



For Decision

Title: Capercaillie Emergency Plan

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Strategic context

1. There are three directly relevant actions and objectives in the National Park Partnership Plan:
 - a) A13 Species recovery, action to “deliver a work programme to support capercaillie conservation in the Cairngorms based on best available evidence”
 - b) A2 Woodland expansion, objective to “increase the amount of woodland in the National Park to support larger, more natural woodlands”
 - c) C8 Accessible path and cycle network, action to “consider all potential mechanisms to reduce disturbance on key species”

2. The Park Authority's direct and indirect delivery commitments to capercaillie conservation are detailed in the Corporate Plan as:
 - a) A13: Lead on a capercaillie emergency plan and long term strategy
 - b) A2: Deliver 1,000ha of new or expanded woodland with new and innovative uses of the Forest Grant scheme as part of Cairngorms2030; promote and administer a Woodland Challenge Fund to support land managers in the preparation of Forest Grant scheme applications
 - c) A2: The Park Authority will inspire, encourage and provide advice on woodland creation, potential forestry applications and forest plans in the Park to landowners and Scottish Forestry in line with the National Park Partnership Plan, Cairngorms Nature and Cairngorms Forest Strategy.
 - d) C8: Develop and deliver Active Cairngorms Action Plan – including proposals to reduce disturbance to key species and habitats.

3. The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) sets out Scotland's response to the biodiversity challenge and achieve a nature positive future. The SBS vision is to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and reverse it with landscape scale restoration by 2045. The Capercaillie Emergency Plan directly reflects SBS vision and outcomes by incorporating emergency measures by 2030 and long term plans to increase resilience in the forest network through habitat expansion and enhancement.



4. The funding strategy focusses public money on habitat expansion and enhancement in a way that also supports wider policy ambitions and priorities for woodland, biodiversity, investing in natural capital and habitat connectivity in the Scottish National Adaptation Plan, Scotland's Forestry Strategy, SBS, Scottish Climate Change Plan and proposals in the Scottish National Adaptation Plan.

Purpose

5. In response to the NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) report investigating the principal causes of decline in the capercaillie population, Scottish Government requested the Park Authority and NatureScot work with stakeholders to develop a costed, spatial plan of activity for capercaillie conservation.
6. At the 8 September 2023 Board meeting, members agreed that strategic aspects of the plan would come back to the Board for approval, and to the Performance Committee for regular updates.
7. This paper sets out the scope of activity and overall funding strategy contained within the costed spatial plan i.e. Capercaillie Emergency Plan. Board members are now asked to agree the elements of the Capercaillie Emergency Plan as presented in this paper.

Recommendations

8. The Board is asked to:
 - a) Agree that the scope of activity in the Emergency Plan meets the request from Scottish Government to continue investment in landscape scale restoration of pinewood habitat; develop a costed, spatially explicit plan and funding strategy; and undertake a pine marten population survey.
 - b) Agree that the funding strategy is appropriate and sufficient to meet requirements.

Strategic policy consideration

9. At the June 2022 Board meeting, members considered work on capercaillie conservation to date and the findings from the SAC report. It was agreed the Park Authority and NatureScot would provide strategic oversight of capercaillie conservation in the Cairngorms by coordinating and overseeing the collective delivery of a clear place based strategy.



10. In June 2023, having considered advice from the Park Authority and NatureScot Boards, Scottish Government requested that the Park Authority and NatureScot work with stakeholders to:
 - a) Continue investment in action to achieve landscape scale restoration of pinewood habitats the long term mechanisms to achieve the vision for a thriving population of capercaillie in Scotland
 - b) Develop a costed, spatially explicit plan of positive management measures based on the SAC Report recommendations, and a funding strategy which explores a wide range of public, private and voluntary mechanisms to generate further funding for capercaillie conservation; and
 - c) Not progress action to control protected predatory species for capercaillie, but that a pine marten population survey is undertaken to better understand the size of the population.

11. The Capercaillie Emergency Plan is agreed by the National Lottery Heritage Fund to be the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project's Legacy Plan. Notably, support for community led action to reduce the impact of disturbance, common messaging, communications and engagement, and habitat expansion and enhancement.

