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# CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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## FOR INFORMATION

**Title: CAPERCAILLIE FRAMEWORK PROGRESS**

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### **Purpose**

To update the CNPA board on Progress with the Capercaillie Framework

### **Introduction**

1. The overall purpose of the Capercaillie Framework is to pull together all information currently available relating to Capercaillie distribution and productivity in the Cairngorms National Park along with the pressures they face and the current management measures being undertaken in a spatial format, in order to inform decisions about their future conservation management.
2. The preparation of the Capercaillie Framework has been led by a dedicated Capercaillie Framework Officer in the CNPA. The work is fully endorsed by the Capercaillie Biodiversity Action Plan partners and has been guided by a Project Team and Project Board including individuals representing the RSPB, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, Cairngorm Local Outdoor Access Forum and an estate actively engaged in capercaillie conservation (Kinveachy).
3. The Framework is being developed in two phases. The first phase (nearing completion) concentrates on the gathering of information leading to a number of clear conclusions which will inform a set of recommendations. The second phase will be putting those recommendations into practice. This will involve working directly with land managers to consider the recreational and conservation management planning on their landholdings.

## Progress to date

4. The major emphasis so far has been on pulling together a range of detailed maps indicating current knowledge of capercaillie habitat usage, colonisation of new areas, path networks and the influence of human disturbance on capercaillie distribution. This in turn is allowing for the identification of “pinch-points” of potential pressure where management measures can be undertaken.
5. Consultation has included the Local Outdoor access Forum, the Capercaillie BAP Group, the Association of Cairngorms Communities along with relevant experts that have been assembled to sit on the Project Team and the Project Board. Analysis of the information illustrated by the maps along with the expert opinion of partners on issues and impacts has led to detailed discussion in the following key areas:

- a) **The range of factors affecting capercaillie distribution and productivity**

A number of cumulative reasons including bad weather, predation, fence collisions, disturbance and loss of habitat are all factors which have contributed to poor productivity leading to decline. But there is no one most important factor and there is a need to consider management issues on a site by site basis.

- b) **The need for awareness of the significance of the National Park population** 80% of the national population is in CNP. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest a risk of negative perceptions of capercaillie rather than being viewed as a real asset to the area. There is a need to encourage a sense of pride in the species in the National Park.

- c) **Availability of existing habitat and creation of new habitat**

Fragmentation of habitat is known to have a negative effect on capercaillie numbers and create “edge effects” e.g. increased threat from predators. To reduce edge effects there is a need for increasing the size and connectedness of patches of habitat that are available to caper. As a result of the known effects of disturbance, the creation of more good quality habitat in areas without human pressure is likely to be beneficial.

- d) **Impacts of human disturbance**

Capercaillie avoid areas (by around 125m either side of a path) with high levels of human disturbance and can be excluded from otherwise suitable habitat. They are attracted to paths and vehicle tracks; to drink from puddles, dry out, dust-bath, ingest grit, etc. This can make them vulnerable to sporadic, unpredictable disturbance, particularly by dogs, which could lead to fatalities.

- e) **Options for recreational access management**

Mitigation measures are likely to help limit the effects of disturbance, including keeping people and dogs on tracks, track-side screening, developing consistent messaging and improving the ranger presence at “at risk” sites. Promoting access in less sensitive areas and creating refuges of minimal disturbance in other areas are important factors being considered?

f) **Specific requirements around communities adjacent to capercaillie habitat**

Following the example of Boat of Garten, a number of communities have been identified where further work is needed due to existing and predicted future human pressure. These include Grantown, Aviemore, Carrbridge and Nethy Bridge.

g) **Impacts of predation and importance of predator control**

A range of predators are impacting capercaillie numbers; appropriate and legal predator control is beneficial to improving capercaillie productivity. Further research in this area is being considered.

h) **Habitat due for thinning and felling**

Forest management is a very important consideration as much of Strathspey is due for thinning or extensive felling in the near future. An inventory to help to ensure thinning and felling are done in ways that considers the significance for the capercaillie metapopulation is needed.

i) **The importance of following forest management guidelines**

Good quality forest management guidelines already exist and continue to be promoted widely. These have proved successful and their promotion should be continued.

j) **The continued impact of unmarked fencing**

It has been considered that capercaillie would likely have gone extinct in Scotland without addressing the threat posed by forest fences. Fences that continue to pose a significant risk should be removed or if still essential, marked appropriately.

k) **Consideration of options for recolonisation**

There are previously occupied sites where the habitat has become unused where re-structure could benefit recolonisation. Dispersal distances and lack of connecting habitat limit the potential for Speyside birds to occupy good habitat developing in Deeside. Captive breeding has been suggested as an option to expand the population into these areas.

6. It is already clear that there is no single management response that will apply in all locations, and implementation will have to look at site specific responses. The final report will help guide deployment of potential management measures in a spatial way across the National Park, particularly in Badenoch and Strathspey.

7. One of the main outputs from phase one of the Capercaillie Framework is to provide “a series of recommendations to guide current and future management practices”. Recommendations based on the above discussion points are currently being considered by the Capercaillie Framework Project Team and Project Board.

### **Next steps**

8. A further discussion with the Local Outdoor Access Forum is scheduled for 23<sup>rd</sup> August, and with the Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group on 28<sup>th</sup> October. The Project Board will be considering the conclusions and draft recommendations at their meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> September. A verbal update on the outcome of the meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> September will be provided to the board on 12<sup>th</sup> September.
9. The completed phase I report will be brought to the board for approval at its meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> December, at which point we will also be discussing the implications of the recommendations with Scottish Government and partners.

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