



winter 2025

cairn

The magazine of the Cairngorms National Park

Cairngorms 2030

Sky's the limit
for Cairngorms
community projects

Inside

Byelaw boost
Approval given
by government

Underwater world
Hidden sounds of
our lochs revealed



For more information head to cairngorms.co.uk/magazine or scan the QR code



**Cairngorms
National Park**

**Pàirc Nàiseanta a'
Mhonaidh Ruaidh**

Do you have a question about something in the National Park? The contacts on this page will help you reach the correct person or organisation for support.



Business support

GrowBiz
connect@growbiz.co.uk
Cairngorms Business Partnership
office@visitcairngorms.com



Local council services

Aberdeenshire: **01467 534 333**
Angus: angus.gov.uk
Highland: **01349 886 608**
Moray: **0300 123 4561**
Perth and Kinross: **01738 475 000**



Land management and conservation

landmanagement@cairngorms.co.uk
nature@cairngorms.co.uk



Paths and accessing the National Park

outdooraccess@cairngorms.co.uk
outdooraccess-scotland.scot



Planning

All planning questions should go to the relevant local authority in the first instance (see contacts on the left) or visit eplanningcnpa.co.uk to view and comment on live applications.



Recruitment and current vacancies

recruitment@cairngorms.co.uk



Volunteering

volunteers@cairngorms.co.uk



Visitor information

visitcairngorms.com
visitscotland.com



Something else?

enquiries@cairngorms.co.uk
Switchboard: **01479 873 535**

Or to visit in person:
Cairngorms National Park Authority
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Fàilte / Welcome

Welcome to the winter edition of *Cairn*, a magazine which has been created for all the folk who live and work in the National Park.

The days are getting shorter, but we're fortunate to have some of the best stargazing spots in the country on our doorstep. Why not take advantage of the winter nights by exploring the Dark Skies Park at Tomintoul and Glenlivet? You might be lucky enough to see the spectacular Northern Lights.

It's also a good time to reflect on the past year. One of the most significant milestones has been the approval of a new fire byelaw to tackle the risk of wildfires. It's an important tool to



help protect our communities and wildlife, alongside a range of other measures. We're already working hard behind the scenes in preparation for it coming into force in April next year.

Meanwhile, projects to safeguard some of our most precious species – from capercaillie to freshwater pearl mussel – are making progress, following a funding boost from Scottish Government's Nature Restoration Fund.

And talking of funding, this edition is celebrating the impact of community grants, sharing inspiring case studies from around the National Park. Read on for a rare opportunity to shape a new fund worth £1m as part of the Cairngorms 2030 programme.

Let us know what you think about this issue of *Cairn*: call **01479 873 535** or email haveyoursay@cairngorms.co.uk

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Highlights



Page 5

Nature boost



Page 8

Wildfire work



Page 11

Culture club



Page 12

Community funding

The 2,000-acre wood

More than 2,000 acres of naturally regenerating native woodland has developed on Invercauld Estate over the past eight years.

In 2017, the estate started using mapping technology to measure areas where new trees,

predominantly Scots pine and birch, were appearing in the River Dee valley. This year the tally surpassed 2,082 acres, equating to an area around nine times the size of Ballater. Invercauld Estate puts the success down to the hard work of staff, fencers, tenant farmers and support from Scottish Forestry.



Damsels in less distress

The stunning northern damselfly is under threat due to habitat loss, but a partnership between the Park Authority and the British Dragonfly Society, funded by BMW Recharge in Nature, aims to change its fortunes.

A series of ponds in the National Park were at risk of being choked with vegetation or drying out completely. Following restoration work to improve

the ponds, adult damselflies and larvae have been recorded in Royal Deeside – indicating successful breeding.



Beaver spotlight

Fresh from hitting the silver screen in a Pearl and Dean cinema advert, beavers took centre stage at the International Beaver Symposium in Inverness.

