

Cairngorms Capercaillie Project

Operational Management Team (OMT) - Meeting Notes

Meeting date: 30 March 2022, 13:30 - 15.00

Venue: Zoom

Attendees: Anne Elliott (Area Officer, NatureScot)
Carolyn Robertson (Project Manager, CNPA)
Colin Leslie (Environment Forester, FLS)
Ewan Archer (Head Keeper, Seafield Estate)
Peter Ferguson (Biodiversity Manager, Rothiemurchus Estate)
Ruari Watt (Highland Mountain Bike Development Coordinator, DMBinS)

Apologies: Mark Tate (CEO, Cairngorms Business Partnership)
Uwe Stoneman (Senior Site Manager - Abernethy, RSPB)

1. Actions from previous meeting

All actions have been completed.

2. Review and discuss project progress (Jan - March) and budget

A Highlight Report detailing the project's activities and progress from 1 January to 31 March was discussed. Good progress is continuing to be made across the majority of work areas. The project budget remains on track. OMT members present were made aware of the Project Board's decision (on 24 March) that current underspend should be used to accelerate project activities where possible.

A number of risks have reduced including those related to the evaluation of the project (now a new contractor is in place) and the impact of restrictions related to Covid-19. The issue cited in the previous Highlight Report related to habitat improvement work on Rothiemurchus Estate has now been resolved. Issues remain related to funding for deer control in Tom an Uird forest and the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy. Regards the latter, the Project Board is still awaiting a response from the Carrbridge Capercaillie Group related to the feedback provided by the Project Board in February regarding the draft 2022/23 Action Plan for the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy.

OMT members present were made aware of the Project Board's intention to make a decision at their next meeting on 23 June on whether or not to seek a project extension. The project's grant expiry date is 30 July 2023. To enable the Project Board's decision regarding an extension, a full assessment will be made of the project activities which are currently anticipated to be completed by 30 July 2023 and those which need or would benefit from more time.

3. Update re working with another community

The Project Board decided at their last meeting on 24 March that the dog walking community should be approached as a new community to work with. The decision was made following input from the Operational Management Team and an analysis of all the communities suggested by OMT members. Members shared advice regarding next steps; it was felt that the dog walking community contains two distinct segments; professional dog walkers and individual dog owners and these segments could potentially be approached separately. Potential also exists to define a geographical area and work just with the dog walking community that uses that area. A discussion was had about the ongoing need for greater consistency in the messages shared with the dog walking community, e.g. dogs on lead vs close control, and to ensure that learning is used from the project's work with the mountain biking community, as another community of interest.

4. Scientific Advisory Committee Report regarding capercaillie conservation and management

An update was provided on the consultation process which is about to begin in response to the report. The process will see a wide range of stakeholders invited to share their views on the four areas of action outlined in the report. All members of OMT will be invited to share their views via an online survey and to attend a workshop in early May to review the views shared through the online survey and focus-in on how proposals on the four areas of action could be delivered. Ms Lorna Slater MSP, the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity will then be briefed and a plan of action will be delivered thereafter.

5. Comms look ahead: April to June

Comms activities over the next quarter will include: a Facebook quiz about the issue of disturbance to capercaillie and a series of Facebook posts sharing headlines from research about disturbance and some of the solutions in place to address the issue; seasonal signage encouraging responsible access in capercaillie areas from April to mid-August will be installed again around Carrbridge and in mountain biking areas in Badenoch and Strathspey; the habitat improvement grant scheme will be promoted - the next application window closes on 1 June; a blog about the habitat improvement work delivered with Rothiemurchus Estate will be written and published by Rothiemurchus; VisitScotland will be publishing a case study about the project's visitor research as part of the Scottish Tourism Observatory; a guest blog about the project will be hosted on RZSS channels; and a short explanatory video about the pilot genetic lek survey will be published on the project's Facebook page.