

Briefing: Cairngorms Capercaillie Framework

1. Why is this significant?

The Capercaillie Framework aims to improve conservation for capercaillie in its remaining UK stronghold. It also provides a practical way to address some of the challenges and tensions between conservation, tourism and development that go to the heart of why the Cairngorms National Park exists. We have international obligations to protect capercaillie while also delivering high quality visitor experience and rural development for the area's communities. The Capercaillie Framework is a significant step in a long term strategy to address these challenges.

2. Capercaillie in the Cairngorms

Capercaillie are a high profile species synonymous with the Cairngorms and its forests. A national conservation priority, capercaillie also generate significant wildlife tourism interest and are seen by many as an iconic species associated with the area.

Management to improve the capercaillie population is one of the central conservation challenges in the Cairngorms National Park. In the UK capercaillie are found largely in pinewood habitat in Scotland, with an overall population that has declined from an estimated 20,000 birds in 1970 to 1,285 at the most recent national winter survey in 2009/10. The Cairngorms National Park is now the remaining stronghold for capercaillie, with at least 75% of the national population. Their breeding success in the Cairngorms is critical to the future presence and expansion of the species in Scotland.

Capercaillie are qualifying interests in seven Special Protection Areas in the Cairngorms National Park. The way the birds move between these sites and use other undesignated woodland in between, means we must approach their conservation at a landscape or population scale. In practice this means managing their habitat in Strathspey as a connected whole to secure the current population, and looking ahead, enabling expansion through the connections from Strathspey to Deeside, Perthshire, Donside and Moray.

3. What is the Cairngorms Capercaillie Framework?

The framework brings together spatial data and knowledge about the capercaillie population, the pressures and management measures in the Cairngorms in order to better co-ordinate deployment of management measures at an effective scale.

We have completed Phase 1 of the Framework which has two outputs:

- a) Phase 1 report with analysis of data collated, discussion and recommendations
- b) Set of working data and maps

The data collated in the Framework will remain a working set of data to be used and updated. In Phase 2 of the project, we will use the data to implement the recommendations for management on the ground through direct engagement with land managers and communities.

There are three key areas of management action that interact and need co-ordination:

- Habitat and species management
- Recreation management
- Development management

For the first time, the Framework gives us an overview of how these three areas of management action can be co-ordinated to best effect. It shows where woodland could be expanded to best effect for capercaillie and where the focus for recreation management should be.

4. What are the key messages from Phase 1?

- The Cairngorms National Park is the remaining UK stronghold where significant management effort including the 2002-07 LIFE project has helped to maintain a viable capercaillie population;
- There is significant potential to further secure and enhance the population in the Cairngorms, to the point at which it could support expansion into other areas of Scotland;
- In the long term, habitat expansion and improvement are key to the species future;
- In the short term, a range of other factors that reduce productivity should be addressed;
- Increasing the extent of good, connected, undisturbed habitat is key – this can be done by improving existing habitat, expanding the area of woodland and by reducing disturbance through recreation management;
- By targeting woodland expansion, recreation management and development mitigation, there is significant potential to increase the extent and quality of habitat for capercaillie.

5. How will this work be used?

The Framework will be used by a range of organisations:

- To work with land managers and communities to co-ordinate habitat and recreation management on the ground. This will include:
 - Supporting habitat improvement
 - Supporting woodland expansion in key areas
 - Reviewing the coverage of ranger services in key areas
 - Changing and adapting path networks where necessary
 - Engaging with residents and visitors using key areas of woodland
- To prioritise effort and resources for woodland expansion through SRDP and other projects;
- To inform development planning and co-ordinate the mitigation associated with development in individual communities;
- To help develop the strategic direction for the next National Park Partnership Plan and Local Development Plan.

6. How does this help deliver the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity?

The Cairngorms National Park is making a significant contribution to delivering the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity Challenge through landscape scale conservation. With at least 75% of the national capercaillie population here, action to conserve the capercaillie is one of the biggest contributions to national species targets we can make.

The 2020 Challenge calls for protected areas policy to be more integrated with action for wider habitats and combat fragmentation and restore key habitats (p43 'Key Steps'). The Framework does exactly this, setting out how action for capercaillie should connect management of Special Protection Areas into a wider vision of woodland enhancement and

expansion across the National Park. Further, it sets out how management of other land use objectives including recreation and development should also be integrated into this landscape scale picture, co-ordinating action well beyond the boundaries of designated sites.

The significant community and visitor engagement required to implement management through this framework will also contribute significantly to the 2020 Challenge's ambition to involve many more people in protecting Scotland's wildlife.

7. How has the Capercaillie Framework been developed?

The Framework is a priority for the Cairngorms Nature Partnership. The work has been led by the Cairngorms National Park Authority with the support of a project team comprising SNH, RSPB, GWCT, FCS, CNPA and the national Capercaillie Project Officer. The team have engaged and taken advice from a range of groups including the Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group, Local Outdoor Access Forum, Association of Cairngorms Communities, Ranger Services, Land Managers, Activity Providers and the Capercaillie Biodiversity Action Plan Group.

8. What happens next?

In December 2014 the Board of the Cairngorms National Park Authority is being asked to endorse the report of Phase 1. This sets out an agenda for management action that partners will work together to implement over the coming five years. This is a long term area of work and implementation will require detailed discussions with individual land managers and communities to put together the right packages of work on the ground. The Cairngorms National Park Authority will continue to lead this work, working with our Cairngorms Nature partners.