
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

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 Carr-bridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy and developing, agreeing and implementing action plans with additional communities.	Amber	Work to agree the Carrbridge capercaillie conservation action plan is delayed and at risk of not being finalised. The mountain bike plan and visitor plan are both well accepted by stakeholders and implementation is underway. The business community's action plan is in draft for consultation. Initial engagement in Deeside has been very positive and a draft plan is in development.
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	Social media engagement has increased by over 30% on the last quarter. Volunteers have been involved in habitat improvements on a number of different landholdings. Genetics work is ongoing on schedule.

Performance Measure: Progress towards the project's agreed purposes	Rating	Commentary
Work with landowners to implement plans to improve and manage around 9,000 hectares of habitat across six 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.	Green	Habitat improvements have been taking place on Balmoral, Seafield, Rothiemurchus and Abernethy estates. Predator management continues on Seafield and Rothiemurchus. Planned work to manage deer has not taken place due to an unsuccessful FGS application, whilst frustrating, this will not affect reaching overall targets.
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	Work on the evaluation framework continues as scheduled. Results from the pilot genetic lek survey have been gathered and now inform phase 2.
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 is used effectively across the project. Tools developed in the evaluation framework support sharing good practise and knowledge exchange.

Strategic Background

1. The most recent update to the Board on delivery of the Authority's strategic objectives as set out in the agreed Corporate Plan for 2018 to 2022 was presented at the June 2021 meeting. The Corporate Plan delivery report may be accessed at: [Meeting - Cairngorms National Park Authority](#) The 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 Corporate Plan key work area 'Deliver Capercaillie Framework' and Key Performance Indicator 'number of capercaillie'. The KPI is currently rated red, based on an assessment that the population target of 1,200 by 2022 target will not be met.
2. The latest review of the Strategic Risk Register was considered by the Audit and Risk Committee in September 2021 and may be accessed at: [210910AuCtteePaper5AnnexI StrategicRiskRegisterV8.1.pdf \(cairngorms.co.uk\)](#).

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) A11.2 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), the most recent overview of delivery of the NPPP having been presented to the Board at its meeting in September 2021: [Meeting - Cairngorms National Park Authority](#). The relevant elements of the NPPP delivery relating to these programmes are:
- a) Action 1d of the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) priority 1d is to 'Co-ordinate habitat, recreation and development management to secure the capercaillie population through delivery of the Capercaillie Framework'. The most recent overview of delivery of the NPPP having been presented to the Board at its meeting in September 2021: [Meeting - Cairngorms National Park Authority](#).

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 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. The project maintains strong links with ongoing and developing wider activities to strengthen information flow and support adaptive project and legacy planning:
 - a) The CNPA visitor management and access teams are actively contributing to the work now underway to develop detailed proposals in response to the NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee Report on capercaillie conservation and management.
 - b) Learning from the trial signage to encourage responsible access around Carrbridge and the Mountain Biking Recreation Management Plan, developed with the mountain biking community, is informing CNPA access team strategic planning.
 - c) Research to understand visitors' perceptions and values relating to access and capercaillie in Rothiemurchus, Abernethy and Glenmore and work with the Cairngorms Business Partnership is helping to inform CNPA's wider work related to managing for visitors, audience profiling and Heritage Horizons.

Performance Overview: Risks Under Management

6. All project risks and issues, as identified in the quarterly progress report, are either in a favourable status or being managed closely at CCP Board level with mitigation plans in place.
7. Staffing: the project is operating with a full complement of staff.
8. Resourcing audit and legacy: Review of work plans enabled re-allocations of staff time to enable the project's work with the mountain biking community to be accelerated.

The CCP Board will make a decision at their next meeting in June on whether or not to seek a project extension in order to secure a firm legacy across all areas of work within the project. The project's grant expiry date is 30 July 2023. To enable the Board's decision regarding an extension, a full assessment will be made of the project activities which are currently anticipated to be completed by 30 July 2023 and those which need or would benefit from more time to secure a firmer legacy.

In February, the CCP Board assessed and provided feedback to the Carrbridge Capercaillie Group regarding the draft 2022/23 Action Plan for the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy. The group disputed some elements of the feedback and requested further time to appeal and submit an amended plan. The group have found the time requirements and consensus building to be a challenge with members away over the Easter holidays. The CCP project team have offered support in re-drafting the Action Plan and a response to the feedback is due imminently. Without an agreed plan, work in Carrbridge is effectively stalled and there is a high risk of funds not being allocated timeously. Funders are aware of the issue and are strongly encouraging CNPA to reach resolution with the group and progress options to re-allocate funds if deadlines are not met.

9. Reputation:
 - a) If an agreed action plan for the community led work in Carrbridge is not in place within a matter of weeks, then the project may have to allocate project funds elsewhere and the Carrbridge group will need to reconsider their position. There is a possibility the group react negatively to this situation and voice their disappointment.
 - b) An Evaluation Framework is in place for the project to monitor ongoing work, 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. With effective ongoing monitoring and evaluation, it will be possible to learn from achievements and issues, adapt ways of working in the light of experience, and share learning within and beyond the project. It will also provide the basis for reporting the outcomes and impacts of the work to others, internally and externally.
 - c) The wider context of capercaillie conservation is a highly contentious and high-profile arena, attracting much comment and polarised opinion. Potential exists for misunderstandings about the relatively limited scope of the CCP.

This issue may increase now the project is involved in helping to co-ordinate the response to the NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee Report on capercaillie conservation and management which is focused on factors affecting capercaillie conservation out with the approved purposes of the project, e.g., predator control including the management of protected species.

10. Technical: CCP staff are helping co-ordinate the work now underway to engage stakeholders in the process of developing detailed proposals for the four areas of action outlined in the NS SAC report. CNPA Board will consider the proposals and CNPA's role in further delivery on 10 June 2022. With this context in mind, the CCP Project Board will discuss at the June project board meeting the project's role in the emerging scenario: how the agreed scope and purposes of the project overlap with the developing proposals, where a discussion with funders might be helpful to explore re-focussing some areas of the project, and where the project legacy will add maximum value.

Proposals currently under development include investigating the feasibility of minimising human disturbance by creating refugia and safe spaces for capercaillie. There is a risk that the CCP's bottom-up, collaborative approach that has proven very successful with groups to date (e.g. mountain biking community, businesses and visitors) is confused with, and therefore undermined by, a more top-down, instructive approach to defining and managing refuges.

Evidence from the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project's genetic research will become available in 2022. The findings will underpin any future decisions on the feasibility and desirability of species translocation.

Conclusions: Performance Overview and Matters Meriting Strategic Review

11. 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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