

## **Cairngorms Capercaillie Project Project Board - Meeting Notes**

**Meeting date:** 29 September 2022, 16.00 - 17.30

**Venue:** Teams

**Attendees:** Andy Ford (Director of Nature and Climate Change, CNPA)  
Anne Elliott (Operations Officer, NatureScot)  
Carolyn Robertson (Project Manager, CNPA)  
Claire Smith (Senior Conservation Officer, RSPB)  
Doug McAdam (CNPA Board member)  
Priscilla Gordon-Duff (Independent)  
Will Anderson (Chief Executive, Seafield and Strathspey Estates)

**Apologies:** Adam Smith (Independent)  
Debbie Greene (Operations Manager, NatureScot)

### **1. Reviews actions from previous meeting**

The actions listed below from the previous meeting were all completed:

- Work with the Carrbridge Capercaillie Group to develop a detailed programme of work and communications for the approved 2022/23 Action Plan for the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy. The programme of work should include a clear timetable for delivering the agreed actions and a meeting schedule for the group.
- Update the project extension proposal to include all deliverables and confirm which will be funded centrally and which will be funded through community action plans.
- Meet with NLHF to discuss the proposed extension to the project's grant expiry date.
- Update the risks in the Highlight Report to include the following: reduced capacity in the last 12 months of the project due to staff leaving fixed-term posts early to secure future employment; reduced ability to deliver actions in the last 12 months due to time constraints and contractor availability.

The following actions from the previous meeting are ongoing:

- Liaise with Seafield Estate re future and legacy plans for the Gamekeeper post funded through the project and employed by the Estate.
- Liaise with Scottish Forestry and RSPB re Scottish Forestry funding for the Capercaillie Advisory Officer post once the project ends.
- Liaise with Brook Forestry re the scope for short-term funding from the project for deer control in Tom an Uird Forest to potentially help to secure longer-term support for a whole forest approach to deer control in Tom an Uird.
- Review the potential for additionality within the mountain biking community work once the MTB Recreation Management Plan for Badenoch and Strathspey has been assessed through the Habitats Regulations Appraisal.

## 2. Review and discuss project progress July to September

A Highlight Report was reviewed detailing the project's activities from 1 July to 30 September. Good progress is continuing to be made across all areas of work. No issues or concerns were raised. Additional detail was provided on the following areas of work:

- The Carrbridge Capercaillie Group are making good progress delivering the recently approved Carrbridge Action Plan for 2022/23.
- The visitor experience audit (part of the Visitor Action Plan) will provide recommendations for how the sites involved and their experiences can be refined, promoted and facilitated in the short to medium-term to make it even easier for all visitor segments to enjoy the sites responsibly leading to long-term sustainable outcomes which stand to benefit both capercaillie and natural heritage more widely. One aspect of this work will involve developing a shared hierarchy of messages with the sites to trial, i.e. an order of messages that can be used consistently across the three sites to make it easier for visitors to enjoy the sites responsibly.
- A wide range of businesses attended the meeting in Ballater delivered in partnership with the CBP on 29 Sept as part of the Deeside Action Plan. The visitor segmentation model was shared (produced as part of the Visitor Action Plan). There was particularly positive engagement with the idea of a Hapi Capi trail to help drive visitors to businesses and provide a unique talking point about responsible enjoyment in capercaillie areas. The meeting provided an opportunity for the new Business Engagement Officer to explain his role to those present. He will be providing dedicated and tailored support to help businesses excel in promoting responsible enjoyment that will enhance visitor experiences and benefit the area's natural heritage. As per the project's work with the visitor community, whilst capercaillie is very much the foundation and catalyst for the Business Engagement Officer's work, the intention is to also achieve far wider-reaching, positive effects.
- The listening sessions with canine professionals (the first stage of work with the dog walking community) have revealed lots of common ground within the project's scope. The online survey to seek views from the wider dog walking community will go live in mid-November. The intention is to bring the canine professionals involved in the listening sessions back together again as potential exists for them to help promote the survey and encourage positive engagement with the project from the wider dog walking community.
- Attention was drawn to the revised timelines for the genetic diversity research. The final report which was due in October will instead be available in the new year and an interim report will be published in October. The plan to host a standalone workshop to share and discuss the insights from the genetic research will be revised. It's likely that a more integrated approach will be required with insights from the research shared as and when workshops take place in response to the national survey and NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee Report.

### **3. Update on the National Survey and NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee Report**

A discussion was had about the national survey result which is due to be published imminently by the RSPB. The FAQs about the survey (published when the survey began in November 2021) are still live on the project website. Outwith the project, CNPA and NatureScot are continuing to progress work on a Spatial Strategy in response to the NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee Report, consultation with stakeholders and CNPA and NatureScot Board discussions about the report. The national survey result strengthens the need for this work to continue and at pace.

### **4. Legacy planning in the context of the National Survey and NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee Report - identifying the project's priorities over the next 15 months**

Whilst all project activities still need to be delivered, Project Board members felt that those that are proving to, or now stand to have the greatest impact and leave the greatest legacy should be prioritised for the remainder of the project. Priority activities could be given more resource, for example, compared to other activities which are likely to have a lower impact in the short to medium-term. Insights from the project's monitoring and evaluation work will be key to identifying the activities that should be prioritised and an interim evaluation report will be available in December to inform decision-making. In the meantime, it was agreed that an initial review should be conducted of all project activities to identify those that are proving to, or now stand to have the greatest impact; those that stand to leave the greatest legacy; those that need to be carried forward into the aforementioned Spatial Strategy; and those for which there is an alternative pathway once the activity comes to an end within the project. The outcomes of this process will then be reviewed alongside the evaluation report in December and an updated programme of work for the project will be produced.

### **5. Comms looks ahead October to December**

Comms activities over the next quarter will include: An end of season report about the trial signage in Carrbridge will be published on the project website; a new post will be published to highlight some of the work delivered through the latest round of the grant scheme; volunteer sessions to improve capercaillie habitat will be promoted throughout the autumn / winter; the second in a new series of blogs will be published for people to learn more about members of the Project Board and the Operational Management Team - the blog will feature OMT member Neil Wilson from the Badenoch & Strathspey Trail Association; an online survey seeking views from the wider dog walking community will be published; the project will have a presence at the CBP conference and Scottish MTB conference.

**Actions:**

1. Liaise with Seafield Estate re future and legacy plans for the Gamekeeper post funded through the project and employed by the Estate.
2. Liaise with Scottish Forestry and RSPB re Scottish Forestry funding for the Capercaillie Advisory Officer post once the project ends.
3. Liaise with Brook Forestry re the scope for short-term funding from the project for deer control in Tom an Uird Forest to potentially help to secure longer-term support for a whole forest approach to deer control in Tom an Uird.
4. Review the potential for additionality within the mountain biking community work once the MTB Recreation Management Plan for Badenoch and Strathspey has been assessed through the Habitats Regulations Appraisal.
5. Re-visit conversations with BASC about a potential financial contribution to the project.
6. Conduct an initial review all project activities to identify activities that should be prioritised for the remainder of the project.