12. Capercaillie is a priority species in the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan. The plan highlights that, ultimately, species recovery must be integrated with landscape scale habitat recovery as the long term, sustainable conservation measure; and that for some highly threatened species there is also a need for short term focused action to get species back on a sustainable footing and provide the environment for long term recovery.

13. In November 2023 Board members approved the content of the Active Cairngorms Action Plan. A priority area for work in the plan is 'Minimising recreational impact on sensitive species and habitats. Work to build on the legacy of the Cairngorms Capercaillie project and thus the emergency plan is specifically referred to.

14. There is a strong expectation amongst stakeholders that the Park Authority, and NatureScot, will take a leadership role, providing resource and commitment to delivery of the emergency plan. Over 50 stakeholders from a range of sectors have attended workshops and meetings since August 2023. There has been a very positive response to a move from consultation into action, led by NatureScot and the Park Authority.



15. The Park Authority maintains its commitment to capercaillie conservation in the form of prioritising habitat expansion and enhancement, delivering a programme of activities to minimise disturbance and providing resource to a co-ordination and leadership role. The Park Authority will take an active role in seeking alternative sources of funding, where possible, to address the immediate measures required to halt and reverse the current decline in numbers and range.

Strategic risk management

16. There is potential for delivery of the capercaillie emergency plan to impact on the Park Authority's strategic risk reference 11 – 'Unrealistic expectations of what the Park Authority and its partners can achieve in the face of the significant risks presented by climate change, species extinction, flood management and fire; and / or disagreement between the Park Authority and stakeholder groups within the National Park'.

17. Despite concentrated and coordinated effort there remains a high risk of local extinction and further conservation effort does not reverse decline. A coordinated approach to communications and joint ownership of the actions in the spatial plan will be used to encourage and facilitate response from a range of partners, most appropriate to the stakeholders and challenge.

18. Further funding for capercaillie conservation may be perceived to redirect limited funding away from other high priority conservation work. In mitigation, the funding strategy targets publicly funded activities at habitat work that provides multiple benefits for nature networks, climate resilience and wider biodiversity. The emergency plan represents a well researched suite of measures, developed through wide stakeholder discussion, engagement and co-design and hence has support amongst the conservation community.

19. The emergency plan contains actions to establish a monitoring scheme that will allow us to better track changes in the pine marten population over time. Some stakeholders' expectations are that this is not sufficient activity in this area.

Stakeholder engagement

20. Over 70 stakeholders have been involved in the creation of the emergency plan. These include the approximately 30 landholdings over which the capercaillie



population extends; those who represent recreational groups and businesses; and those who manage relevant public, private and voluntary funding mechanisms.

21. Collaboration with stakeholders in the creation of the emergency plan has emphasised the need for collective communications, joint ownership and delivery of the plan, the scope of activity within the plan, the contextual challenges and pragmatic expectations for conservation of the species.
22. Consultation on the Active Cairngorms Action Plan identified there is broad support for the approach of minimising disturbance through applying extra measures in certain places at certain times of year, on the basis that access rights are not being restricted.

Implications

23. Financial: Delivery costs associated with individual activities are identified as part of the funding strategy, along with the potential funding mechanisms that may be available and could be applied to discrete areas of work. The Park Authority's contribution is identified in the direct and indirect delivery actions in the Corporate Plan.
24. Staffing: The ongoing coordination and oversight of delivery is a component of future work plans in Park Authority staff teams. In practice this will be a reduction in staff time allocated to capercaillie conservation as the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project comes to a close. Further staff resource required to deliver the emergency plan is identified in the funding strategy as an overall cost which requires further funding being sought. Delivery of specific elements around reducing the impacts of disturbance is accommodated within the current staff resource allocated to development and delivery of Active Cairngorms.
25. Liabilities: Long term resilience measures such as woodland expansion and enhancement are national and National Park Partnership Plan long term policies. Measures to support minimising disturbance in sensitive areas at certain times of year is complimentary to existing work programmes and adds no additional resource demands on Rangers.



Success measures

By 2030, decline in the capercaillie population in the National Park will have been halted.

Supporting information

26. Links to previous board papers:

[10 June 2022, Capercaillie Paper](#)

[8 September 2023 Formal Board Minutes](#)

27. Emergency plan scope of activity (contents page), see Annex 1

28. Funding strategy, see Annex 2