



## For discussion

**Title:** Cairngorms Capercaillie Project  
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### Purpose

This paper presents the final report on the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project.

### Recommendations

In reviewing this final report, the Performance Committee is asked to:

- a) Agree the project has successfully delivered the approved purposes.
- b) Note the project's key achievements and learnings.
- c) Consider any strategically significant issues with project legacy planning.

### Performance Overview

1. The project plan outputs have been entirely achieved and the project has met or exceeded its quantitative targets, with only a few exceptions due to the Covid 19 pandemic, e.g. volunteer hours.
2. The project's work has enabled delivery of actions in the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) 2023 - 2027:
  - a) NPPP A13 Species Recovery action: deliver a work programme to support capercaillie conservation in the Cairngorms, based on best available evidence.
  - b) NPPP C8 action: consider all potential mechanisms to reduce disturbance on key species and recreational impacts on high ground.
3. The project's activities and legacy will enable the delivery of actions in the Corporate Plan (CP):
  - a) CP A13: lead on a capercaillie emergency plan and long-term strategy.
  - b) CP A2: deliver 1,000 ha of new or expanded woodland with new and innovative uses of the Forest Grant Scheme.



- c) CP C8: develop and deliver Active Cairngorms Action Plan – including proposals to reduce disturbance to key species and habitats.

## Performance Dashboard: Completion of the project's Approved

### Purposes

Performance Measure: 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	Developed and delivered Action Plans with the visitor, mountain biking, dog walking, business, Deeside and Carrbridge communities, and an additional community led campaign with the birdwatching, photography and wildlife guiding community.
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	Engaged in 221 events and activities with 4,218 participants. Volunteers donated over 4,000 hours. The website has attracted over 23,000 visitors. Social media presence has garnered thousands of followers and interactions. Media coverage has reached millions of people through 107 project specific articles.
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	Successfully supported new, improved, or better-managed habitat for capercaillie across 10,133 hectares through partnerships with land managers, implementing large scale habitat improvement plans, and supporting land managers via a project grant scheme.
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	Workshops, interviews, films and reflective gatherings have fostered open discussions and insightful stakeholder input. Sharing good practice events and knowledge exchange have all been well attended and informed an adaptive approach. The project has been independently evaluated throughout by an appointed consultant.



<b>Performance Measure: Agreed purposes</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
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	<p>Created the UK's first community led action plan for capercaillie. Findings have been shared widely nationally and internationally at conferences, workshops, in literature and hosting visits.</p> <p>Insights into developing community led conservation have fed into the development of Cairngorms 2030 and will underpin the delivery of the Capercaillie Emergency Plan.</p>

## Key achievements

4. A presentation of the projects highlights is available in [Project Overview](#)
5. Seven communities of interest and place have taken part and made valuable contributions to capercaillie conservation: mountain bikers, businesses, visitors, wildlife guides and birdwatchers, land managers, dog walkers and the Carrbridge capercaillie group.
6. The project has demonstrated adaptability in capitalising on community led initiatives not originally in project plans e.g. the Cairngorms Gravel project, engagement with the dog walking community, and the Lek it Be campaign were all concepts generated by communities during the project.
7. Innovative monitoring and research techniques have significantly contributed to the scientific understanding of capercaillie ecology and behaviour. Work with the Royal Zoological Society for Scotland (RZSS) WildGenes laboratory has provided unique insights into the Scottish population.
8. Over 10,133 hectares of habitat improved and over 1.3 km of fencing marked or removed. Support and knowledge sharing have increased the availability and uptake of new habitat enhancement methods.
9. Increased capacity and decision-making in the Badenoch and Strathspey Trail Association created a user led mountain bike recreation plan. This has so far protected over 450 hectares of habitat from disturbance by mountain biking activity



in part by working with land managers in the project to improve riding experiences in less sensitive areas.

10. Over the last five years the project has grown into a diverse partnership of over 25 organisations and groups, including volunteers who have donated over 4,000 hours of their time. Over 25,000 people have been engaged through events, activities, Facebook, website and Instagram, schools and volunteering.

## **Key learnings**

11. Work with communities of place and interest required both time, flexibility and clear parameters. The approach required a willingness and ability to work with uncertainties and to guide and support, rather than control. Support for a community's activity relied on groups working to a strong, democratic mandate for action and the partnership's collaboration around agreed project outcomes.
12. The control of protected species was clearly established from the outset as being outwith the scope of the project. However, project activities were frequently framed in this context. Having ambassadors for the project with credibility amongst different stakeholder groups was important in reinforcing project messages and keeping complex partnerships together.
13. Engaging and empowering a large and diverse partnership of groups and individuals not normally engaged with conservation *per se* is a powerful way and more sustainable approach to conservation than reliance on land managers, charities and public agencies. The sustainability however relies on support and commitment for volunteers and community groups.

## **Strategic implications of Legacy Plans**

14. Activities to inform Park Authority strategic planning, strengthen information flow and support adaptive project and legacy planning are primarily delivered via embedding activities in the Capercaillie Emergency Plan. Leadership and oversight of the Emergency Plan will be co-managed by the Park Authority and NatureScot.
15. Activity for minimising disturbance in core capercaillie areas is included in the Active Cairngorms Action Plan. A project post has been extended for 3 months (July –



September) to support work with the dog walking community to underpin the transition and legacy planning.

16. Increasing capercaillie numbers is not a quantified target within the project, due to the many confounding variables affecting populations, the relatively short timescale and the project focus on community-led approach to species conservation. Work on the Emergency Plan will ensure the Park Authority is committing resource, within the scope of the Emergency Plan, but there remains a risk that conservation efforts do not halt decline.

## **Conclusion**

17. It is considered the project has successfully achieved delivery of the Approved Purposes and ensured project achievements are secured in legacy planning.

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