P/T)	Supporting project delivery	105,900
Total		860,364

* Total salary, equipment and overhead costs for the delivery phase, i.e. 3 years (2020 – 2023)