

Cairngorms Capercaillie Project Project Board - Meeting Notes

Meeting date: 24 March 2022, 13.00 - 15.00

Venue: Zoom

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

Apologies: Doug McAdam (CNPA Board member)

1. Action from previous meeting

The action was completed.

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

A Highlight Report detailing the project's activities and progress from 1 Jan to 24 March was discussed. Good progress is continuing to be made across the majority of work areas. The project budget remains on track. It was agreed 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 Carrbridge Capercaillie Group are still to respond to the feedback provided by the Project Board in February regarding the draft 2022/23 Action Plan for the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy. It was agreed that a decision should be taken at the next meeting on 23 June as to whether or not to seek a project extension. The project's grant expiry date is 30 July 2023. To enable the 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. Decision re working with another community

Board members reviewed a number of other communities that the project could potentially work with from July 2022 - July 2023. Of those communities it was agreed that the dog walking community should be approached.

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 Project Board members, with the exception of Doug*, 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. * CNPA Board members have been advised not to take part in the consultation process to ensure they can participate fully in the CNPA Board meeting that will follow to review the consultation results.

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.

Actions for next meeting

- 1. Carolyn:** Develop a proposal for a project extension based on the project activities which will not be completed by 30 July 2023 and those which would benefit from more time.
- 2. Carolyn:** Develop a plan for working with the dog walking community from July 2022 - July 2023.
- 3. Carolyn:** Work with the Carrbridge Capercaillie Group to identify a way forward in response to the Project Board's feedback on the draft 2022/23 Action Plan for the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy.