

CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

- Title:** CNP Capercaillie Framework Update
- Prepared by:** Justin Prigmore, Cairngorms Nature Officer
- Purpose:** This paper provides a summary of the Capercaillie Framework including an update of the final conclusions and recommendations of Phase 1; and implications for Phase 2

Advice Sought

Ongoing input and advice is requested from the LOAF into the development of Phase 2 and its delivery.

Update

1. Building on the advice provided by the LOAF at the last three meetings, conclusions and recommendations have been re-developed further and have been included in the final Report for Phase 1. (See Appendix 1.)
2. In summary, the Capercaillie Framework brings together spatial data and knowledge about the capercaillie population, the pressures and management measures in the CNP in order to better co-ordinate deployment of management measures at an effective scale.
3. Phase 1 has two outputs:
 - a) Phase 1 report with analysis of data collated, discussion and recommendations
 - b) Set of working data and maps
3. The data collated in the Capercaillie Framework will remain a working set of data to be used and updated. In Phase 2 of the project, data will be used to implement the recommendations for management on the ground through direct engagement with land managers and communities.
4. There are three key areas of management action that interact and need co-ordination:
 - a) Habitat and species management
 - b) Recreation management
 - c) Development management

5. The Capercaillie Framework gives us an overview of how these three areas of management action can be co-ordinated to best effect. It shows where woodland could be expanded to best effect for capercaillie and where the focus for recreation management should be.
6. Key findings from Phase I are:
 - a) The Cairngorms National Park is the remaining UK stronghold where significant management effort has helped to maintain a viable capercaillie population;
 - b) There is significant potential to further secure and enhance the population in the Cairngorms, to the point at which it could support expansion into other areas of Scotland;
 - c) In the long term, habitat expansion and improvement are key to the species future;
 - d) In the short term, a range of other factors that reduce productivity should be addressed;
 - e) Increasing the extent of good, connected, undisturbed habitat is key – this can be done by both expanding the area of woodland and by reducing disturbance through recreation management;
 - f) By targeting woodland expansion, recreation management and development mitigation, there is significant potential to increase the extent and quality of habitat for capercaillie.

Next steps

7. Completion and sign-off of the Phase I Report. This will go to the CNPA Board for ratification on 12th Dec. Upon ratification, the final Report will be made available to the LOAF.
8. Implementation of Phase 2 will be put forward as a priority in the new CNPA Corporate Plan for delivery over the next 3 years.

Input from the LOAF

9. The LOAF has provided invaluable help with shaping and developing Phase I of the Framework. The LOAF is requested to help with advice and input into the specific case-by-case nature of delivery of Phase 2 as required.

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Appendix I.

Summary of Conclusions:

Theme	Conclusion
1. Core population area	1a) Increasing productivity within the Strathspey population is critical to the survival and future expansion of the species
2. Peripheral areas	2a) Capercaillie currently unlikely to colonise peripheral areas in Deeside and Donside from core areas in Strathspey without enhanced habitat connectivity.
3. Improving existing habitat	3a) Habitat within current woodland can in some places be improved to ensure it is more suitable for Capercaillie
	3b) Previously occupied habitat has the potential for restructure and currently occupied but declining sites also have scope for improvements
4. Habitat expansion	4a) Forest expansion should also focus on creating undisturbed woodland habitat away from human disturbance
	4b) Existing high quality forest patches should be expanded to create larger core areas where conditions are conducive to improved productivity
	4c) Large areas of forest should be linked up by connecting corridors or stepping stones to improve the landscape scale connectivity of Capercaillie habitat
5. Fencing	5a) Fences in Capercaillie habitat should all be marked or where possible removed.
6. Deer Management	6a) Deer management should be undertaken within areas of high importance for Capercaillie that allows for ground cover and tree regeneration that is beneficial for the species
7. Access Management	7a) A proactive approach to access management is needed on a site-by-site basis through Recreation Management Plans
	7b) Ensuring people stay on paths in sensitive areas and that dogs are kept on leads in these areas can make a significant difference.
	7c) There is a need for suitable and clearly identified areas where dogs can be exercised off-lead.
	7d) Refuges of undisturbed habitat can be improved through a combination of habitat expansion and access management including the re-alignment or abandoning of unsuitable paths.
	7e) There is a significant risk of disturbance from informal recreation through unplanned routes developing ad-hoc on the back of existing or promoted routes – eg mountain bike trails.
	7f) The current ranger resource does not sufficiently cover the important sites to ensure behaviour changing messages are promoted and encouraged.
	7g) There is a need for clear consistent messages, both to residents and visitors at sites, but also before they arrive.
8. Development Mitigation	8a) A co-ordinated approach at a landscape scale to mitigation for development impacts is required.
9. Deployment of predator control	9a) Predator control is an effective contribution to improving Capercaillie productivity
	9b) Control of crows and foxes is not being undertaken across the important Capercaillie sites in a consistent way
	9c) There is a need to assess this further with the view of strengthening the level of predator control undertaken at these key sites.

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10. Public Awareness	10a) There is a need to be more open about the presence of capercaillie and develop understanding about the impact of disturbance and how people can help conservation management.
11. Community Engagement	11a) There is a need and opportunity to work with individual communities to develop a sense of local ownership for conservation efforts and behaviour changes in woodlands regularly used by communities.

Recommendations:

Continue and improve current management approaches	
1	Continue to promote existing guidelines on forest management for capercaillie.
2	Manage the network of Natura sites proactively to expand and improve habitat beyond designated sites and create refuges in less disturbed areas.
3	Develop communications between forest managers and assist co-ordination of management to ensure the needs of the Capercaillie metapopulation are met.
4	Ensure consistent messages for dog walkers are adopted across the CNP; protecting the most important sites during the most sensitive times of year by promoting off-lead dog walking in other areas.
5	Advocate legal predator control as a key beneficial action to improve Capercaillie productivity.
6	Continue and improve targeted deer management to enable ground cover and tree regeneration.
Spatially Targeted Management Actions	
Habitat	
7	Expand habitat between existing patches to expand the current core area, minimise the edge effects and reduce separation between existing and historically used habitat.
8	Improve habitat at previously occupied or declining sites.
9	Ensure all potentially damaging fences in Capercaillie habitat are either removed or adequately marked. Where fences have been previously marked, ensure they are still adequately visible across their length.
Access Management	
10	Co-ordinate and increase ranger presence in areas where important Capercaillie habitat and significant visitor and recreation pressure coincide.
11	Encourage people keep to tracks and avoid sensitive locations – through for example natural path-side screening or interventions to habitat or topography.
12	In refuge areas during the sensitive period (April – Aug) there should be a restriction on dogs.
13	Improve ‘refuge areas’ for Capercaillie by re-aligning or abandoning infrequently used paths in less disturbed habitat. This will require significant consultation and the creation of specific recreation management plans.
14	Proactively guide the creation of new access infrastructure, e.g. mountain bike trails, away from sensitive sites.
Development Planning	
15	All new development adjacent to sensitive Capercaillie sites should include tailored packages of mitigation including recreation management planning to prevent avoidable disturbance and impact on habitat.
16	Develop a co-ordinated approach at a landscape scale to identifying, implementing and monitoring mitigation

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	associated with new development
Awareness and Engagement	
17	Develop and deliver a communications campaign aimed at improving appreciation of the species, highlighting the importance of the area nationally and demonstrating the economic benefits.
18	Develop a programme of place- specific community engagement in communities with anticipated development pressures: Grantown-on-Spey, Ballater, Carrbridge, Nethy Bridge, Boat of Garten, Aviemore and An Camus Mor.
19	Engage directly with known groups (e.g. cycling clubs, dog walkers, outdoor activity providers, tourism based businesses and birdwatchers) to raise awareness of sensitivities and help develop the knowledge and infrastructure that is suitable to the needs of both people and capercaillie.
Research and Monitoring	
20	Ensure Capercaillie lek and brood count monitoring continues, using consistent methodology to assist accurate comparison between sites and through time.
21	Undertake further research of changes to Capercaillie distribution and productivity alongside monitoring of specific management on the ground to assess the impacts.
22	Develop a comprehensive programme of “people monitoring” to assess changes in human use, impact of different user types if possible and Capercaillie responses over time.
23	Consider potential role of capercaillie ‘restocking’ and improving genetic diversity in areas of decline as part of overall conservation strategy