



## THE BIODIVERSITY DUTY REPORT: LEVEL ONE ORGANISATIONS SECTION 1: INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR PUBLIC BODY

**Please describe your organisation's role and purpose, including any particular environmental responsibilities**

The Cairngorms National Park has 4 statutory aims as set out in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000:

- Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area
- Promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area
- Promote understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public
- Promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities

The purpose of a National Park Authority is also set out by the Scottish Parliament as being to ensure the four aims are collectively achieved in a coordinated way. If there is a conflict between the first aim and the other aims, the Authority must give greater weight to that aim. The CNPA has a key role in leading the delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan. The Plan sets the context for close cooperation and partnership across public, private and voluntary organisations in the Park.

19 Members make up the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) Board: 7 members appointed by Scottish Ministers, 5 members are elected locally and 7 members are nominated by the 5 councils in the Cairngorms National Park: Highland (2), Aberdeenshire (2), Moray (1), Angus (1), Perth & Kinross (1). The [Board Standing Orders](#) set out the procedures which apply to meetings of the Board and its committees.

The Park Authority does not own or manage any of the land in the National Park. CNPA has two statutory functions – planning and development and outdoor access – and is responsible for developing and producing a [Local Development Plan](#), [Core Paths Plan](#) and [National Park Partnership Plan](#). A [Management Statement and Financial Memorandum](#) has been issued to the Park Authority to enable it to discharge its functions.

CNPA leads the development of the National Park Partnership Plan and co-ordinates its delivery and monitoring, providing the framework for partners to co-ordinate effort on the big issues. The Partnership Plan provides strategic direction for key strategies and plans which support its delivery and are developed through close partnership working with different sectors. The Partnership Plan focusses on three long term outcomes of Conservation, Visitor Experience and Rural Development.

Of most relevance to delivery of the Biodiversity Duty are the [Cairngorms Nature Action Plan](#), which sets out the conservation priorities; [Active Cairngorms](#), the outdoor access strategy, the [Local Development Plan](#), which sets out the policies for land use planning within the National Park; and the [Cairngorms National Park Forest Strategy](#), which provides future direction on the management and expansion of woodlands in the Park.



## SECTION 2: ACTIONS TO PROTECT BIODIVERSITY AND CONNECT PEOPLE WITH NATURE

**Please describe and explain any actions that your organisation has undertaken alone or as part of a partnership to benefit biodiversity directly, to tackle the main drivers of biodiversity loss, or to achieve wider outcomes for nature and people**

The Cairngorms National Park is one of the best places in the country for nature. This is where we find some of Scotland's wildest land, arctic-like mountain plateaux and Scotland's most extensive semi-natural pine forest, home to 80% of our capercaillie population. Half of the Park is designated as being of European importance for nature through the Natura network and over a quarter of the UK's rare and threatened species are found here.

The [Conservation](#) outcome in the Partnership Plan sets out the key conservation priorities which will guide the work of partners over the Plan period. The Agenda for Action and partners' work under the three priorities of [supporting landscape-scale collaboration](#), [deer management](#) and [moorland management](#) will help to meet the conservation challenges and deliver the relevant national strategies and public interest land use priorities.

The [Cairngorms Nature Action Plan](#) further details the priorities over the next five years and provides a focus for the work of the Cairngorms Nature Partnership. The Action Plan describes actions and commitments to woodland expansion, peatland restoration, river re-naturalisation, nature friendly farming, species conservation and involving and engaging people in nature. CNPA co-ordinates the work of the Cairngorms Nature partnership, overseeing the delivery of the Action Plan. A [final report of the Action Plan 2013-2018](#) highlights some of the partnership's achievements.

During 2020, Cairngorms Nature partners have delivered more than £100,000 of habitat improvement and species conservation via the Biodiversity Challenge Fund and 2,800ha of woodland expansion. During the period from the beginning of 2018 to the end of 2020 we delivered 1,383 hectares of peatland restoration management supported by funding from Peatland Action. Delivery of peatland restoration management was significantly impacted by Covid-19 restrictions and the lack of suitable contractors.

