



For Discussion

Title: Cairngorms Capercaillie Project

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Purpose

This paper presents the latest delivery updates on the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project.

Recommendations

The Performance Committee is asked to review delivery updates and consider:

- a) progress towards the project's agreed purposes;
- b) any strategically significant impacts on delivery of the CNPA's Corporate Plan and National Park Partnership Plan;
- c) any material impacts on the CNPA's strategic risk management.

Performance Dashboard

Performance Measure: Progress towards the project's agreed purposes	Rating	Commentary
Empower communities to help ensure the survival of capercaillie through community led conservation, by implementing the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy and developing, agreeing and implementing action plans with additional communities.	Green	Overall, positive progress is continuing to be made in the delivery of Action Plans in place with the visitor, mountain biking, Deeside and Carrbridge communities, and more recently with the dog walking community in Badenoch and Strathspey.
Raise awareness and increase understanding of the challenges facing capercaillie through a variety of means including social media activities and events, a new online Engagement platform, volunteer work, a public app, new resources for schools and genetics analysis.	Green	Volunteers have donated over 3,300 hours to the project. On and offline engagement continues to grow. Learning experiences have begun to be developed with RZSS for delivery post project at the Highland Wildlife Park and the genetic analysis work is complete.
Work with landowners to implement plans to improve and manage around 9,000 hectares of habitat across six	Green	Habitat improvement work continues on Balmoral, Seafield, Rothiemurchus. Abernethy and Tom an Uird Forest.



Performance Measure: Progress towards the project's agreed purposes	Rating	Commentary
estates for the benefit of capercaillie; enable landowners to play their part in capercaillie conservation via a third-party grant scheme targeting landholdings in capercaillie areas.		Predator management continues on Seafield and Rothiemurchus. All work delivered through the project grant scheme is now complete.
Monitor, test and evaluate ideas throughout delivery, applying learning from the project to refine activities including habitat improvement work, survey techniques, promotional activities and the community action planning model.	Green	An interim evaluation of all project activities has been conducted and the findings reviewed by the project's Operational Management Team, Project Board and NLHF. Work is ongoing to prepare for a final evaluation of the project which will be available in December.
Develop an innovative and replicable model for community-led species conservation that enables communities to successfully coexist with their natural heritage, sharing the project's findings internally and externally with UK organisations, and further afield, to create a legacy of learning.	Green	The model developed through initial work with Carrbridge and subsequently modified through adaptive learning continues to be used effectively across the project, including, most recently, with the dog walking community. Plans are underway to partner with the Cairngorms 2030 project to host a series of 'Sharing the learning' events this autumn. The events will see key learnings shared from both the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project and Cairngorms 2030's development phase. The intended outcome for the events is that learning from the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project strengthens future community-led action across the Cairngorms National Park and beyond.

Strategic Background

1. The most recent update to the Board on strategic objectives as set out in the agreed Corporate Plan was presented at the [March 2023](#) CNPA Board meeting. The Park Authority's strategic objectives of relevance to consideration of the delivery of the programme reporting presented with this paper are:



- a) Delivery of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project directly impacts on the National Park Partnership Plan action to 'Deliver a work programme to support capercaillie conservation in the Cairngorms, based on best available evidence; and the associated Corporate Plan action to 'lead on a capercaillie emergency plan and long-term strategy'.
2. The latest review of the Strategic Risk Register was considered by the Audit and Risk Committee at the [December 2022 meeting](#). Strategic risks of relevance to consideration of performance of the programmes of work considered by this paper are:
- a) A9.3 Staffing: additional externally funded projects strains staff workload capacity with increased risks of stress and reduced morale.
 - b) 11.2 Strategic Risk Resourcing: the end of major programme investments (Tomintoul and Glenlivet, LEADER) requires significant ongoing staffing to manage audit and legacy which the Authority finds difficult to resource.
 - c) A14.1 Reputation: One-off, high-profile incidents and / or vociferous social media correspondents have an undue influence on the Authority's positive reputation.
 - d) A27 Technical: approaches to conservation and protection of endangered species may be insufficient to achieve associated strategic outcomes
3. The programmes of activity under consideration here also fit with the priorities of the current National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP), specifically Objective A13 and the action to 'Deliver a work programme to support capercaillie conservation in the Cairngorms, based on the best available evidence'.

