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## CAIRNGORMS NATURE STRATEGY GROUP

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**Title:** Draft Capercaillie Management Framework

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**Purpose** This paper introduces the Strategy Group to the proposed capercaillie framework. The framework aims to bring together existing knowledge on the state of capercaillie in Strathspey, the pressures and suite of management measures being deployed in a spatial framework in order to guide future management decisions.

The paper seeks advice from the Strategy Group on the scope of the work and arrangements for delivery.

### 1. Advice Sought

Strategy Group members are asked to consider the background issues, note the action to date, comment on the suggested framework and advise on how best this can be delivered.

### 2. Background

- Capercaillie populations in Scotland have declined significantly from an estimated 20,000 birds in 1970 to 1,285 at the most recent national winter survey in 2009/10. The Cairngorms National Park holds a significant proportion of the national population – at least 75% of the national number of lekking males. The annual brood counts suggest that the vast majority of the most productive breeding sites are found within the National Park, particularly Strathspey. Although capercaillie numbers have held up in Strathspey, the population is now extremely vulnerable elsewhere. Capercaillie persist in other areas (Deeside, Donside, Easter Ross, Moray and Perthshire) but these populations are more fragmented, numbers are lower and breeding success poorer. The Strathspey capercaillie population is crucial to the long-term survival of the species in the UK. This places a significant responsibility on CNPA and our partners to take a strategic approach to management for this population.
- The capercaillie decline is thought to be caused by a number of cumulative reasons including loss of suitable habitat, bad weather, predation and disturbance. With capercaillie populations at such vulnerable numbers, any factors that could impact on the breeding success of individual birds could have significant impacts for the population as a whole.
- Capercaillie are subject to disturbance by dogs, particularly during the breeding season. Birds can be killed, injured or family groups separated resulting in chick mortality. Habitat is avoided c. 125m either side of tracks as a result of disturbance which is limiting the amount of habitat available.

- Based on past trends, the human population of the Park is projected to rise from 16630 in 2010 to 21010 in 2035 (26% increase). The number of households (not houses) is projected to increase from 7800 in 2010 to 10550 in 2035 (35% increase). Both those figures come from National Records Scotland projections for the Park.  
[www.nrscotland.gov.uk](http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk)
- The proposed Local Development Plan, currently out for consultation, identifies a housing land supply for 723 houses in years 0-5 and a total land supply for 2350 houses in 20 years (based on current information). There is likely to be continued demand over time for further development.
- The Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC), produced following the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 ensures that everyone has the statutory right of responsible access. SOAC has guidance relating to dogs and ground nesting birds which says “dogs on leads or under close control during the bird breeding season (usually April to July)”. This is widely considered by many land managers as unclear and inaccurate when considering capercaillie conservation.

### 3. Recent Work

- The Capercaillie BAP Group has recently developed the “Research and Management Framework” to identify and prioritise the management needs to provide strategic focus to ensure a sustainable future for the species. Main priorities are 1). Adapting to climate change; 2). Limiting the impacts of predation; 3). Eliminating collisions with hazardous fences, 4). Creating and managing capercaillie habitats; 5). Managing access and disturbance.
- Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA). CNPA cannot approve or adopt plans unless it can be concluded to have no adverse impact on the designated features of the Natura network in the CNP or its supporting habitats. Capercaillie is a designated feature on a number of SPA’s with the CNP. The HRA undertaken for the Local development Plan (LDP) has identified where appropriate assessments and further work need to be undertaken relating to all the proposed development within the lifespan of the LDP. This will include significant packages of mitigation.
- Recreational pressures management – much work has been done over the last several years to help land managers with ground nesting bird and visitor pressure sensitivities to ensure that appropriate and consistent signage is in place. At sensitive areas for ground-nesting birds it has been agreed by the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum to adopt a much firmer line by recommending that signage says “keep your dog on a lead” during the ground nesting bird breeding season. The use of such strong messages should be in conjunction with wider campaigns, and an ‘on-the-ground’ presence, to promote responsible dog behaviour.
- Work with specific communities adjacent to sensitive woodland sites is underway to limit the impact of dog disturbance. Boat of Garten has seen an extensive community-involved project where a range of management options are being implemented including

Ranger patrols, signage, vegetative screening, etc. A similar project is beginning to evolve for the community owned and managed Anagach woods in Grantown-on-Spey.

- The Cairngorms Nature Action Plan aims to improve the quality and connectivity of woodlands over the next five years. The plan has set a figure of 5000Ha of new native woodland by 2018. Capercaillie is identified as a species for priority and focussed action over the next five years. The proposed framework encompasses actions in the Plan.

#### 4. The Need for a Framework

Although there is therefore a lot of work and active management going on across different sectors and places, there is a clear need to draw this together to understand how it is currently playing out spatially across Strathspey as a whole, to understand how these measures interact and to explore whether other management measures are required.

#### Aims and Objectives

- **Aim:** To bring together existing knowledge on the state of capercaillie in Strathspey, the pressures and suite of management measures being deployed in a spatial framework in order to guide future management decisions.
- **Objectives:**
  - Identify and map:
    - current known state of capercaillie populations
    - suitable current and proposed habitat; strategic opportunities to target habitat expansion and enhancement
    - areas where re-structure/management would benefit re-colonisation
    - recreational pressure hotspots (current and projected)
    - current predation control measures and proposed strategic predation control co-ordination hubs
    - the deployment of current management measures in relation to recreation management, development mitigation and habitat enhancement
  - Consider the ways in which the cumulative deployment of current management measures interact spatially and the extent to which these measures are likely to deliver sufficient scale of protection/enhancement at a meta-population level;
  - Identify gaps in the deployment of management measures, both spatially and in terms of management approaches, and how these gaps could be addressed;
  - Review whether the current legislative and policy context provides sufficient scope and clarity to implement management measures effectively, with particular regard to Natura legislation and SOAC;
  - Identify the monitoring programme required to maintain sufficient information on the cumulative implementation and impacts of management measures across sectors for the Strath as a whole.

- **Outputs to include:**

- Map based analysis to inform ongoing adaptive management
- Analysis of the cumulative impacts of current management measures
- Recommendations on:
  - Spatial deployment of management measures
  - Where and what additional management measures should be deployed
  - Requirements for guidance for land managers
  - Likely pressure points as a guide to priorities for action

## 5. Scope

This initial phase of the framework will provide an analysis with a significant spatial component and a series of recommendations. It will not in itself provide ‘answers’ to all the policy and management issues, but it will be used to inform decisions on for example, recreation management, mitigation packages for development, investment in habitat enhancement. Specifically it is proposed that:

- The geographic remit of the framework is Strathspey
- The framework will not seek to specify a carrying capacity i.e. the number of houses or visitors particular areas can support.
- The framework will not prepare detailed management plans for individual locations.

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