In 2020, CNPA launched a [Cairngorms Green Recovery Fund](#) to help communities and local businesses by supporting projects to create economic growth, jobs, protect nature and address climate change. The fund is made up of £100,000 from the CNPA and a further £30,000 from the Cairngorms Trust and has four guiding principles:

1. To support projects that are focused on green solutions.
2. To support the well-being and economic growth of communities.
3. To support employment.
4. To support the long term aims of the Cairngorms National Park.



The CNPA Local Development Plan identifies the most suitable sites needed for future development and incorporates guidance on any mitigation required for biodiversity related to those allocations. The Plan also contains comprehensive policies on protection of Natural Heritage and biodiversity of international to local significance.

- [Policy 4: Natural Heritage](#) is divided into six sections covering all protected species and habitats as well as those within the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan. It requires developers to undertake comprehensive assessments of natural heritage interests on all development sites. The policy also includes a presumption against removal of ancient woodland.
- [Policy 3: Sustainable Design](#) includes a requirement for a design statement which demonstrates how opportunities to further biodiversity and promote ecological interest will be achieved.
- [Policy 10: Resources](#) explicitly protects the water environment and carbon sinks and stores including soils and peat.

The [Cairngorms Local Development Strategy](#), led initially by Cairngorms LEADER and most recently by the Cairngorms Trust, aims to promote community led local development to support a sustainable rural economy in the Cairngorms National Park. It is designed to tackle some of the challenges faced by people living, working or visiting the Cairngorms National Park. The Strategy links directly with the Community Action Plans, National Park Partnership Plan and Scottish Government strategies. It is about supporting communities in planning for their future needs, tackling issues and challenges they face – including climate emergency and biodiversity crisis - as well as dealing with the responsibility it brings.

The objective to develop thriving and sustainable rural communities with a strong and resilient community base, supported by a diversified and competitive local economy drawing on the Cairngorms unique natural and cultural assets is split into six strategic themes. Theme 5, to 'Protect and enhance landscape and heritage', focuses on increasing involvement of local communities in protection and enhancement of natural and cultural assets. This includes land, wildlife, habitats, traditions, buildings, crafts, culture and reduction and mitigation of the impact of climate change.



## SECTION 3: MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY

**Please outline any steps your organisation has taken to incorporate biodiversity measures into its wider policies, plans or strategies. This should include decision-making structures and staff and organisational roles and responsibilities.**

Planning within the CNP is delivered through the [Local Development Plan](#). This includes specific policies on protection of Natural heritage (Policy 4) and sustainable design (policy3) which requires ecological interests to be included within applications.

The [Economic Action Plan](#) for the National Park states "The National Park's outstanding natural and cultural heritage attracts around 1.9 million visitors each year, underpinning many jobs. There is increasing interest in Scotland in the concept of 'natural capital' which describes the stocks of natural assets on which our lives depend and which aims to highlight the connections between natural resources and economic development. If ever there was a place where these connections are both obvious and important then it must be in the Cairngorms National Park....

...The need to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss will have implications for the National Park and specifically land use, managing increased flood risk, housing, transport and tourism. We need to ensure that growth in the Park economy is sustainable and helps to meet the target of net zero emissions and the biodiversity targets. The collation of evidence to influence the next National Park Partnership Plan will take place in 2020 but, given the urgency of climate risks, some significant actions require to be taken now. "

The [Cairngorms Trust](#) acts as the Local Action Group (LAG) for the Cairngorms National Park. This includes the decision making on the use of European Union LEADER funds allocated to the Cairngorms National Park LAG. The Trust aims to inspire communities and visitors to support the landscapes, wildlife, local culture and economic health and to encourage sustainable and community-led local development within the Cairngorms National Park. The Trust supports projects which maintain and enhance the landscapes, wildlife, habitat, local culture and the access within the Cairngorms National Park. The Trust administers the Green Recovery Fund which has to date [supported 13 projects](#) in the Park focussed on green solutions, access to nature and community empowerment.

