

## Context

The Cairngorms National Park is a nationally and internationally important haven for nature and wildlife. Habitats are rich and varied, from montane alpine habitats high on the Cairngorms plateaux; freshwater and riparian habitats of the renowned salmon rivers the Spey, Dee, Tay and South Esk; peatland habitats important for storing carbon; Caledonian pine woodlands, home of the rare capercaillie; to stands of aspen in Strathspey supporting rare insects and fungi.

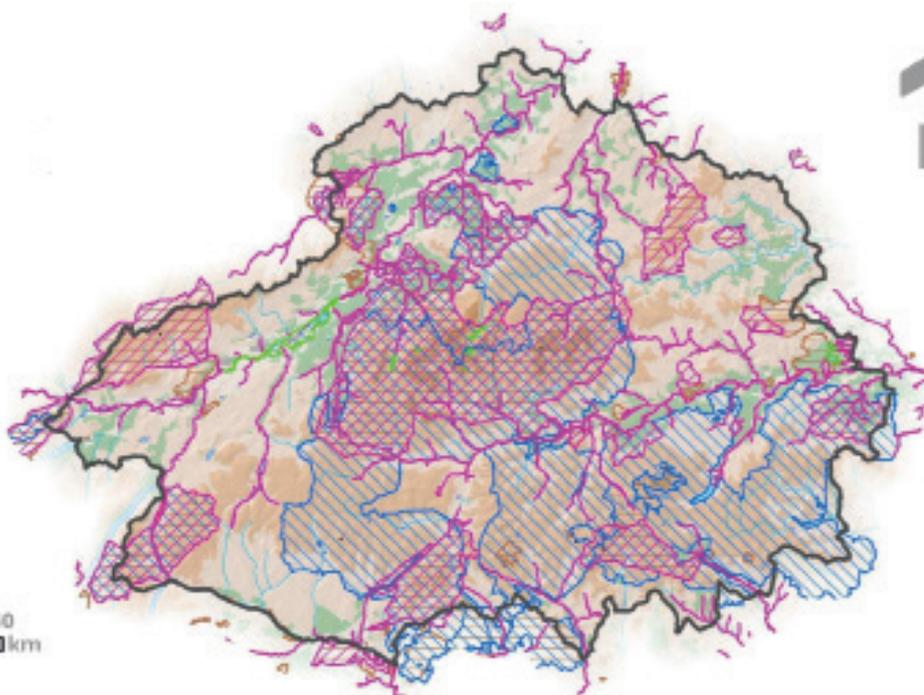


**2% UK  
LANDMASS**

**25%** of rare  
animal, insects,  
lichen & fungi

## Areas protected for nature conservation

With 55 nationally and 42 internationally important areas protected for a nature conservation completely or partially within the National Park boundary, many of which overlap with each other, over half of the National Park is designated as one or more areas protected for nature conservation.



Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright and database right 2021. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100040965 Cairngorms National Park Authority.

