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## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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### FOR INFORMATION

**Title: CAIRNGORMS CAPERCAILLIE PROJECT UPDATE**

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CAIRNGORMS CAPERCAILLIE PROJECT**

#### **Purpose**

To update the Board on the progress of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project.

#### **Recommendations**

**That the Board note the progress of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project.**

#### **Capercaillie Status and Distribution**

1. There are only around 1,100 capercaillie left in the UK and approximately 90% live in the Park. The population has undergone significant decline from around 20,000 birds in the 1970s; the equivalent of one capercaillie every day for the last 40 years.
2. Recent national surveys, conducted every five years, have indicated there is a significant range contraction back to the stronghold of Badenoch and Strathspey, which now holds approximately 85% of the national population and is therefore critical to prevent extinction in Scotland.
3. The primary factors affecting decline are poor productivity, fragmentation and lack of habitat, collision with unmarked fences, predation, wet and cold spring weather and disturbance leading to avoidance of heavily used areas. Research has shown that capercaillie tend not to use areas within ~100m of well used tracks and paths, although they are present in some high footfall areas in the Cairngorms National Park including Glenmore and High Burnside.

4. Capercaillie are Schedule 1 species making it illegal to intentionally or recklessly disturb the birds during lek season. The RSPB lek viewing facility ceased to operate in 2016 and protecting capercaillie from disturbance, particularly during lek season, remains a challenge as a minority of bird watchers continue to visit known lek sites.

## **Background**

5. The Scottish Capercaillie Group, chaired by Pete Mayhew, takes an overview of the factors affecting the national capercaillie population and guides work on the protection and enhancement of the species. The group comprises an extensive range of partners to advise on the most pressing issues and future priorities.
6. European LIFE funding from 2000 to 2006 provided resource to mark fences and increase predator control. Along with an earlier Forestry Commission Scotland funded programme of fence removal and marking, it is generally accepted that this funding halted the very rapid decline of the population and without it the bird may well have become an unviable population.
7. Work in the National Park has recently focussed on bringing together partners to investigate and find resolution on the overlapping issues of development management, recreation, habitat expansion and designation at a landscape-scale. The results of this investigation were written up as the Cairngorms Capercaillie Framework in 2015. The framework identifies a number of recommendations for partners to take forwards.
8. In 2016 a project team, led by CNPA, was formed to pull together a funding application to National Lottery Heritage Fund (formerly Heritage Lottery Fund) to deliver some, but not all, of the recommendations in the Capercaillie Framework. In 2018 £517,700 funding was secured for a development phase. If successful this could lead to a further £3.5 million for a delivery phase. A project manager and staff started work on the development phase of the project in October 2018.

## **Cairngorms Capercaillie Project**

9. The aim of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project is to explore new ways to collaborate with people who live in, work in and visit the National Park to help them play a part in capercaillie conservation. It will do this by:
  - a) Creating more habitat for capercaillie in the Cairngorms National Park.
  - b) Enabling more people to get involved in capercaillie conservation in the Park.
  - c) Enabling communities in the Park to create their own action plans to help capercaillie.

- d) Providing financial support where necessary to help landowners controlling predators to continue this work.
  - e) Confirming the genetic health of capercaillie in the Park.
10. The project is innovative in that it is putting people at the heart of conservation decision making and making people part of the answer to capercaillie survival, rather than part of the problem. The project seeks to find ways people and wildlife can live alongside each other, providing a model to save at risk species around the world.
11. The project focusses on the multiple benefits to society that conservation brings, be they related to health and well-being, the local economy, landscapes, inclusion or employment. The project will bring people together to share what's important to them and find common ground with species' needs. For example, better paths to access and enjoy local woodlands will also benefit capercaillie if they minimise disturbance in other, more sensitive areas.
12. In addition to the work with communities of place and interest, the project is building on existing understanding of habitat, ecology and behaviour to provide a more sustainable long-term future.
13. There are still other factors that fall outwith the scope and remit of the project, not eligible for National Lottery Heritage Funding (NLHF) funding, which continue to be taken forwards by the Scottish Capercaillie Group e.g. translocation/ reinforcement and predation by protected species.

## **Development Phase**

14. The project is currently in a testing and learning phase. Until March 2020 the project is tasked with finding answers to the question 'how can communities of place and interest play a part in capercaillie conservation?' This involves trialling different approaches and working up approaches into a definitive plan for delivering solutions during a delivery phase 2020 – 2023.
15. During this phase the project is testing a methodology for co-creating a community-led action plan for capercaillie (currently called a Woodlands for People and Wildlife Plan). Carrbridge is the pilot community, trialling this approach which will identify community needs and overlay them with species' needs to find common ground.
16. There has been, and still is, some very vocal criticism from a small minority to the pilot in Carrbridge questioning the legitimacy and intentions of the project. However, the Carrbridge Capercaillie Community Working Group, established to support and guide this element of the project, has unanimously agreed to take work forwards by

recruiting a community development agency to facilitate conversations with the whole community around what they value and want from their woodlands and what they can do to help save capercaillie.

17. Carrbridge's role in the project is key in helping the project to learn and strengthen its plans for the Delivery Phase when more communities in the Park will be invited to follow Carrbridge's lead and create their own community-led action plans to help look after their local capercaillie. The communities the project would like to work with in the delivery phase are yet to be finalised but likely to include the following:
- a) Residents and visitors to Grantown-on-Spey (e.g. wildlife watchers, accommodation providers and dog walkers)
  - b) Resident and visiting recreational users of High Burnside (e.g. mountain bikers, runners and dog walkers)
  - c) Landowners, managers and users of a Deeside estate (where small and isolated Capercaillie populations remain)
  - d) Residents and visitors using the Speyside Way between Boat of Garten and Nethy Bridge (where previous community work related to capercaillie provides a foundation to build on).

## **Next Steps**

18. The findings from the development phase will form the basis of an action plan for delivery phase, describing in detail exactly what the project plans to do 2020 – 2023. This will include:
- a) Habitat improvement plans for over 200ha of existing habitat and over 150ha of new native woodland.
  - b) Continuing to monitor numbers of adults and chicks through lek surveys and brood counts and a public app enabling more people to report Capercaillie sightings and signs.
  - c) Assessing the genetic health of capercaillie in the Park by collecting and analysing feathers.
  - d) Additional gamekeepers to enable existing predator management to be increased and extended where relevant.
  - e) Events, media and outreach programmes to raise awareness and understanding
  - f) Collaboration with further communities of place and interest to co-create action plans (Woodlands for People and Wildlife Plans) that may include:
    - i. Volunteering opportunities
    - ii. Activities for local school children
    - iii. Improvements to woodland paths
    - iv. Signage and way-marking in the woods
    - v. Activities and information for visitors
    - vi. Appointment of a local Ranger

- vii. Creative and artistic responses to capercaillie
  - viii. Safe spaces for wildlife in the woods, including capercaillie
  - ix. Areas in the woods for specific user groups and people with specific needs
19. The plans for delivery phase, along with reports of lessons learnt from development phase and plans for monitoring, maintenance, legacy, risk management and budget, will comprise an application for delivery phase funding to be submitted in March 2020. This application to NLHF is a competitive process, to be decided by the Scotland Committee.

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**23 May 2019**

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