

# Capercaillie Emergency Plan Programme Board meeting

Tuesday 16 December | Park Authority office, Grantown-on-Spey and Teams

## Attendees

- Alex Macleod: North Region Manager, Forestry and Land Scotland
- Carolyn Robertson: Cairngorms Nature Manager, Park Authority
- Chris Donald: Head of Operations Central Highlands, NatureScot
- John Risby: Highland and Islands Conservator, Scottish Forestry

## 1. Update on actions from the last meeting

All actions from the previous meeting are either complete or scheduled for discussion during this meeting. A draft Research and Monitoring Plan from the Scientific Advisory Group was shared in advance for review. Delivery of the programme of work supported by the Nature Restoration Fund is underway and direct contact has been made with all land managers in capercaillie SPAs in the National Park. Carolyn and John have begun to contact all relevant land managers regarding fences within 5km of active lek sites to discuss options for removal. A stakeholder update will be circulated in the new year, and an update on internal reprioritisation to support Emergency Plan delivery will be provided during this meeting.

## 2. Update on staff resource to support delivery of the Emergency Plan

No contractor was appointed following the tender brief advertised on Public Contracts Scotland to support delivery of the Capercaillie Emergency Plan. In response, the Park Authority has reprioritised work to create more internal capacity. While the option of using an ecological consultancy was raised, the general view was that keeping delivery support in-house is more effective, particularly for stakeholder relationships. Scottish Forestry funding for the original contractor brief was unavailable this year, and contributions received from NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland and RSPB will be revisited once internal reprioritisation is complete.

### **3. Review the Research and Monitoring Plan for the Capercaillie Emergency Plan**

There was broad support for the draft Research and Monitoring Plan developed by the Scientific Advisory Group. Points were raised regarding the lag in capercaillie responses to interventions delivered through the Emergency Plan, emphasising the need to communicate this clearly. Ecological impacts are unlikely to be evident by 2030, though some early indicators may show change. Potential exists to revisit the Emergency Plan in 2045, in line with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, to assess long-term impact.

Support was expressed for using productivity data as the primary indicator of success, tracked through an annual 'dashboard'. Increased productivity is expected to drive population-level change, with the National Survey remaining the key mechanism for detecting change. Subject to a strong case from the Scientific Advisory Group, Board members were supportive in principle of aligning the next National Survey with the end of the Emergency Plan rather than in the middle (26/27) as is currently scheduled.

It was recognised that identifying the specific impacts of interventions requires experimental design, which is beyond the scope of the Emergency Plan, but productivity data can provide useful insights. It was noted that where productivity data has been limited in the past there is a risk that it can be overstretched, but this stands to become less of an issue with the rapidly developing use of camera traps to successfully capture productivity data for analysis. Work is also ongoing to assess the comparability of brood counts with dogs and cameras.

It was noted that clear communication of the Research and Monitoring Plan is essential to convey the complexities of the capercaillie system and external influences. The next draft will include a theory of change model illustrating what is monitored, how, and why. A joint meeting with the Board and the Scientific Advisory Group was proposed to finalise the Research and Monitoring Plan and agree communications.

### **4. Discuss next steps for the Capercaillie Reinforcement Feasibility Study**

The Phase 1 (initial scoping) report has been published on the National Park website, and Phase 2 (in-depth investigation) is currently out to tender, with the contract due to be awarded before Christmas. The Phase 1 report identifies a prioritised list of potential translocation sites for further detailed assessment in Phase 2, including Deeside; Speyside (adjacent to the existing stronghold); Capercaillie SPAs outwith the National Park (Easter Ross, Moray and Nairn, or Perthshire); and other areas of Scotland. It was agreed that Deeside should be the priority focus for detailed assessment, reflecting stakeholder input gathered during Phase 1.

## **Actions**

1. **Carolyn** to liaise with Chris, John and the RSPB regarding options for redeploying contributions linked to the tender brief advertised on Public Contracts Scotland, to support delivery of the Capercaillie Emergency Plan.
2. **All** to share any final comments on the Research and Monitoring Plan with Carolyn.
3. **Carolyn** to coordinate with the contractor for Phase 2 of the Capercaillie Reinforcement Feasibility Study, ensuring a priority focus on Deeside for detailed assessment.