The event attracted 150 delegates from across the world, some of whom visited Glenmore and Rothiemurchus to hear about the success of the Cairngorms beaver project. A third round of beaver releases will take place at Loch Morlich, WildLand Cairngorms and Insh Marshes this winter.



To watch a video update from the project, scan the **QR code** or go to **cairngorms.co.uk/beaver-update**

Cow power for caper

Capercaillie, freshwater pearl mussels and rare invertebrates are among the species benefitting from Scottish Government's Nature Restoration Fund to support vital partnership projects this winter.

Part of the £1.2m grant will support land managers to deliver elements of the Capercaillie Emergency Plan, including harnessing 'cow power' by introducing cattle to woodland areas. As cows wander and graze,

they trample the forest floor, creating a capercaillie-friendly habitat with muddy hollows which are good for the invertebrates and plants that capercaillie hens and chicks feed on.

The Nature Restoration Fund will also support work to boost the populations of rare woodlands, including aspen and montane species. And it will fund plans to make the Dee catchment more resilient to climate change and better for nature, helping species including the freshwater pearl mussel, whose numbers have not recovered since Storm Frank a decade ago.



All about ants

The rare narrow-headed ant punches well above its weight (and size). It recycles nutrients, conditions the soil, disperses wildflower seeds and preys upon other insect species, helping to control populations.

It's only known to exist in three areas of the UK, two of which are in the National Park. Now a pioneering project, supported by the Nature Restoration Fund, has seen ant colonies reared in captivity and 'planted' back into the wild at NTS Mar Lodge Estate. It complements work to translocate wood ants to historic strongholds and areas of establishing native woodland to boost biodiversity.

If you notice any ant hills when you are out and about, please jot down the location and date of your sightings and send them to nature@cairngorms.co.uk



Deer larder developments

Following the success of two deer larders funded by Cairngorms 2030, we're hoping to expand the project into other areas of the National Park.

The larders were set up on two farms to help tackle agricultural damage caused by deer, allowing them to butcher and process wild venison locally. Around two tonnes of venison has now been distributed, with Glenkilrie Farm donating to schools for home economics classes, and Fair Feast CIC focusing on foodbanks and community kitchens.



Scan the **QR code** or visit **youtube.com/watch?v=uIRVy x4APiY** to watch our latest video.

Sound waves

Underwater sounds recorded in the waters of the Cairngorms National Park are at the heart of an innovative new music album.

Local musician Mhairi Hall and field recordist David de la Haye spent a year capturing the sounds of nature above and beneath the water at locations including Loch Garten, River Feshie and An Lochan Uaine. The recordings will be used as a baseline for future research on environmental changes and contribute to other bioacoustic research taking place in the National Park.

Scan the **QR code** or visit **hudsonrecords.ffm.to/underwatercairngorms** to hear a sample



Falcon focus

The results of the first National Park-wide survey of peregrine falcon in 20 years sadly show a continuing downward trend.

In Badenoch and Strathspey, peregrine pairs have dropped by two-thirds since the early 1980s, and a similar picture has been observed in other areas of the National Park. Contributing factors may include prey availability, land management practices and Avian Flu. We're working closely with raptor study groups and estates to explore next steps, such as tagging birds and nest-cams.

To view the full report go to **cairngorms.co.uk/peregrine-report**

Field notes

Balanloan Home Farm on Atholl Estates hosted farmers and crofters from across the National Park and beyond for a one-day workshop.

The event combined informative talks with a farm tour, showcasing how a whole system approach to regenerative farming is being put into practice. Participants explored soil health, grassland management and grazing techniques to boost resilience, profitability and climate adaptation. The workshop was part of Cairngorms 2030's future farming project, delivered



with the Nature Friendly Farming Network. More events are planned, open to all farmers and crofters in the National Park.



Scan the **QR code** to sign up to our agricultural newsletter, or go to **cairngorms.co.uk/agricultural-newsletter-signup**

Welcoming wildcats

The Saving Wildcats project has confirmed the arrival of at least five litters of wild-born kittens and four more kittens at its breeding for release centre at the Highland Wildlife Park.