The CNPA greening committee drawn from members of staff and management. This group oversees the office activity and facilities and recommends improvements to way the authority work. The [Greening Policy](#) includes measures for enhanced biodiversity. The have included - green roof on the new building, bird boxes around the site as well as bat boxes incorporated into the building. The front of the building has recently been planted with an insect friendly herbaceous planting to encourage native species and pollinators.



## SECTION 4: NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY

### How has your organisation integrated biodiversity into nature based solutions to the climate emergency and other socio-economic outcomes?

The Cairngorms National Park represents 6% of Scotland's landmass and is well placed to help tackle the climate emergency challenges through nature-based solutions.

A board paper '[Net Zero with Nature](#)' outlines where the National Park should focus its efforts to lead the way to a low carbon future that supports a nature-rich Park, benefitting resilient local communities. The CNPA has started to set out an ambitious vision and programme of action to tackle climate change which is set to be at the core of the next National Park Partnership Plan.

In March 2020, the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) hosted the '[Net Zero with Nature](#)' conference to address the climate crisis and what needs to happen in the Cairngorms National Park to tackle the issues.

The Cairngorms are ideally placed to capitalize on the country's requirement for nature-based solutions such as [peatland restoration](#), [natural flood management](#) and [woodland creation](#) working on a landscape scale.

Two reports detailing research on how climate change affects snow cover in the Cairngorms National Park have been published and are available to download – [Snow Cover and Climate Change on Cairngorm Mountain](#)

There are 18,000 residents in the National Park and 2 million people visit each year. The CNPA has invested considerably in developing [Active Travel](#) to support walking and cycling within and between communities. Encouraging people to use green modes of transport will reduce CO2 emissions while also improving our health and wellbeing and making our communities more sustainable.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) has always strived to be as 'green' as possible has monitored its carbon footprint since 2007/08. In a decade, the organisation has managed to reduce its carbon emissions by 40% from 150 tCO2e to 90 tCO2e in 2017/18. This has been achieved by a reduction in vehicle use and switching to more environmentally friendly pool cars, a reduction in electricity usage, cutting down on paper use, the installation of a biomass boiler, buying only eco-friendly cleaning products and making recycling easier around the office.

[View the CNPA's Greening Policy & emissions report](#)



## What steps has your organisation taken to incorporate biodiversity outcomes into partnership initiatives, wider strategies or initiatives of relevance to climate change?

CNPA work with partners, business, land-owners, and communities to develop long term plans for the Park. The National Park Partnership Plan is the overarching management plan which sets out how all those with a responsibility for the Park will coordinate their work to tackle the most important issues. It focuses on three long-term outcomes:

- [Conservation](#)
- [Visitor Experience](#)
- [Rural Development](#)

CNPA's mission is to lead the way in delivering for the Cairngorms National Park by bringing people together toward a common purpose; enhancing the Park for everyone and inspiring new generations to be Park champions. Designed to be an enabling organisation, promoting partnership working and giving leadership to all those involved in the Cairngorms National Park, the Park Authority does not duplicate the work of other organisations, such as the enterprise agencies or NatureScot. It ensures there's a joined-up approach to projects and initiatives that help to meet the four aims of the Park. Our [Communications & Engagement Strategy](#) sets out how we will achieve this.

CNPA leads the [Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group](#) as a grouping of professionals from a range of organisations with an active role in the delivery of biodiversity gain in the Cairngorms National Park. The Strategy Group comes together to provide guidance to, and collectively oversee the implementation of, the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan and wider Cairngorms Nature partnership. The objectives and functions of the Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group are:

- To provide strategic leadership of Cairngorms Nature to make a measurable difference to biodiversity in the Cairngorms National Park
- To inspire and provide support to individual and community involvement in local conservation projects
- To co-ordinate and maintain an overview of progress in biodiversity management across the whole Park.

