



Protected Species survey guidance for Peatland Restoration Projects in the Cairngorms National Park

Version 1.0

This guidance summarises the expectations for protected species survey requirements within Cairngorms Peatland ACTION–supported peatland restoration projects in the Cairngorms National Park. It follows the NatureScot Peatland ACTION protocols and directs applicants to the NatureScot technical resources.

1. Purpose of protected species surveys

Peatland restoration activities risk disturbing or harming protected species if not planned appropriately. Applicants must ensure **no negative impacts to protected species** and that restoration activities comply with all relevant wildlife legislation.

Protected species surveys therefore:

- Identify the presence of protected species on or near the site.
- Inform whether timing, design or methods of restoration must be adapted.
- Provide information needed to set out spatial constraints that protect species during works.

2. Who can complete protected species surveys?

Surveys must be carried out by a **competent person** with the appropriate expertise for the species and survey type. Requirements are detailed in the [NatureScot Species Survey Guidance for field ecologists](#). Applicants should consult qualified ecologists with experience in upland/peatland systems and protected species legislation.

3. Survey requirements for Cairngorms Peatland ACTION grant applications

Applicants must:



3.1. Complete pre-application protected species surveys

Baseline surveys are required **prior to applying for delivery funding**. These surveys feed into the ecological understanding of the site and are used to ensure compliance with protected species legislation. NatureScot provides [species-specific survey protocols](#) including:

- Breeding birds
- Mountain hare sweep searches
- Reptiles

Pre-application survey to include:

1. A desk study
2. A preliminary walk over field survey

3.2. Produce a constraints map

Survey results must be used to prepare a **constraints map**, outlining:

- Sensitive areas
- Species-specific exclusion zones using appropriate buffers
- Timing restrictions
- Any areas requiring avoidance or specific techniques

This map along with details of any license applications and proposals for ECoW is a required part of the **Cairngorms Peatland ACTION delivery grant application**.

3.3. Funding for Surveys

Peatland ACTION **does not fund** the initial protected species surveys or constraints mapping unless the applicant is supported through a **development grant**, where such work may be eligible.

4. Pre-operational surveys and Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW)

Once a project has been approved for **delivery funding**, applicants must:

- Carry out any necessary pre-operational protected species checks
- Implement ECoW oversight, where required (e.g., for breeding birds, mountain hare, reptiles)

These checks ensure restoration activities remain compliant at the point of construction.



Cairngorms Peatland ACTION *will fund* pre-operational surveys and ECoW activity as part of the delivery grant, provided they are included in the budget breakdown and comply with grant eligibility criteria regarding value for money and agreed deliverables. This distinguishes pre-works checks from the baseline survey work required earlier in the process.

5. Where to get advice on survey methods and protocols

NatureScot already maintains detailed, species-specific protocols that must be followed. Given the legal and ecological complexities, applicants should be directed to the **NatureScot Peatland ACTION Technical Team** for advice on:

- Which surveys are required
- Survey timing windows
- Correct methodologies
- Data recording requirements
- Legislative responsibilities
- Roles and responsibilities – refer to: [Peatland ACTION - Changes to support for species protection for Peatland ACTION projects | NatureScot](#)

We do **not** create, provide or endorse parallel standards. All guidance should align with and directly refer back to the official NatureScot Peatland ACTION protocols.

7. Summary

- Baseline protected species surveys must be completed by a competent ecologist before applying for a delivery grant.
- Results must be used to prepare a constraints map for the grant application.
- These early surveys are not funded by Cairngorms Peatland ACTION unless via a development grant.
- Pre-operational surveys and ECoW checks are eligible for Cairngorms Peatland ACTION funding under the delivery grant.