Building on its strong working relationships with communities and landowners, the project invited local residents Angus and Valerie Macpherson to witness wildcat releases for the first time this summer. When opening the doors to the enclosure, the Macphersons celebrated the animal's cultural significance both for Clan Macpherson and the Badenoch area.



Beetle drive

A critically endangered species of longhorn beetle has been found thriving at a Forestry and Land Scotland car park in Glenmore.

The discovery was made when a team of volunteers, led by RZSS, surveyed the area to find out more about the creature. It's part of an exciting 'breed to release' project funded by the Cairngorms Trust.



River resilience

Planning permission has been granted for a river and floodplain restoration scheme on the River Dee near Braemar, with work due to start next summer.

This Cairngorms 2030 project aims to restore the natural river and floodplain process, improve connectivity and increase resilience to flooding and drought.

Forging ahead with byelaw

Scottish Ministers have approved a new seasonal fire byelaw for the Cairngorms National Park, which bans fires and barbecues between 1 April and 30 September each year, effective from April 2026.

The byelaw is part of a broader wildfire management strategy from the Park Authority and partners, including the Climate Adaptation Fund, the Integrated Wildfire Management Plan and enhanced ranger patrols.

It follows extensive consultation with residents, land managers, community groups and partners, with 79% of those taking part voting in favour of the measure.

The major wildfire on the northern boundary of the National Park earlier this year underlined how important it is for us all to work together to protect this special place and tackle the threat of wildfires.



We're doing the following in preparation for the byelaw:

- Working with Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to prepare for robust enforcement, including enhanced patrols at key sites and an extensive training programme for rangers.
- Developing a targeted wildfire communications campaign, including permanent and temporary signage, leaflets, press activity and social media advertising.
- Working with local councils to put in place road signs at key entrance points and hotspots, informing people that there are no fires or barbecues allowed.
- Coordinating activity across estates, public bodies, NGOs, businesses and communities in the National Park to ensure a joined-up approach to information sharing on fire risk, the byelaw and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Ranger reflections

It's five years since we launched the Park Authority ranger service, working closely with partner ranger services, land managers and community partners.

The team has grown to 21 rangers, including five permanent staff, 12 seasonal rangers and four trainees. As well as welcoming our visitors, their work ensures everyone has a safe, responsible and enjoyable time.

In the past year, our rangers have:

carried out

1,544
patrols



engaged with over
7,000
visitors

cleared

679

fire
sites



delivered

54

educational
sessions



Worked with

256

junior rangers

Steely ambition

Plans to transform a former sawmill site at Boat of Garten into the Cairngorms Enterprise Park are gathering pace.

New owners Ross and Heidi Stuart, of Nethy Steel Ltd, want to address a shortage of flexible, affordable workspaces for trade businesses in the area, and they've already received around 25 enquiries. Their first step is refurbishing existing buildings to create industrial units. The project will be developed in phases, with input from the local business community.

For more info visit cairngormsenterprisepark.co.uk



Ross and Heidi Stuart



Homes on the horizon

Planning applications have been approved for around 70 homes in Nethy Bridge and Aviemore, with a significant proportion earmarked for affordable housing.

This adds to ongoing developments in Kingussie and Newtonmore, where around 100 houses are under construction. These include affordable homes and a number allocated on a priority basis to people already living or working in the National Park. Meanwhile, the Housing Minister has announced a Housing Emergency Action Plan, acknowledging the acute challenges faced in rural areas.

Conservation careers

This summer, 16 young people from the Black Professionals UK network spent an inspiring day in the National Park exploring careers

in conservation and rural development with the Park Authority.

Sessions covered nature restoration, species reintroduction and planning,

before the group – aged between 13 and 18 – enjoyed some hands-on time outdoors with the Park Authority ranger team. It was a chance to connect with nature, gain fresh perspectives and consider future rural careers.



