



## For Discussion

**Title:** Cairngorms Nature Festival

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### Purpose

This paper presents an overview of the Cairngorms Nature Festival (CNF), a summary of activity for the event in 2023 and an assessment of performance against strategic aims and objectives.

### Recommendations

The performance committee is asked to review delivery updates and consider

- a) progress against delivery of the project objectives;
- b) summary of the 2023 event; and
- c) any strategically significant impacts on delivery

### Strategic background

1. Cairngorms Nature Festival (CNF) is one of the most high-profile events in the National Park for raising awareness and understanding of, and building public support for, objectives in the National Park Partnership Plan and in particular the collective work towards Nature objectives regarding land management, deer and moorland management, and ecosystem restoration.
2. The Festival also plays a key, supporting role in the delivery of objectives across the suite of activity in the NPPP, notably: B9: Mental and physical health; B10: A Park for All; B11: Volunteering and outdoor learning; and C10: Cultural heritage
3. The CNF supports the Heritage Horizons: Cairngorms 2030 programme in raising awareness and understanding of the nature and climate emergencies; inspiring people to take forwards pro-environmental behaviours; creating a greater connection to landscapes and fostering a sense of place; and shaping the way we engage with residents and visitors.
4. CNF is the key delivery mechanism for meeting one of the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan's three aims: 'Engaging, inspiring and encouraging local communities and



communities of interest to value and care for nature, be proud of the conservation work in the Cairngorms and want to do something to protect and enhance their natural heritage’.

5. The festival forms the backbone of the associated priority areas of work to recognise & celebrate good conservation work; increase engagement and provide opportunities to get involved; and get more people actively and responsibly enjoying nature.

## Performance Dashboard

Performance Measure: delivery of project objectives	Rating	Commentary
To raise the profile of the Cairngorms National Park as an exceptional place for wildlife	Green	<p>New Cairngorms Nature Festival website developed for 2023. Increased digital activity and greater awareness on social media channels, local Facebook community groups, a targeted ad campaign and digital advertisement with external news sites.</p> <p>Social media reach as of 19 May 308,631, with 4,325 link clicks through to website.</p> <p>National media coverage through radio and print, evidence of national reach also through social media.</p>
To showcase and celebrate the work of land managers and the Cairngorms Nature partnership	Amber	<p>60 partners were involved in running events: 16 conservation organisations; 7 estates; 10 ranger services; 13 community groups; 21 businesses and individuals</p> <p>More work to be done with stakeholders to develop and involve more event providers in future. As experience and capacity builds in experienced event providers, CNPA will be able to under-represented groups more.</p>
To increase engagement with nature amongst target audiences and enthuse target audiences about the unique nature of the Cairngorms	Green	<p>Feedback an evaluation from 2023 will provide information on audience profile.</p> <p>Art competition engaged with 15 schools and communities across the Park. 29 families attended the art finale event</p>



Performance Measure: delivery of project objectives	Rating	Commentary
		taking part in nature activities with rangers,  CNF has encompassed Green Health Week. Large numbers of local participants combining health with showcasing nature.
To act as a mechanism towards moving people along the engagement pathway	Green	Event participation includes the opportunity to 'opt-in to hear more about the events and nature activities in the National Park.' In 2022 this resulted in 186 sign-ups for e-newsletters. Figures for 2023 will be available in due course.  The social media plan ensured follow up opportunities were identified in advance, particularly around volunteering opportunities, and promoted as part of that pathway to capitalise on event success.
Bringing people together to build a sense of community around Cairngorms Nature	Amber	Over 60 partners contributed time and resources to deliver events.  Events provide opportunities for people to meet and enjoy nature together in their communities i.e from one event in Aviemore there is now a Grantown moth group.  More work needed to identify opportunities for communities and ongoing volunteering to support delivery of Cairngorms Nature work.  Social media engagement provided a forum for dialogue and conversations about nature highlighting priority species and ongoing work and opportunities.
Support local businesses, artists, creatives, organisations and communities	Amber	Cairngorms Business Partnership is involved in CNF planning and delivery. The programme included inclusive weekend events to encourage overnight stays.