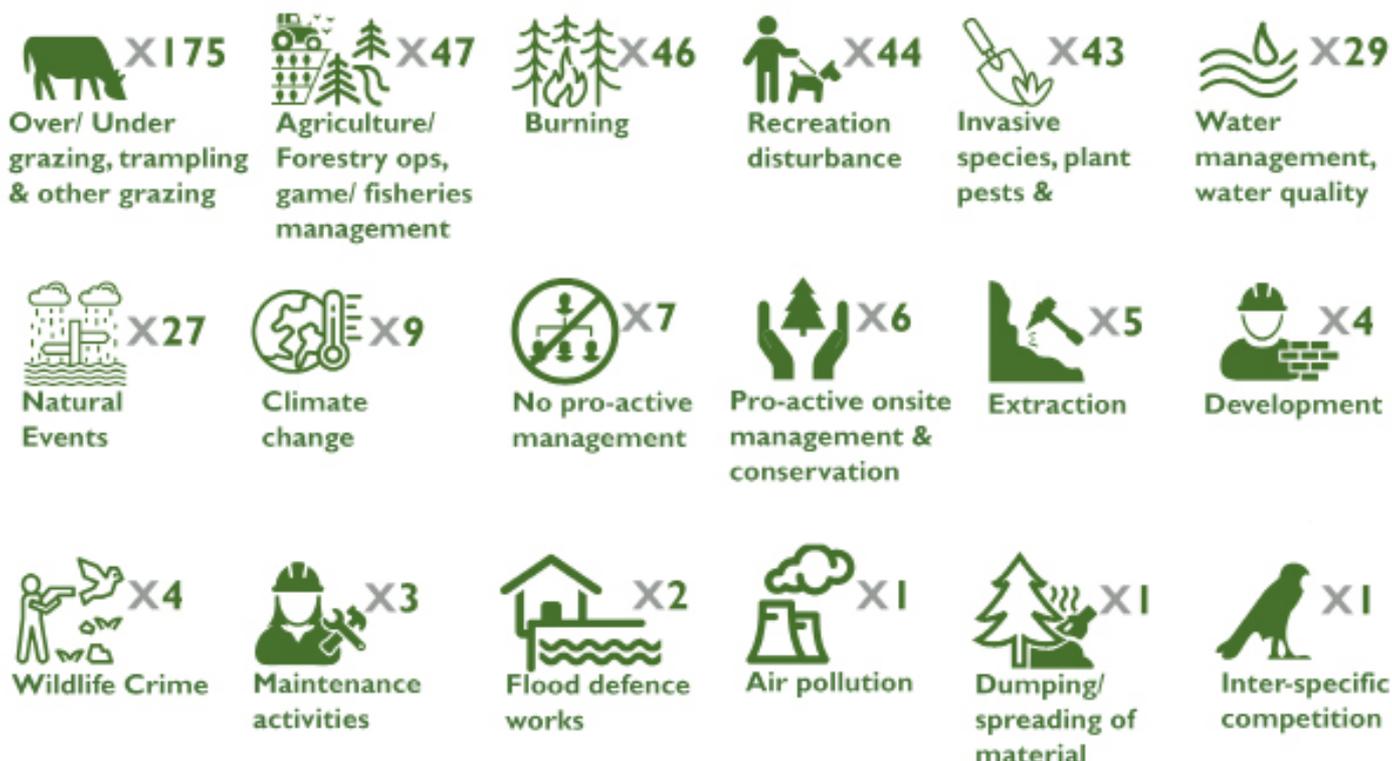
## Changes in protected area condition 2015 - 2021

The condition of the protected areas could be considered a reflection of the wider state of biodiversity within the National Park. Since the environmental baseline assessment was carried out for the current NPPP in 2015, the overall number of protected areas in favourable condition has increased from 42% to 58%.

Protected area type	No. completely or partially within the Park	No. in unfavourable condition		% in favourable condition		Change in condition
		2015	2021	2015	2021	
SSSI	55	23	21	58%	62%	+4%
SAC	23	16	11	30%	52%	+22%
SPA	16	9	8	44%	50%	+6%
Ramsar Site	3	2	1	33%	67%	+33%

## Summary of pressures affecting protected areas

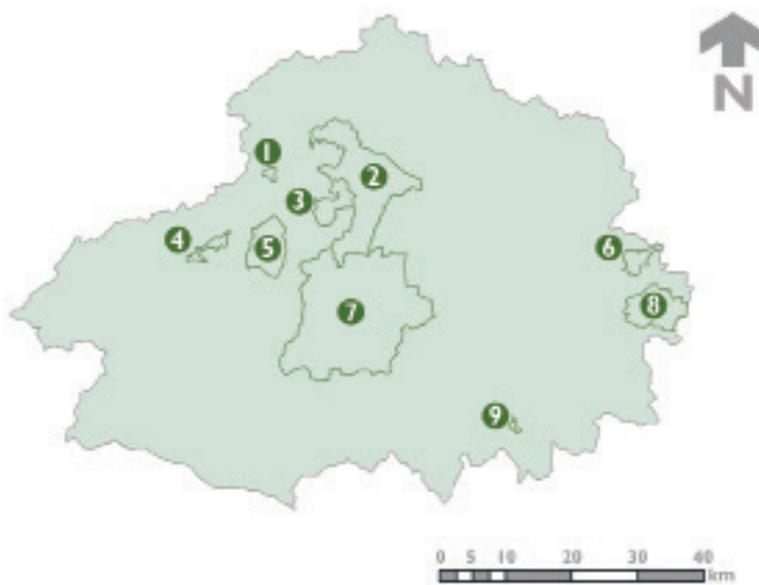
A wide range of pressures (below) affect qualifying interests and notified features of protected areas resulting in unfavourable condition, most of which relate to land/water use and management. The information below shows the number of protected areas affected by the particular pressure according to the latest Site Condition Monitoring carried out by NatureScot.