In 2018 CNPA established the [Cairngorms Upland Advisory Group](#) (CUAG) which draws its membership from organisations and groups which have an interest in upland management issues in and around the Cairngorms National Park. Its main functions are:

1. To promote better communication and understanding between all organisations with an interest in upland management in the Cairngorms National Park.
2. To advise the Cairngorms National Park Authority on upland management and, in particular, integration of the different land management sectors within the Park
3. To share examples of good practice and strengthen the skills base in the sector
4. To share latest research, relevant to upland management in the Cairngorms to inform future land-use strategy

CNPA plays an active role in supporting and co-ordinating the work of many regional land use partnerships and initiatives, encouraging Park-wide collaboration and collective working at a landscape-scale towards the joint outcomes of meeting the twin challenges of biodiversity loss



and climate emergency. These include [Deer Management Groups](#), Catchment Management Partnerships, Local Biodiversity Action Plans and the CNPA-led East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership looking to deliver [moorland management](#) that meets both the public and private interest.

The Park's rich biodiversity and fantastic natural assets underpin a strong visitor offering. CNPA plays a leading role in delivering the [Sustainable Tourism Action Plan](#) working with the Cairngorms Business Partnership and the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership, which brings together tourism businesses and organisations with key public sector partners. The Cairngorms is the first National Park in the UK to be awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, based on 5 Principles that govern how tourism is developed and managed:

1. Giving priority to protection
2. Contributing to sustainable development
3. Engaging all stakeholders
4. Planning sustainable tourism effectively
5. Pursing continuous improvement



**Looking ahead, what do you think will be the main climate change related challenges for biodiversity over the next three years?**

Climate change related challenges for biodiversity in the Cairngorms:

- Changes to habitat cover and composition and species diversity, distribution and abundance;
- Increasing ecosystem resilience: improving ecological networks to create opportunities for species to disperse, increasing species and structural diversity
- Mainstreaming and incentivising land management for natural processes and ecosystem functionality
- Taking an adaptive approach to land and conservation management, encouraging and supporting changing objectives and management measures in response to new information.

Targets and Key Performance Indicators in the National Park Partnership Plan include hectares of new woodland, hectares of peatland restored, designated site condition, deer densities, capercaillie population estimates and numbers of wildlife crime incidents in the Park.

Targets in the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan also include woodland expansion and enhancement, peatland restoration, freshwater restoration, riparian planting and species' recovery.

CNPA is currently developing the Cairngorms Nature Index, a baseline assessment of ecosystem functionality, habitat cover and condition and priority and/or indicator species distribution and abundance





## SECTION 5: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

### Public Engagement

The Park Authority undertakes many methods to engage the wider public and communities in biodiversity and the environment. These include

- [Cairngorms Nature BIG weekend](#) - an annual three day event providing information and activities across the national park. In 2019 there were more than 100 event over the weekend and more than 2,500 people participated. In 2020 this was on line and reached an audience of more than 3,500 through our on line events, talk and activities.
- [Cairngorms Capercaillie Project](#) - this is a large project working with communities close to capercaillie woodlands. It seeks to empower communities to engage with the conservation of the species whilst ensuring that recreation in the woodland does not effect the birds.
- [Volunteer Cairngorms](#) - a programme to support and develop environmental volunteering in the Cairngorms National Park through coordinating environmental and community volunteering opportunities and directly managing 30 volunteer rangers who give several weekends each year to undertake engagement work. Volunteers have been selected and trained to perform a variety of task and in turn support efforts of communities to protect nature.
- [Cairngorms Photo-posts](#) - is a long term citizen science project mainly to show the effect of landscape change and engage people in landscape monitoring
- CNPA supports the [16 Health Walk Groups](#) active in the Park
- CNPA employs a Conservation Engagement Officer to directly support several community groups around the CNP to proactively conserve nature through habitat improvements. This officer also coordinates a range of social media posts and news letters highlighting the biodiversity within the National Park.
- Conservation with volunteers is also achieved through the support of the CNPA to a number of science projects including Cairngorms Wild Plant and the Rare Invertebrates of the Cairngorms. Both project recruit volunteers to help with the recording and conservation of particular species.