Pride in nature

Cairngorms Pride is a new community-led social enterprise for LGBTQ+ groups, activities, partnerships and events, supported in its start-up year by the Cairngorms Trust. One of its first projects is Diversity in Nature, which includes working with schools and families and an art prize in partnership with the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland. Meanwhile a new 'Pollination Street' of bee and bug houses has arrived at Glenlivet Estate, in partnership with Speyshed. Go to cairngormspride.scot for more info.

Think winter

The Cairngorms is a winter playground. As the cold weather starts to bite, it's crucial to prepare for your adventure to keep yourself and others safe. From navigating hills to mountain biking, the #thinkWINTER campaign has advice and resources to help you before



heading out into the elements. Scan the QR code or visit mailchi.mp/glenmorelodge.org.uk/thinkwinter

Making trax

Trails at Laggan Wolfrax have been upgraded and improved to allow riders using adaptive bikes to enjoy the mountain biking on offer. Forestry and Land Scotland and the community-run Laggan Forest Trust joined forces to make the improvements to the blue and green trails on the edge of the National Park.

Our survey says...

The latest visitor survey commissioned by the Park Authority reveals that three-quarters of guests saw National Park status as important when researching holiday destinations.

Independent experts MEL Research interviewed more than 1,300 visitors in locations across the Cairngorms National Park over the past year. They were asked a range of questions



about their stay, including the length of visit and type of accommodation. The results reveal that visitors felt a strong personal connection to the area.

For more on the survey go to cairngorms.co.uk/visitor-survey



Strathdon support

Strathdon has been a hive of activity over the past few months!

Our staff met with the Silver Circle and held a drop-in event with partners, which also saw the launch of a new Community Action Plan. Around 60 people discussed topics from farming to the Local Development Plan. Meanwhile, a community bench has

been reinstated at Bellabeg thanks to S3 woodwork students at Alford Academy. Supported by Park Authority ranger Will George, the project helped pupils develop joinery skills while upgrading a valued local asset.

And finally, the community have created a new 'swap shop' cabin offering everything from clothes to kitchen items and books on a trust basis.

Charging ahead



Three new EV charging points are in place at the Reindeer Centre in Glenmore, Nethy Bridge Hall and Landmark Forest Adventure Park in Carrbridge. The installations are part of the UK-wide BMW Recharge in Nature scheme with National Parks Partnerships. With EV charging provision already in Blair Atholl, Dinnet, Ballater, Crathie, Braemar and Tomintoul, communities across the National Park are now supporting greener travel for residents and visitors.



Active Aviemore

We have secured funding from

Transport Scotland to further develop plans for active travel in Aviemore as part of Cairngorms 2030. The project aims to improve links to Badenoch and Strathspey Community Hospital for pedestrians, cyclists and wheelchair users. We're keen to get your views as the designs progress, so keep an eye out for ways to get involved.



New route for Deeside

A new electric bus service is opening up travel choices in the east of the National Park. With space for two pre-booked bikes, Ember's route goes through Glenshee, Braemar, Balmoral and Ballater. It offers links to Aberdeen and Dundee, as well as Aberdeen Airport.



Culture club

The rich cultural heritage of the Cairngorms National Park is a source of pride for many of us.

Now an ambition to create an independent network for those working in the area is gathering pace following an event at Boat of Garten Hall.

The event was led by a working group of people specialising in different aspects of cultural heritage across the National Park, with support from the Scottish

Community Tourism Network (SCOTO) and the Park Authority.

"It's been rewarding meeting people passionate about heritage in all its forms," working group member Lydia Fisher told us. "It has sparked new ideas, fostered collaboration, and inspired new ways of thinking how to celebrate and preserve the National Park's rich cultural legacy." Meanwhile, the new Communities and Cultural Heritage Fund is now live. With a total fund value of £50,000, community groups are being invited to apply for grants ranging from £2,500 to £10,000.

For more on funding opportunities in the National Park, see overleaf

Funding the future for Cairngorms communities

Imagine this for a school field trip: spending a night under the stars, spotting constellations and listening out for nocturnal wildlife.

