

Capercaillie Emergency Plan Programme Board meeting

Tuesday 22 April | Park Authority office, Grantown-on-Spey and Teams

Attendees

- Grant Moir: Chief Executive Officer, Park Authority (Chair)
- Carolyn Robertson: Cairngorms Nature Manager, Park Authority
- Chris Donald: Head of Operations Central Highlands, NatureScot
- Kenny Kortland: Environment Policy Officer, Scottish Forestry
- Alex Macleod: North Region Manager, Forestry and Land Scotland

Apologies

- John Risby: Highland and Islands Conservator, Scottish Forestry

1. Scientific Advisory Group

It was confirmed that Stuart MacQuarrie, NatureScot's Deputy Director for Nature and Climate Change, will chair the Scientific Advisory Group. All invitations to join the group have been accepted, so the membership is as below, and the group will aim to meet as soon as possible.

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| ▪ Forest Research | ▪ RZSS |
| ▪ GWCT | ▪ University of Aberdeen |
| ▪ NatureScot | ▪ University of St Andrews |
| ▪ RSPB | ▪ University of Glasgow |

2. Recruiting a Capercaillie Emergency Plan Project Manager

NatureScot, the Park Authority and FLS confirmed that funds could be made available to cover the cost of a 1 year post with scope to extend to 2 years subject to funding in 2026/27. Scottish Forestry funding for year 1 is to be confirmed and the RSPB have also offered to contribute. Due to current Scottish Government headcount restrictions, a contractor will be recruited and managed by the Park Authority.

3. 2025 priorities

An action agreed at the last meeting to help inform future funding was to prioritise activities outlined in the plan based on evidence and opportunities for quick wins. A discussion was had about the priorities listed below:

1. Reducing disturbance

The Park Authority is currently funding the Lek It Be campaign and work with the dog walking community and mountain biking community. Subject to further funding there is scope to upscale this work as reducing disturbance remains a priority.

2. Reducing the impacts of predation

Increasing numbers of landmanagers have begun to deliver diversionary feeding and funding is needed to help effectively upscale the technique in preparation for delivering a 4-year programme (2026 – 2030) of diversionary feeding on all sites in the National Park with suitable hen records.

3. Expanding and improving habitat

Scottish Forestry is continuing to support and enable woodland expansion plans where there are benefits for capercaillie, e.g. Abernethy, Kinveachy, and significant FGS funding has been granted for deer management plans in capercaillie areas to enable woodland expansion plans without fencing. It was noted that continued support for habitat expansion and improvement on sites like Abernethy and Kinveachy would help the sites reach their maximum potential for capercaillie.

4. Woodland restructuring

Within core areas it was noted by Scottish Forestry that more could be done to increase structural diversity through thinning, winching-over trees, small-scale felling to remove non-native conifers and effective deer management.

5. Woodland grazing and robocutting

It is an action in the Capercaillie Emergency Plan to build an evidence base and identify target areas in the National Park where woodland grazing and robocutting will deliver the greatest benefit for capercaillie. Doing this asap will help to inform where limited FGS funding would have best effect.

6. Removing and marking fences

Scottish Forestry will carefully consider any proposed new fences and the action in the Capercaillie Emergency Plan to target the removal of fences within 1 to 5km of active lek sites remains a priority. To achieve this, funding is needed to top up the FGS grant for fence removal.

Actions

1. Carolyn to work with Stuart to arrange the Scientific Advisory Groups' first meeting.
2. Carolyn to draft a new role description suitable for a contractor to support delivery of the Capercaillie Emergency Plan, initially for 12 months.
3. Kenny to confirm Scottish Forestry funding for the above post.
4. Carolyn to use the priorities discussed to inform fundraising activities and allocation of NRF funding (TBC).