### Workforce skills and training

CNPA supports the development of staff in skills relevant to biodiversity in several ways:

Professional conservation staff are encouraged to undertake additional training on specific skills for their roles. They are encouraged to join professional organisations such as CIEEM and follow the CPD requirements. The staff are also encouraged to participate in conferences and workshops.

All CNPA staff are given the opportunity to engage in conservation work on volunteers days.

**Identify any opportunities that are available to your staff to take part in practical actions**

Staff volunteering days - each member of staff may undertake two days per annum in core time to assist in community and conservation events. In the past this has included working within local woodland, path maintenance and litter picking.

Biological recording - staff are encouraged to undertake this activity and are given guidance from conservation staff. This includes large scale survey of wildlife such as the Strathspey Wetlands and Waders Initiative recording of farmland waders run by the RSPB and CNPA.



## SECTION 6: RESEARCH AND MONITORING

**Describe any research activities that your organisation has undertaken to help develop understanding and awareness of biodiversity**

The [Cairngorms National Park Research Strategy](#) aims to connect research and management in the Park. It sets out research priorities and encourages collaboration across research disciplines that will help inform management challenges in the Park. Research priorities include investigating how designated habitats and species can be maintained and enhanced in a changing context of climate, development, recreation and land use; and determining what is the natural capital of the National Park and the implications of management choices on ecosystem service delivery.

Current, specific pieces of biodiversity related research and monitoring, to support delivery of the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan, include genetic analysis of capercaillie populations, surveys of aspen woodlands, wood ants and species rich grassland, monitoring of wader productivity, collaboration with raptor study groups, deer densities and habitat impact assessments, mapping of ancient woodland remnants and wader hotspot modelling

CNPA is currently working with the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research to develop a Cairngorms Nature Index, based on the [Norway Nature Index](#), as a baseline and framework for future analysis of the state of the Park's biodiversity, natural capital and ecosystem functionality.

**What follow-up actions or monitoring have you undertaken to assess the impacts of the actions you have taken? How have you measured this? If you do not carry out any monitoring activities, please explain why.**

Cairngorms Nature is the principal delivery mechanism for delivering the [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy](#) and the Six Big Steps for Nature in the Cairngorms National Park. The [Cairngorms National Park Authority Biodiversity Delivery Agreement \(PDF – 161KB\)](#), outlines the role that CNPA plays as a focus for collaboration, sharing effort and resources on a number of key, priority areas.

- Landscape-scale conservation, including the expansion of woodland and the restoration of peatlands and wetlands
- Focused action to improve the status of threatened or declining species
- Involving people

Monitoring and delivery of the current Action Plan (2019 - 2024) is overseen by the [Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group](#). An [interactive report](#) describes the actions taken, impacts and targets achieved over the life of the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan 2013-2018.



**Does your monitoring show any significant trends or highlight any areas of concern?**

CNPA is not directly responsible for monitoring and works closely with NatureScot, Scottish Forestry and SEPA to monitor designated site condition and water quality issues. The Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group reviews delivery of the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan, which includes progress along the Species Recovery Curve for priority species, informed by input from multiple partners and SEWeb data.

**Have you added any data collected to the National Biodiversity Network or your Local Records Centre?**

CNPA directly supports the work of North East Scotland Biological Records Centre to collect and collate biological records for the whole of the National Park.

Projects in the National Park are all encouraged to submit records to the NBN and where CNPA is a funder, this is a condition of funding.