## National Nature Reserves

There are 9 actively promoted NNRs within the National Park.

NNR		Managed by
1	<b>Craigellachie</b>	NatureScot
2	<b>Abernethy</b>	NatureScot and RSPB
3	<b>Glenmore</b>	Forestry and Land Scotland
4	<b>Insh Marshes</b>	RSPB
5	<b>Invereshie and Inshriach</b>	NatureScot
6	<b>Muir of Dinnet</b>	NatureScot
7	<b>Mar Lodge Estate</b>	National Trust for Scotland
8	<b>Glen Tanar</b>	Glen Tanar Estate
9	<b>Corrie Fee</b>	NatureScot



## Cairngorms Nature Action Plan (CNAP) 2019 - 2024

A number of species and habitats important for conservation and tackling the effects of climate change have been identified for landscape scale conservation, priority species and involving people management within the CNAP.

### Habitats and species identified for action in the CNAP 2019 – 2024, and the habitat type(s) that they are predominantly associated with

	<b>Habitats</b>	native woodlands (particularly Caledonian pine forest supporting capercaillie), moorland and peatlands, freshwater and wetlands (particularly for natural flood management)
	<b>Mammals</b>	Scottish wildcat (found in woodland habitat); mountain hare (found in upland habitat)
	<b>Birds</b>	capercaillie (found in woodland habitat); curlew (found in wetland and grassland habitat); golden eagle, peregrine falcon, (found in upland habitats); hen harrier (found in upland and grassland habitats)
	<b>Invertebrates</b>	Kentish glory, dark bordered beauty, pine hoverfly, wood ants, pinewood mason bee, aspen hoverfly, shining guest ant (reliant on woodland habitats); scabious mining bee (reliant on grassland habitats); Northern silver stiletto fly, Northern February red stonefly, Northern damselfly (reliant on water/wetland habitats)
	<b>Molluscs</b>	freshwater pearl mussel (found in freshwater)
	<b>Trees, shrubs, plants</b>	aspen, woolly willow, twinflower, one-flowered wintergreen, small cow wheat (found in woodland habitat); marsh saxifrage, alpine blue sow thistle, oblong woodsia (found in upland habitat)
	<b>Fungi &amp; lichen</b>	waxcaps (fungi, found in grassland habitat); Alectoria ochroleuca (lichen, found in upland habitat); Hertelidea botryose (lichen, found in woodland habitat)

## CNAP: Progress

There has been a huge amount of conservation work undertaken across the two years of the plan so far. This has been largely maintained despite the pandemic due to the hard work of all those involved. 71 of the 83 actions (85%) are on track to deliver planned outcomes along with 30 out of 40 targets (75%).

This is the third round on reporting on the action plan activity and delivery, the previous round was in August 2020. The change in the number of Action status since August 2020 are indicated in the red numerals

## Actions

Overall there is strong and steady progress on most actions. There are now two red actions (peatland and raptors) and amber is up from 6 to 8. Six of the Amber actions were previously green. The four actions that were amber in 2020 are now all green. The reduction in green actions probably reflects several issues including Covid effects. Only one action has not yet started (natural capital accounting).