Performance Measure: delivery of project objectives	Rating	Commentary
		<p>The Festival supported local business through promotion of their paid festival events, using local suppliers for delivery of CNP events.</p> <p>Potential for better collaboration in the future eg in partnering businesses with charities and community groups for sponsorships and ongoing relationships.</p>
Increasing accessibility to the National Park and the benefits of being in nature	Green	<p>Events tailored for people with disabilities and isolated/hard to reach groups - i.e handbiking, accessible canoeing, off-road wheelchair taster and refugee health walk.</p> <p>Over 50% of the events are low cost or free of charge which is key to inclusion in the Park.</p> <p>Currently only a small number of land management focused events and accessible events, more of these types of events could be developed if staff resource was increased.</p> <p>New website serves as an information hub where events can be easily searched using a range of criteria including: wheelchair access, toilets, family friendly and free events. On each event page, public transport and full accessibility information is displayed, including any hidden costs such as parking fees.</p>



## Strategic risk management

6. The latest review of the Strategic Risk Register was considered by the Audit and Risk Committee in December 2022. 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.
    - Staff resource required to support the Festival has increased and put strain on individual CNPA staff members and teams during peak planning and delivery periods. This includes across departments in CNPA, particularly communications teams and ranger services. There is a risk that the demands on CNPA time and resource exceed those currently available. This risk is under management by the Operational Management Team as part of staff work plans and reviews of resource priorities and allocations. The current budget is sufficient to run the Festival.
  - b) **A 28 Staffing:** delivery of key outcomes is impacted by staff turnover, particularly in project teams.
    - Organisation and delivery of the Festival is significantly impacted by continuity, or lack of, in the staff team. Relationships with event providers and 'lessons learnt' from successive years is critical to success. The post is currently a 3 yr fixed term contract, due to end in November 2024. Fixed term contracts are under periodic review by Senior Management Team to manage this risk.
  - c) **A26 Reputational:** key communications activities, messaging and (in some cases) brand awareness raising can be dependent on partner collaboration rather than under direct control, with potential for ineffective or disjointed communication outcomes.
    - There is an expectation on CNPA to provide sufficient support to event providers. A shortfall in meeting this expectation could result in poorly planned and delivered events and loss of confidence in partners to invest their time and resources to develop, promote and deliver Festival events to a high standard.
    - The Festival has built strong relationships with over 60 partners and stakeholders delivering events over a decade. There is an expectation that it will do so in the future.



- d) **A14.1 Reputational:** One-off, high profile incidents and / or vociferous social media correspondents have an undue influence on the Authority's positive reputation.
- Festival events are delivered by partner organisations, with CNPA providing primarily a co-ordinating and promotional role. However, by association and profile, the Park Authority's reputation is closely associated with the quality of events. Equally, Festival events are branded and therefore associated with communication of the brand values. There is a risk that negative PR or poor quality reflect on the National Park and Park Authority.

## 2023 Festival summary

Number of events	Event theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 82 distinct events</li> <li>• 158 activities (instances of the events)</li> <li>• 60 partners - 16 conservation organisations; 7 estates; 10 ranger services; 13 community groups; 21 businesses and individuals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 volunteering events</li> <li>• 55 events providing a unique nature experience</li> <li>• 57 outdoor activities</li> <li>• 35 guided walks</li> <li>• 10 events focusing on music, arts and culture</li> <li>• 25 events enabling training and skills development</li> </ul>
Event audience	Event type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 50 family friendly events</li> <li>• 32 adult-only events</li> <li>• 31 events with wheelchair access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 43 free events (52%)</li> <li>• 12 drop-in events</li> <li>• 60 bookable events – with a total capacity of 1700</li> <li>• 23 events that do not require booking many of which had unlimited capacity</li> </ul>

### Art competition

7. 15 schools involved in art competition with 29 finalists – over 110 attendees at Grand Prizegiving Ceremony at Mar Lodge Ballroom

### Volunteering events

8. Capercaillie Habitat event at Balmoral, Conservation Volunteering at Mar Lodge, Tree Nursery at Cairngorms Connect, Protecting Pinewoods with FLS Glenmore
9. NESBReC Wildlife Recording, OATS Path Maintenance
10. Butterfly Conservation - Kentish Glory Egg Hunt
11. Twelve volunteer Rangers supported 7 events across the Nature Festival



