
CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

- Title:** Supporting the delivery of the Capercaillie Framework
- Prepared by:** Adam Streeter-Smith, Outdoor Access Officer
- Purpose:** To update members on the work being undertaken to deliver the Capercaillie Framework, recent planning applications that could affect capercaillie breeding success and to seek advice on encouraging responsible access on sensitive capercaillie sites.

Advice Sought

1. *What is the LOAF's view on existing capercaillie signage, the use of more engaging imagery (such as hens and chicks) and the use of stronger messages to relate responsible behaviour to protecting hens and chicks?*
2. *Does the LOAF support a more site specific approach to signage and recreation management whereby:*
 - a. *areas identified as low risk require dogs on paths*
 - b. *areas identified as medium to high risk require dogs on leads and people on paths?*

Background

Capercaillie Framework

1. The Capercaillie Framework draws together existing information about capercaillie and their management, in order to better co-ordinate deployment of management measures at a landscape scale. The Framework guides conservation effort over the long-term to increase the capercaillie population in the Cairngorms National Park.
2. Long term conservation success is predicated on three main issues - improving habitat management, including woodland expansion, reducing disturbance and developing mitigation to manage impacts on local populations for developments.
3. To reduce disturbance the management priorities are to promote responsible access and dog walking and to reduce habitat fragmentation by active path management and realignment.

The Capercaillie Framework Heritage Lottery Bid

4. The Cairngorms National Park Authority and key partners including RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, James Hutton Institute and the Game Conservancy have developed a package of works submitted to Heritage Lottery and LEADER to deliver projects that support the ongoing conservation and enhancement of capercaillie in the Park.
5. The Project objectives are to:
 - a. To build support for capercaillie conservation, helping people to understand and value their natural heritage, the benefits it can bring and how their actions can affect it;
 - b. To work with communities in the National Park to develop sustainable approaches to recreation, meeting residents' and visitors' needs whilst minimising impact on capercaillie; and
 - c. To develop a programme of conservation action to support the long-term survival of the species.
6. Starting with Carr-bridge in the development phase and rolling out to other communities in the delivery phase we will work closely with communities to improve the experience and facilities for residents and visitors while minimizing impact on capercaillie. This could include creating improvements to the path networks, better facilities for off-lead dog waking, creating refuges for capercaillie by minimising informal path development on sites agreed with the community and by regular countryside ranger activity.

Planning and development- An Camus Mòr

7. As the Planning Authority the CNPA is legally bound to assess whether any development will have an impact on European protected sites such as Special Protection Areas and the qualifying interests such as otter or capercaillie. This assessment takes the form of a Habitats Regulation Appraisal detailing the impacts and the mitigation, if possible, of those impacts. A development can only be approved if the competent authority (in this case the CNPA acting as planning authority) is certain that there will not be significant effects on the integrity of the European protected sites.
8. The recent development of housing in Boat of Garten is such as case. Here it was identified in the HRA that the construction of 36 houses adjacent to a woodland with a resident capercaillie population would have a significant effect on the both the population directly and the nearby protected sites. The final mitigation package that was agreed included measures to:

- a. Request that dog walkers keep dogs on leads from 1st of April to the 15th of August in the medium to high quality brood habitat areas of Boat wood:
 - b. Request that the public stay on paths in the areas of medium to high quality brood habitat from 1st of April to the 15th of August:
 - c. Develop native vegetation screening alongside paths in areas of high quality brood habitat:
 - d. Measure in introduce temporary screening whilst effective natural screening is established:
 - e. Limit construction access to the site:
 - f. Double fencing around the development and the provision of s single access point into the woodland:
 - g. Alternative dog walking areas.
9. The An Camus Mòr (ACM) development could create a new community of up to 1500 houses. It would mean a new centre of population that its residents would recreate from. The additional recreation would be likely to have a significant effect on nearby populations of capercaillie and designated sites that have capercaillie because it would increase recreational disturbance. In order to assess the proposals, the CNPA modelled the additional recreation visits that might occur from ACM based on the Scottish Participation in Nature Survey. We estimated that ACM residents and visitors could make up to 780,000 recreational visits to the outdoors every year. The majority (68%; up to 530,000 visits) will be on foot from home, and 96% of these (up to 510,000) will involve a walk of up to 5 miles in total length. We estimated that around 105,000 visits will involve a round trip car travel distance of 10 miles or less. 83% of visits are predicted to be to destinations visited regularly - at least once a week or more frequently. The main activity on 85% of visits will be walking, and 52% of visits will be accompanied by a dog.
10. The predictions therefore indicate that a large proportion of recreational visits to the outdoors will take place in and around An Camas Mor i.e Glenmore, Abernethy, Rothiemurchus. Significant volumes of visits are predicted at some popular locations including Loch an Eilean, Coylumbridge, Inverdrurie, Whitewell, Garten Wood, Loch Morlich. In addition, some locations that aren't currently well used for recreation, but are conveniently located in relation to An Camas Mor, are also predicted to receive substantial numbers of visits including Achnahatnich, Loch Pityoulis, and Inchriach Forest.
11. The HRA for the planning permission in principle for An Camus Mor identified a suite of possible mitigation proposals such as those used at Boat of Garten but also including path realignments that would result in no net increase in disturbance to capercaillie from the residents of An Camus Mor. If the Decision Notice for the ACM application is issued (it cannot be issued unless the applicant agrees to pay significant planning obligations), the applicant will need to apply to discharge the condition that requires a Recreation

Management Plan. That application will open to public consultation through the planning process and will be subject to a further HRA that must conclude that there will not be a significant effect on Natura sites before it could be approved.

Further developing core messages to reduce capercaillie disturbance

12. There is still consensus between the capercaillie biodiversity action group and the CNPA that the risk of disturbance to capercaillie is best mitigated through dogs being on leads during the bird breeding season in sensitive areas. A position previously supported by the LOAF.
13. Lessons learned from the work undertaken in Boat of Garten by the community countryside ranger and the James Hutton Institute identified that effective recreation management should include:
 - a. Do as much early community listening and engagement as possible;
 - b. Tell an engaging story- people were more moved to care about hens and chicks rather than males lekking;
 - c. Identify key values underlying user behaviour, so that messages can be framed accordingly;
 - d. Be clear and strategic on the kinds of intervention available and required;
 - e. Define and communicate clearly behaviour expectations;
 - f. Acknowledge and mitigate the amenity deficit;
 - g. Provide genuine substitutes for affected paths or areas based on user's needs;
 - h. Make specific provision for 'interaction avoiders';
 - i. Secure sufficient resources to communicate and implement interventions.
14. At present our approach to promoting responsible behaviour on sensitive sites has been to support the use of the blue and white signage (see appendix 1) at key entrances and exits as well as supporting ranger services to raise awareness through face to face contact.
15. Much of the messaging has used imagery of the male capercaillie but it is hens that are at greatest risk of disturbance.

What is the LOAF's view on existing capercaillie signage, the use of more engaging imagery (such as hens and chicks) and the use of stronger messages to relate responsible behaviour to protecting hens and chicks?

16. The work of the James Hutton Institute highlights that there is an opportunity to secure responsible behaviour through a zoned approach because dog walkers can cope with sophisticated zoning. For example keeping your dogs on paths in low risk areas and on a lead in medium or high risk areas. At present differing land managers take differing

approaches with some seeking a blanket requirement for dogs on leads and others a more pragmatic dogs on leads in certain areas.

Does the LOAF support a more site specific approach to signage and recreation management whereby:

- a. **areas identified as low risk require dogs on paths**
- b. **areas identified as medium to high risk require dogs on leads and people on paths?**

17. Going forward the CNPA intends to work with SNH, Seafieled Estate and RSPB Scotland to develop more engaging threshold and zone signage in and around Boat woods.

Adam Streeter-Smith
Outdoor Access Officer

adamstreetersmith@cairngorms.co.uk

Appendix One