CNPA is a member of Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum and supports the proposals for the national co-ordination of biological records

## SECTION 7: BIODIVERSITY HIGHLIGHTS AND CHALLENGES

**Describe your organisation's main achievements for biodiversity over the reporting period and what you are most proud of (this can include processes, plans, projects, partnerships, events and actions).**

Delivery of the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan 2012-2018 and achievement of targets for woodland expansion, peatland restoration, river re-naturalisation and species conservation are detailed in the [final report](#).

Over the last two rounds of Scottish Government's Biodiversity Challenge Fund, Cairngorms Nature partners have attracted approximately £200,000 of conservation funding targeted at delivering the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan. These include river restoration and riparian planting, wet grassland management for waders, pine hoverfly captive breeding and reintroduction, habitat creation for rare invertebrates, aspen planting and protection from grazing, and fresh water pearl mussel translocation

In 2020 CNPA was successful in drawing down £2.9 million of funding for capercaillie conservation. The [Cairngorms Capercaillie Project](#) is a multi-partner, National Heritage Lottery Fund project to involve a wider range of people in saving a genuinely iconic species from extinction in Scotland.

The £3.6 million NLHF funded [Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership](#) comes to end in 2020, benefits for biodiversity include:

- the creation of 3 new fish passes to open up 9km of salmon spawning ground,
- 17 ha native woodland planting,
- 13 successful applications to the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) for habitat management covering a total of 750 ha,
- farmers collaborating to restore c. 50 ha of wetland,
- wetland management training and demonstration events,
- a new bird hide for observing wading birds created,
- 180m of innovative green-engineering on river banks using tree trunk revetments, willow-spiling and tree planting,
- a new community wildlife group and grant scheme developed stimulating more than 20 locally led biodiversity projects.

Delivery of 1,383 hectares of peatland under active restoration across 8 different land holdings. This work was supported by grant-aid of £1.77 million from Peatland ACTION and land owner's contributions of £0.19 million. and 2,800ha of woodland expansion

The [Cairngorms Nature BIG weekend](#) is an annual three day celebration of the nature in the Cairngorms with events, activities, walks and talks aimed at making the nature of the Cairngorms accessible to a wide range of people. In 2019 there were more than 100 event over the weekend and more than 2,500 people participated. In 2020 this was on line and reached an audience of more than 3,500 though our on line events, talk and activities.

CNPA's Green [Recovery Plan](#) sets out how the natural and social capital of the area are protected and replenished as the economy is rebuilt to deliver a fairer, greener and more equal society.



## Looking ahead, what do you think will be the main challenges over the next three years?

The [big conservation challenges](#) identified in the National Park Partnership Plan are:

Enhancing habitats on a landscape scale

- Improving the condition of existing woodland and creating a more extensive, connected forest network resilient to changing climate, pest and disease risks, including restoring the largely missing montane woodland habitat.
- Restoring functioning river and wetland systems, improving water quality, freshwater habitats and flood management.
- Restoring degraded peatland and actively managing the carbon and water functions of the uplands.
- Enhancing the special landscape qualities of the National Park.

Protecting and enhancing species

- Addressing declining and fragile populations of key species including capercaillie, freshwater pearl mussel and other Cairngorms Nature priorities.
- Eliminating the illegal killing of raptors and increasing raptor populations.
- Tackling species management conflicts by combining knowledge from all sectors to develop shared solutions to competing objectives.

Building support and engagement

- Engaging people in the land use choices and finding new ways to invest in and support the active land management required.
- Increasing community involvement in land management planning.
- Engaging and inspiring people through recreation, volunteering and learning opportunities that connect them with the nature of the Cairngorms.

Tackling these challenges will require taking an adaptive approach to land and conservation management, encouraging and supporting changing objectives and management measures in response to new information, resource and financial commitment, collaboration at a landscape scale and a clear understanding of the status and requirements of priority species through surveys, monitoring and research.