## Festival highlights

12. The 'Kentish Glory Moth Trap and Egg Hunt' event in Aviemore - organised by Butterfly Conservation - was attended by over 20 people, from experts to complete beginners. The event has inspired participants to create the Grantown Moth Group. The group matches up enthusiasts with those new to nature, breaking down barriers and creating a welcoming community for learning, biological recording, and the enjoyment of nature.
13. The Cairngorms Nature Festival Art Competition reached over 1000 pupils in 15 primary schools across the Park. Over 110 people attended the Grand Prizegiving Ceremony in the Ballroom at Mar Lodge Estate. The winners of each category received the Grand Prize of a trip for their entire class to the Highland Wildlife Park.
14. Cairngorms Nature Festival worked in partnership with Nature 4 Health to organise a hike up Meall 'a Bhuachaille and lunch at Ryvoan Bothy for 31 refugees. Pete Short, one of the CNPA Rangers who supported the walk, described the day as "one of the most rewarding days as a Ranger I have had".

## Festival attendees

15. Via Eventbrite bookable events we can collect information that allows us to establish attendee demographics and feedback on marketing, transport, ease of access etc. Many event providers manage their own bookings, and for feedback on these events we will communicate with them directly. Feedback is also being collected from event providers and attendees via online surveys.
16. From the feedback so far 33% of attendees were resident in CNP, 35% day trippers from within 50 miles, the remainder are from further afield including one family from outside the UK. 50% of respondents travelled to the National Park specifically for the CNF.



## Website and social media coverage and reach

Website Analytics	2022	2023
Total pageviews	37,939	50,834
Avg Time on Page	1m 20s	2m 35s

Page Title	Page views
Home page	11,606
Events page	11,464
Map	1,542
Concert, Ceilidh & Cocktails Event	910
Our Partners	565

17. Through paid social media advertisement on the National Park and Nature channels:  
Reach of 308,631 - 4,325 link clicks through to Cairngorms Nature Festival website  
A more in-depth analysis of our social media engagement will be undertaken over the coming weeks.

## Festival feedback

18. Some quotes from our participants survey which is ongoing:

- a) "Upland path restoration with OATS. I enjoyed trying something totally new for me. It was a way to appreciate these parks in a new way, to work with the people that keep our paths in good shape and our nature protected for all beings to enjoy."
- b) "The Wilding project [was my favourite event] because the guided tour taught me, in my 50s, so much more about nature when I felt I already knew so much!"
- c) "The beginners' bird identification walk at Blair Atholl [was my favourite event]. It has opened a whole new world when out for a walk."
- d) "Deer management on the Balmoral estate. An excellent, well run course with extensive data and other information about management of the estate and the CNP. Congratulations to the organisers and many thanks for your efforts."





- e) “Strathspey Storywalks: Self-Guided Fairies and Fables Tour. We loved the fact that we could access this at anytime and made for an interesting and enjoyable afternoon.”
- f) “Staulkers ... liked hearing about how the Scottish gov’t is working with land owners to manage the deer.”

## **Finance and staffing**

- 19. Budget for 2023 was £45,000 this included £11,200 for website development. The budget for 2023/24 is £35,000. This is considered sufficient to support communications and marketing, event support and ‘flagship’ events run by CNPA.
- 20. The Cairngorms Nature Engagement Officer (1 FTE) is dedicated to work on the Festival almost full time between January and May. In the run up to and during the Festival large amounts of TOIL and flexi are generated. This year two interns were recruited to help with delivery of the Festival and manage the resource and time demands on the Cairngorms Nature Engagement Officer. This proved highly successful. As part of the feedback and review process, further investigation will look to establish how the resource demands can be spread out over the year, allowing further work on the user nature journey and providing more opportunities for participants to continue to engage and volunteer and delivering the strategic aims outlined above.
- 21. In the weeks preceding and during the Festival 3.5 FTE from the communications team were also deployed on it. There was also significant resource contribution from comms during the website development and branding work.

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