The experience gave geography pupils from Speyside High a valuable insight into the Cairngorms Dark Skies Park and its impact on tourism in Tomintoul and Glenlivet.

The overnight session rounded off a series of Pathways to Rural Work events run by Countryside Learning Scotland and Crown Estate Scotland, made possible by a Cairngorms Trust Community Led Vision Fund grant.

From upgrades to shinty changing rooms and village halls to new equipment for small social enterprises, the fund benefits communities in a huge variety of ways. It's one of a range of grants overseen by the Cairngorms Trust, which has distributed £2m to nearly 300 projects in the past decade, working closely with the Park Authority.



New for this year has been the Park for All Fund, designed to increase access to the National Park for members of black and ethnic minority communities and foster a deeper connection with nature.

New Scots from Afghanistan, Syria, Romania and Sudan were among those to benefit through a project organised by Angus Council's Vibrant Communities Resettlement and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) service. Around 30 young refugees and asylum seekers spent a day with rangers in Glen Doll, with activities including cutting back bushes and monitoring red squirrels.





“This is one of the most ambitious projects of the programme, empowering people to lead the way in looking after this special place for generations to come.”

**David Clyne,
Head of Cairngorms 2030**

“It’s beautiful,” said one participant after the visit. Another said: “I loved the views.” Others reflected that the experience had made them consider volunteering or working in the outdoors.



Help design a £1m Communities Fund
We’re looking for 18 people to help design a new fund for Cairngorms communities this January. Scan the **QR code** or go to **cairngorms.co.uk/2030-fund**



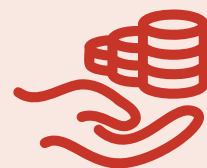
Supporting young people is also at the heart of the Cairngorms Youth Local Action Group (YLAG), which has handed out more than £100,000 to 100 projects since it started in 2021. Children as young as seven are involved in the latest round, with projects including a youth orchard and clothes recycling and reuse workshops in Strathspey.

Now another exciting fund is on the horizon. The £1m Communities Fund is part of the Park Authority’s Cairngorms 2030 programme, supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

This project is unusual because its funding outcomes haven’t been set in advance. This January, members of the community can apply to join a panel to decide on the criteria and process for awarding funds, reflecting the needs and priorities of people in the National Park. They will also be paid for their time.

David Clyne, Head of Cairngorms 2030, said: “This is one of the most ambitious projects of the programme, empowering people to lead the way in looking after this special place for generations to come.

“The co-design panel offers a rare opportunity to shape how this significant sum of money best supports our communities to deliver the vision and themes of Cairngorms 2030. I can’t wait to see how it develops.”



Current opportunities

Communities and Cultural Heritage Fund (£50,000)

Supporting communities and celebrating our shared cultural heritage.

Community Led Vision Fund (£242,000)

Cairngorms Trust fund for capital projects that address community priorities.

Youth Local Action Group (£10,000+)

Giving young people a voice and supporting youth-led projects.

For more information on funding available, scan the **QR code** or visit **cairngorms.co.uk/funding**



Introducing the Dùthchas Award

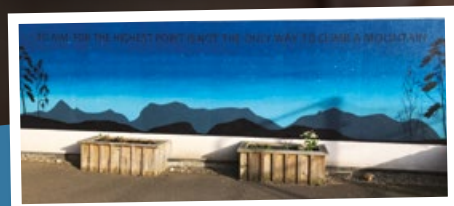
The Cairngorms Dùthchas Award is an exciting new outdoor learning award inspiring people to be lifelong custodians of the National Park.

Dùthchas – the deep-rooted connection between people and nature – is the cornerstone of our Cairngorms 2030 programme, and this award aims to create a legacy for generations to come.

Designed to appeal to 'head, hand and heart', it encourages people to learn about the qualities of the National Park and do something practical to

look after it, fostering a long-term care for this special place. The free scheme will be open to children as young as three, throughout school years and beyond. The approach builds on the Park Authority's long-standing engagement with young people through the John Muir Award.