Performance Overview: Delivery Against Strategic Expectations

4. Positive progress has been made against all of the project's approved purposes. The quarterly report to National Lottery Heritage Fund (Annex 1) highlights the programme is well advanced and on track to deliver project outcomes.
5. Corporate Plan and National Park Partnership Plan actions and indicators position the activities of the NLHF funded project within the context of wider CNPA and partner work on land management, visitor experience and rural development. This work is captured in the NPPP 2022 – 27 action to 'Deliver a work programme to support capercaillie conservation in the Cairngorms, based on the best available evidence'.



6. The project has a role in helping to outline a framework for the work programme ensuring the project's legacy is embedded in the work of CNPA and partners. Activities to inform CNPA strategic planning, strengthen information flow and support adaptive project and legacy planning include:
 - a) The CNPA visitor management and access teams are actively contributing to the development of a spatial plan for capercaillie conservation. Transitional planning is in place to manage the project's legacy regarding access management as part of the development of Active Cairngorms.
 - b) Members of the CNPA Access and Recreation team are involved in the project's current work with the dog walking community which will see the development of a 5-year programme of actions, representative of the dog walking community's views, for delivery post-project led by CNPA.
 - c) Insights and learning from the project's model for community-led species conservation and work with communities has been integrated into the programme of engagement work in the delivery phase application for Heritage Horizons: Cairngorms 2030.

Performance Overview: Risks Under Management

7. All project risks and issues, as identified in the quarterly progress report, are either in a favourable status or being managed closely at Project Board level with mitigation plans in place.
8. Staffing: the project is operating with sufficient staff capacity to achieve its objectives and additional staffing resource to fast track current work with the dog walking community has been agreed in principle at Project Board level and with NLHF.
9. Resourcing audit and legacy: The Project Board agreed in June 2022 that the project should seek an extension to the original grant expiry (30 July 2023) in order to secure a firm legacy across all areas of work within the project. NLHF approved the extension which will see the project's activities end in December 2023 and the project formally end in January 2024. No additional funding is required. The extension will be financed by the project's current budget.
10. Legacy planning is ongoing with an outline legacy plan recently reviewed with Project Board and NLHF. Project staff are working closely with colleagues and partners to identify where different aspects of the project's work will be accommodated both within CNPA and with partners; and where project



activities will come to a natural conclusion. Work to develop the legacy plan is also informed by planning for delivery of the NPPP 2022 – 27 action and the creation of a framework for a future work programme, or 'Emergency Plan'.

11.Reputation:

- a) An Evaluation Framework is in place for the project to understand the successes and challenges involved in delivering the project and to report on the extent to which the project has achieved its goals. The Framework has been updated in response to ensure it provides a thorough basis for effectively reporting the outcomes and impacts of the work to others, internally and externally.
- b) The wider context of capercaillie conservation remains a highly contentious and high-profile arena, attracting much comment and polarised opinion. Current discourse is focused primarily on the outcomes of the NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee's February 2022 report and the recommendation therein regarding predator management. Project staff, with support from Project Board members where relevant, are continuing to ensure the project scope and legacy is clearly communicated in this context.
- c) The future work programme, or 'Emergency Plan' will contain a legacy for the project's work where there is overlap in the wider context of activity to support capercaillie conservation. The Project can play a crucial role in defining the scope of, and framework for, the development of an Emergency Plan to ensure learning is not lost and the legacy is secure. There is a risk that this further confuses messaging around the scope and remit of the project.
- d) The project's genetic diversity research undertaken by RZSS is now complete. The aim of this work was to provide information that can underpin any future decisions on the feasibility and desirability of species reinforcement. The (draft) report includes information on the robustness of the Scottish population in terms of its genetic diversity and recommends that action to expand the gene pool will aid the long-term survival of capercaillie in the UK. Reinforcement is a complex issue, requiring further investigation before any firm position can be taken.

12.Technical: CNPA chairs the Scottish Capercaillie Group and ensures alignment of activity with technical experts on this group that are not directly involved in the project and legacy planning. CNPA works closely with NatureScot in progressing work on a Spatial Strategy, seeking technical input and advice



from partners, Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group members and advisory forums as and when necessary.

13. There is a risk that the CCP's bottom-up, collaborative approach that has proven very successful with groups to date (eg mountain biking community) is confused with, and therefore undermined by, a more top-down, instructive approach to defining and managing access messaging and refuges. CNPA is working with NatureScot as part of the review of nation-wide access messaging to ensure lessons learnt from the project inform national campaigns.

Conclusions: Performance Overview and Matters Meriting Strategic Review

14. There are no matters of strategic significance which merit escalation at this time in the opinion of senior managers leading the Cairngorms NPA's linkage to the areas of activity covered by this paper and associated reports.

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25 May 2023

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