

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

- Meeting date:** 11 January 2023, 13.30 - 16.00
- Venue:** CNPA office, Grantown-on-Spey
- Attendees:** Andy Ford (Director of Nature and Climate Change, CNPA)  
Ann Nicol (Heritage Pathfinder)  
Debbie Greene (Operations Manager, NatureScot)  
Carolyn Robertson (Project Manager, CNPA)  
Dan Tomes (Area Manager, RSPB)  
Will Anderson (Chief Executive, Seafield and Strathspey Estates)
- Apologies:** Adam Smith (Independent)  
Doug McAdam (CNPA Board member)  
Priscilla Gordon-Duff (Independent)

The meeting focused on a review of the project's activities to date, the findings, lessons and evidence of impacts at this stage, and the main priorities for the remaining 12 months of the project. In response, the following points were raised and discussed:

- It was confirmed that the project has been granted an extension to the original grant expiry date. The project's activities will now end in December 2023 instead of July 2023. The final evaluation of the project will be completed in January 2024.
- Progress has been made across all areas of the project. It was suggested that this could be presented in the form of a diagram highlighting the main issues affecting capercaillie and those which the project has had an impact on and to what degree.
- So far, 63% of landmanagers within the National Park with capercaillie on their land have actively engaged with the project, i.e. they've used project resources to deliver work on the ground and or they are supporting wider project work. It was agreed that it would be useful to reflect on the levels of landmanager engagement achieved by the EU LIFE funded project ('Urgent Conservation Management for Scottish Capercaillie'). Looking ahead, it's increasingly important that all landmanagers within the National Park with capercaillie on their land are involved in a collective effort to help the species. It would therefore be useful to identify reasons why some landmanagers have not yet engaged with the project.

- The final evaluation of the project will include a number of case studies that will focus-in on specific activities. The aim will be to share more detailed information about the impacts of specific activities if, for example, they are particularly innovative and or there are clear impacts on both people and capercaillie. Case studies will include the project's work to protect lek sites from disturbance this spring using Rangers and Police Scotland support, trial signage, peer to peer messaging amongst birders and photographers, support from residents and potentially cameras. This multi-faceted approach is new and stands to have an immediate impact on both people and capercaillie. A case study will also be developed around Hapi Capis (small wooden capercaillies) which have been adopted by residents and visitors in significant numbers over the course of the project, potentially helping to raise awareness and create more advocates locally.
- It is both an Approved Purpose of the project and a priority over the next 12 months to share the project's learning related to community-led work with other environmental / species focused projects in Scotland and further afield. To help do this, the project will deliver an open event this autumn, working with the Heritage Horizons Cairngorms 2030 project team, to share learning related to mobilising communities and measuring impact.
- It was confirmed that the project will start the handover process with each community at different points over the next 12 months, depending on when the work with the community began. Identifying how the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy will be delivered in future is therefore the project's first priority and the respective handover is due to be complete by July.
- In February 2022, a subgroup of the NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee, advised that capercaillie could be lost within two to three decades if more action is not delivered and quickly. News was also announced in September that the UK capercaillie population has declined by 51% since 2015/16; the lowest recorded level since the start of the national survey in 1992 - 1994. The idea of developing a Capercaillie Emergency Plan in response was supported by members of the Board. It was felt that such a plan could provide a strong mechanism for the project's work to continue and therefore secure a firm legacy. It could also provide a place for all other capercaillie conservation work, and work that stands to benefit capercaillie, to come together to enable a coordinated effort. NLHF are supportive of the idea that the project's legacy is delivered through a Capercaillie Emergency Plan and project resource is used to help develop the plan.
- Board members discussed the potential for mixed messages if the project plays a lead role in writing a Capercaillie Emergency Plan given that the contents will inevitably include activities that are beyond the project's scope. The project also has limited extra capacity over the next 12 months. It was therefore felt that the project's role in developing the plan should be focused just on facilitation, for example helping to kickstart the plan by writing up the project's own learning and recommendations in the first instance.

- It was noted that a response from Scottish Government is key to confidently developing the Capercaillie Emergency Plan. It was also noted that the Wildlife Habitat Charitable Trust (WHCT) would be interested in receiving a formal application for funding to support the Capercaillie Emergency Plan. The application window for major grant applications is likely to be in June/July 2023.

**Actions:**

1. Ann and Carolyn to integrate into the final evaluation report feedback from Project Board members re the presentation and narrative around some evaluation information, e.g. the project's impact on the rural economy, including employment.
2. Andy and Carolyn to progress the idea of a Capercaillie Emergency Plan and the project helping to facilitate the development of the plan.
3. Carolyn to share an overview of the handover points for all community work.