



Autumn 2023

## Project Briefing

This briefing sets out the work of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project to scope and develop plans for accessible and welcoming dog friendly spaces, places and routes in Badenoch and Strathspey to reduce disturbance to capercaillie by dogs, and help to develop a dog friendly Cairngorms where wildlife can thrive.

### Background

The Cairngorms Capercaillie Project, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and led by the Cairngorms National Park Authority, is the coming together of communities in the Cairngorms National Park, including the dog walking community, to help secure the long-term survival of capercaillie in the UK.

Badenoch and Strathspey, within the Cairngorms National Park, is home to over 6,200 resident dogs and around 150,000 visiting dogs each year. The area is also home to 80% of the UK capercaillie population.

Research shows that being able to exercise dogs off-lead is the single most important requirement for people walking dogs and that dog walkers specifically seek places for off-lead activity. This can cause capercaillie to avoid areas of good habitat, thereby limiting the amount of space they have to live. Research also shows that people with dogs are a greater cause of disturbance to wildlife than people alone, and that lone dogs can flush birds 100% of the time. This can cause birds unnecessary stress; force them to leave their nests in the case of ground-nesting birds like capercaillie; and can separate mothers from their dependent young. Work with the dog walking community is therefore an essential part of helping capercaillie and other wildlife to thrive in the Cairngorms.

Last year, canine professionals in Badenoch and Strathspey including dog walkers, trainers, breeders, vets, groomers, people who work dogs professionally and use assistance dogs, were asked to share their views about exercising dogs in Badenoch and Strathspey. Their views were used to create an online survey for the wider dog walking community to complete. 265 people who own dogs or have a connection to dogs in Badenoch and Strathspey shared their views through the online survey.



The online survey results were used to identify areas of common ground, and a series of facilitated workshops were held for resident dog walkers in Badenoch and Strathspey to identify and prioritise actions based on those areas of common ground.

Through the workshops, the following vision was developed: **A dog friendly Cairngorms where wildlife can thrive.** To achieve this vision, the following actions were identified:

- Create and develop dog walking spaces in Badenoch and Strathspey, ideally in woodlands and accessible on foot from communities, to meet the needs of dogs and their owners away from sensitive areas for wildlife.
- Build knowledge around capercaillie by developing an active community of dog owners in Badenoch and Strathspey with information and understanding at its heart.

### Next steps

The Cairngorms Capercaillie Project is committed to enabling the dog walking community in Badenoch and Strathspey to make as much progress as possible towards the vision of a 'dog friendly Cairngorms where wildlife can thrive'. Once the project ends, the Park Authority will continue to support work towards this vision. Before then, the project will undertake the following steps:

1. Work with members of the local dog walking community to identify and map the spaces, places and routes in Badenoch and Strathspey that resident dog owners and professional dog walkers value most.
2. Screen the mapped spaces, places and routes for capercaillie disturbance impacts. Where disturbance to capercaillie is an issue, work with the local dog walking community and respective land managers to scope measures to reduce disturbance.
3. In the areas valued by dog walkers where disturbance to capercaillie and other wildlife is not an issue, work with the local dog walking community and respective land managers to scope the potential to improve those areas for dog walking.
4. Using the outcomes from steps 2 and 3, develop a first draft of a 'Pawprint system' that provides information for dog walkers about the measures in place to enable responsible dog walking in the areas that the dog walking community values.
5. Seek feedback on the first draft of the 'Pawprint system' from the local dog walking community and land managers and develop the system in response.



6. Seek feedback on a second draft of the 'Pawprint system' from the local dog walking community, land managers and the Local Outdoor Access Forum and refine the system in response to produce a final version.
7. Develop a costed plan for delivering the 'Pawprint system' and secure support for delivery from all relevant parties.

### **Roles and responsibilities**

The Cairngorms Capercaillie Project is responsible for facilitating the process of reducing disturbance to capercaillie by dogs and in so doing, helping to create a dog friendly Cairngorms where wildlife can thrive.

As the project is led by the Cairngorms National Park Authority, it is ideally positioned to facilitate a coordinated approach at scale to the development of accessible and welcoming dog friendly exercise spaces, places and routes, initially in Badenoch and Strathspey. By enabling a coordinated and joined-up approach, all interested parties stand to benefit.

The project is responsible for employing a dedicated member of staff to support this area of work; identifying and mapping the spaces, places and routes in Badenoch and Strathspey that resident dog owners and professional dog walkers value most; and screening those areas for capercaillie disturbance impacts.

The project is responsible for enabling dialogue between parties to identify a range of management measures that will reduce the risk of disturbance to capercaillie and provide quality access experiences for dog walkers. It is also responsible for presenting this information in the form of a simple 'Pawprint system' for dog walkers.

The project respects the existing dog friendly exercise spaces in Badenoch and Strathspey that are already contributing towards the vision of a dog friendly Cairngorms where wildlife can thrive. The project strongly advocates the positive role that these spaces are playing and wishes to complement and work alongside them to help the growing numbers of resident and visiting dog owners to enjoy the National Park responsibly.

As the Park Authority and therefore the project does not own any land, the responsibility of creating, managing and maintaining dog friendly exercise spaces, places and routes lies with the respective land manager, or third-party if the responsibility is given by the land manager to a business, community group or other entity.



If land managers are interested in a third-party operating an existing and or new dog friendly exercise space on their land, the project will make the land manager aware of potential interested parties and aim to coordinate and facilitate contacts between those parties.

The project is open to all contact from land managers in Badenoch and Strathspey with an interest in making land available for exercising dogs, particularly areas of land within walking distance of communities that provide a compelling alternative to exercising dogs in capercaillie sensitive areas. The project is also open to all contact from any groups, organisations or other entities interested in helping to operate these spaces.

### **Intended outputs**

1. A map of spaces, places and routes in Badenoch and Strathspey that resident dog owners and professional dog walkers value most.
2. A 'Pawprint system' for dog walkers which provides clear and simple information about the measures in place in the mapped areas to enable responsible dog walking.
3. A costed plan for delivering the 'Pawprint system' where additional work is needed, e.g., communications, infrastructure on the ground.
4. A summary of the support secured from all parties including the Park Authority to enable delivery of the 'Pawprint system' from 2024.