A number of groups, including some children who are homeschooled, have been involved in a pilot. Six-year-old Noelle told us: "My favourite part of the Dùthchas Award so far has been painting a colourful cottage in the hills, in the style of a Scottish artist."

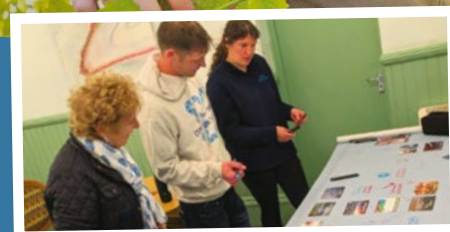


Inspirational artwork

"To aim for the highest point is not the only way to climb a mountain." The words of Scottish writer and poet Nan Shepherd are the highlight of a new mural at Grantown Grammar School. Featured on the STEM building – where pupils have been studying peatland and woodland habitats – they worked with local artist Claire Macdonald and art teacher Kyle Noble on this inspirational design.

Tomintoul turns 250

The community of Tomintoul have a lot to celebrate next year, as 2026 marks 250 years of the village. As the anniversary lasts a whole year, so will the celebrations! Festivities kick off at Hogmanay, with a torchlit procession and ceilidh. Visit tomintoul250.org.uk for details of all the anniversary events taking place throughout the year.



Climate festival

The YMCA in Grantown-on-Spey was the hub for the first ever Grantown Climate Action Festival. With a series of events focusing on how we can tackle climate change, the festival heard from Park Authority staff on peatland restoration and beaver reintroduction. Other events included workshops on bike maintenance, clothing and furniture repairs, and woodwork.



In conversation with Dr Sally Mackenzie

Dr Sally Mackenzie is Freshwater Restoration Manager at the Park Authority. She was among those involved in a recent rescue operation for one of our most precious species: the freshwater pearl mussel. Longer-term work to protect these amazing molluscs has been funded by Scottish Government's Nature Restoration Fund.

Why are freshwater pearl mussels so important?

Freshwater pearl mussels can live for over 100 years and are essential to river health. Each mussel filters around 50 litres of water a day – the equivalent of our morning shower – helping keep water clean for salmon, trout, otters and many other species. Their waste adds nutrients to the ecosystem and freshwater snails even scrape calcium from their shells.



Dr Sally Mackenzie, Freshwater Restoration Manager at the Park Authority

Healthy mussel populations are central to a thriving river ecosystem.

What happened on the River Spey earlier this year?

A lack of rain led to low river levels and rising water temperatures, leaving many mussels either covered in silt and algae, unable to filter, or exposed to the air and drying out over the summer months. So we carried out a major rescue operation, saving more than 2,500 freshwater pearl mussels over a two-week period.

Mussels can use their small foot to move to deeper water, but that relies on them having a clear path and suitable habitat to move to. We found many jammed between rocks where they'd tried to move but got stuck. These conditions are catastrophic for a species already under threat.

Who got their feet wet in the rescue?

It was a true team effort! Park Authority rangers and staff from

across the organisation – including some from our Planning team – worked alongside NatureScot staff, [local ecologist and Park Authority board member] Pete Cosgrove and the Spey Fishery Board. Knee-deep in the river for hours, everyone carefully relocated the mussels to safer sites.

How are the mussels doing now?

The mussels are monitored regularly and the latest inspections are very encouraging. They're still healthy and filtering effectively, contributing to the river ecosystem as they should. It's hugely rewarding to see that the effort has paid off, protecting not just the mussels but the wider health of the River Spey.



To find out more, scan the **QR code** or visit **cairngorms.co.uk/wildlife/freshwater-pearl-mussel**



“We carried out a major rescue operation, saving more than 2,500 freshwater pearl mussels over a two-week period.”

Dr Sally Mackenzie, Freshwater Restoration Manager
Cairngorms National Park Authority

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Read the full story on page 15



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