

# Capercaillie Emergency Plan Programme Board meeting

Thursday 2 October | Park Authority office, Grantown-on-Spey and Teams

## Attendees

- Alex Macleod: North Region Manager, Forestry and Land Scotland
- Andy Ford: Director of Nature and Climate Change, Park Authority (Chair)
- 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

The Scientific Advisory Group are on track to share a draft Research and Monitoring Plan with the Programme Board by the end of the year. The focus for monitoring is on outcomes for capercaillie. This marks a shift from monitoring outputs alone, e.g. hectareage of habitat improved. It was highlighted that halting population decline remains a critical outcome and the Scientific Advisory Group has a key role to play in informing plans for the next National Survey to identify population level change.

Work is ongoing to identify other datasets needed to monitor the Emergency Plan, noting current inconsistencies in data resolution, timescales and spatial coverage, and the absence of some datasets. Funding is needed to address some of these issues to ensure effective and robust monitoring of the Emergency Plan. A question was raised for the Scientific Advisory Group about how climate change factors into monitoring.

No contractor was appointed following the tender brief advertised on Public Contracts Scotland to support delivery of the Emergency Plan. In response, the Park Authority is looking to reprioritise 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 funding received from NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland and RSPB will be revisited once internal reprioritisation is complete.

## **2. Delivering priority actions through the 25/26 Nature Restoration Fund**

The Board reviewed and approved a draft programme of work to deliver priority actions from the Capercaillie Emergency Plan, supported by the Scottish Government's Nature Restoration Fund (NRF). The proposed activities have been developed collaboratively with stakeholders and with input from the RSPB Capercaillie Advisory Officer. To date, engagement has been open rather than targeted, with stakeholders responding to the funding opportunity as it was advertised. The Board agreed that land managers within capercaillie Special Protection Areas (SPAs) who have not yet responded should now be contacted directly.

Proposals within the draft work programme include support to create habitat suitability maps for capercaillie, which will provide greater ability to target interventions in a spatially coherent way. A habitat improvement plan for Forestry and Land Scotland Strathspey will also be developed as a priority and used as a template for other landholdings.

It was confirmed that NRF funding must be spent within the National Park. It was agreed that monitoring and data sharing should be conditions of any funding awarded and that baseline data should be collected wherever possible before work begins. Where woodland-grazing equipment is funded, it was agreed that options should be discussed with grantees to make equipment available to other local graziers contributing to capercaillie management.

Fence removal within 5 km of active lek sites is as a priority. The Board reviewed high-risk fences and agreed that the Park Authority and Scottish Forestry will contact relevant land managers to discuss options for removal.

## **3. Stakeholder engagement**

It was agreed that a progress update for stakeholders will be shared in January, covering the Scientific Advisory Group's work, preparations for the breeding season (including Lek It Be and diversionary feeding), dust bath camera / productivity insights and an update on the reinforcement feasibility study. The potential for Programme Board site visits was discussed, and the Park Authority and Scottish Forestry will also visit land managers to discuss fencing. Members highlighted the importance of maintaining positive relationships and keeping all stakeholders engaged. Engagement with land managers in capercaillie SPAs remains a priority.

## **4. Any other business**

Programme Board dates for 2026 will be aligned with Scientific Advisory Group meetings. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 16 December.

## **Actions**

1. **Carolyn** to share the draft Research and Monitoring Plan from the Scientific Advisory Group for review at the next meeting.
2. **Carolyn** to take forward delivery of the Nature Restoration Fund programme of work as agreed by the Board.
3. **Carolyn** to contact all land managers in capercaillie SPAs who have not yet engaged in the Nature Restoration Fund opportunity.
4. **Carolyn and John** to contact all relevant land managers to discuss fences within 5km of active lek sites and options for removal.
5. **Carolyn** to draft and circulate a stakeholder update in January as agreed.
6. **Carolyn** to provide an update at the next meeting on internal reprioritisation to support delivery of the Emergency Plan.