

Extract from Verifiers Report for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

Two verifiers from Europarc visited the Cairngorms National Park for three days in May 2017 and reviewed the plans and progress being made and the met with stakeholders. They made the following recommendations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Regarding all the information given in this report, the main conclusion is that the Cairngorms National Park is working and progressing satisfactorily towards sustainable tourism and implementing the principles of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. In fact, there are some examples of excellence that should be disseminated among the Charter Network. However, there is always place for improvement so I suggest the following recommendations:

1. Reduce impact of visitors to vulnerable species

Although this need is identified and addressed by the CNPPP and the Conservation Strategy, it is worthy to point it out here and to take it into account in the delivery of the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan. It is a main issue for tourism sustainability and for the status of the CNP as an outstanding nature travel destination.

It is recommended to pay attention and undertake some clear and effective measures to reduce impact of visitors to vulnerable species as ground nesting birds. This could be tackled for example by:

- Providing good and clear information about when and how to access responsibly to certain sensitive areas,
- More and better communication of the responsible outdoor code, especially to the foreign visitors, making it easy and attractive.

However, it would be essential to involve rangers, front-line staff of tourism businesses and visitors centres to provide effective information and raise awareness of visitors.

2. Deal with illegal raptors persecution

It is essential to identify and implement efficient measures to reduce raptor persecution that is affecting the reputation of the CNP as an outstanding and sustainable nature travel destination.

3. Active and effective management of high visitors flows

Active management of high visitors affluence to Glenmore is needed to reduce parking problems, impacts and to improve visitors experience and nature conservation.

There is a strategy with clear objectives (Cairngorm & Glenmore Strategy) but effective measures are needed to improve public transport, limit the parking zones and finally reduce the amount of visitors arriving in certain times by private cars.

4. Greater effort to improve knowledge about the CNP by tourism professionals

Good visitor infrastructures and information materials and campaigns have been developed, so now it is recommended to make a higher investment in training tourism professionals to provide them a deeper knowledge about the National Park as a whole (nature and culture values, tourism attractions, businesses, responsible access etc.). This could be targeted to individuals working or willing to work in tourism businesses, visitor centres, local entities, etc. It has been successful in other 9 Charter Parks to develop specific and comprehensive training courses combining theory and practice, with onsite visits and activities that increases motivation and experience exchange. A singular recognition by the CNPA to the professionals participating in these courses could be offered.

5. Enhancement of sustainable management by tourism businesses

Big efforts have been made in the past to promote sustainable management in tourism businesses through different schemes (Green Tourism Schemes, CNP Brand) and there probably are an important amount of businesses implementing effective measures.

A sustainable tourism destination cannot be so without the commitment and active involvement of the private tourism businesses, so it is recommended to identify, recognise, monitor and promote sustainable best practices of tourism businesses in the CNP, paying attention to environmental management (energy efficiency, water saving, waste management, waste reduction and management...), information about the CNP, contribution to nature and culture conservation, and support to local development (local products, providers, etc.).

It would be useful to use existing schemes as the Green Business Scheme or the Quality Scheme of Visit Scotland or building a stronger link between the CNPA and the most committed and sustainable businesses through the Charter Part II – that can be adapted to the Cairngorms reality and the Make It Yours program.

It would be needed afterwards a consistent communication campaign about those businesses, their commitment and best practices.

6. Visitor giving scheme to maintain infrastructures and contribute to conservation

The CNP have a very good network of paths that is being constantly improved, but there is uncertainty of availability of funds – especially public ones – to maintain the network in the future. On the other hand, there is also a need of conservation activities and projects to maintain the status and level of attraction of the national park as a nature and outdoor activity destination.

Nowadays, the park is receiving almost 1.7 million visitors per year, these visitors could contribute to the conservation and maintenance of the National Park. Most of them would probably be glad to make a contribution to the singular place they have enjoyed so much. The challenge here is to design a visitor-friendly scheme, with low administrative costs and high transparency; where tourism businesses and local entities should be actively involved.

7. Participation in the European Charter Network

The European Charter Network now counts with 157 sustainable destinations (protected areas) from 19 countries and it is a good opportunity to exchange experiences and best practices or even to promote CNP among a wide, international, specialised and committed network of professionals (protected areas managers, tourism businesses, public administrations, etc.). Every Charter Park has a lot to offer to the network and can take advantage of the experiences from other parks.

I therefore recommend that the CNPA make an effort to participate in the available tools of the network: Charter Newsletters, social media, charter meetings, joint projects and publications, working groups, etc. The network is a good school for protected areas managers aiming to progress on sustainable tourism.

The CNPA could also contribute as part of the network to make the Charter more visible and valued by the local stakeholders and the general public.

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July 2017