AIM	Red	Amber	Green	Not yet Started	Not reported	Actions
Landscape Scale Conservation	1 +1	2 -1	17	0	1	21
Priority Species	1 +1	5 +2	38 -1	0 -2	0	44
Involving People	0	1 +1	11	0 -1	0	12
Delivery and monitoring	0	0	5	1	0	6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2 +2</b>	<b>8 +2</b>	<b>71 -1</b>	<b>1 -3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>83</b>

## Targets

This is the first time a comprehensive assessment has been made against the targets. Therefore a comparison with 2019 and 2020 can't be made. Two species targets are red indicating they are not likely to be achieved (capercaillie and raptors). There are 5 amber and 30 that are green. Two species are predicted to be in a better SRC position than originally thought. Twin flower has already reached its target stage. One is no longer applicable because the work on shining guest ant has been subsumed into that for wood ants in general. There are only 2 unreported.

TARGETS	Red	Amber	Green	Unreported	Total Targets
Landscape Scale Conservation	1	3	3	1	8
Priority Species	2	0	24	1	27
Involving People	0	2	3	0	5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>40</b>

## Landscape Scale Conservation

The information below shows the RAG status (left) of the CNAP targets (right).



5,000 Ha new woodland (including regeneration & montane)



**2800ha to date.**



70% of new woodland to be native species



**90% of the 2800Ha planted to date is native woodland.**



750 Ha plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) & native woodlands under active restoration



**340Ha under active management.**



20 farms in woodland & grassland projects



**Delayed by farm advisor post vacancy: species rich grassland project planned for start in 2022.**



5000 Ha peatland restoration



**681Ha delivered 2019-2021; 2,200 Ha planned for 2022 - 2024.**



150km river and riparian restoration



**43km undertaken so far across three catchments. Significant restoration planned as part of Heritage Horizons Bid.**



50 ponds created or restored, including SuDS



**10 ponds in 2019/20 and a further 20 planned for completion in 2021.**



increase in farmland water populations from the existing 2015 baseline

**Not reported : Survey completed in 2021 (delayed due to Covid). Data currently being collated and analysed for reporting 2022.**

Woodland expansion and with predominantly native species has been very successful to date and it is very likely that the 5000ha target will be exceeded.

The Scottish peatland programme funding has been secured for the next three years allowing more investment by contractors, this is likely to accelerate the progress on restoration. This is now delivered directly through a CNPA peatland action team. Though the target of 5000Ha by 2024 may not be reached it is likely to do so only a year later.

## Involving People

The information below shows the RAG status (right) of the CNAP targets (left).



Over 50 volunteer rangers working in Cairngorms National Park



Currently 38 – The same as in August 2020 but no more have been recruited due to Covid. However more are planned in the next year or so.



5 communities fully engaged in landscape values project



Will be delivered through the Heritage Horizons Project.



15,000 people attended outdoor, nature-related events



High online activity but Covid 19 restrictions meant that outdoor event not possible in 2021. Up to 2020 approximately 4,000 people engaged through the CNBW and other events.



3 communities involved in land-use decision making



Will be delivered through the Heritage Horizons Project.



20 Land managers trained in community engagement



Training project still in planning phase of delivery.

## Public Engagement

The pandemic has also affected the ability and nature of public engagement. More engagement has been done online by the CNPA and will continue to be a feature of public engagement going forward. The big weekend was virtual in 2020 and will be so in 2021.

Volunteers remain an essential component of good conservation work. They are involved with invertebrates, wild plants, bird counts, habitat creation and surveys (eg aspen deadwood).

## Priority Species

Work to achieve the targets for priority species has been overwhelmingly successful with all but two (Capercaillie and Raptors) of the listed species currently at a green RAG status and predicted to be achieved by 2024.



### Capercaillie

There is a very high risk that the CNAP target will not be met. Capercaillie populations in Scotland have declined significantly from an estimated 20,000 birds in 1970 to 1,114 at the national winter survey in 2015/16. A further national survey results are due in 2022.

The Park holds a significant proportion of the national population – around 80%, the majority in Strathspey - mostly in areas protected for nature conservation but also in other forests that host metapopulations.

Capercaillie also persist in Deeside. The Strathspey capercaillie population is crucial to the long-term survival of the species in the UK.



### Raptors

Press release in Sept. 2020 on successful breeding of white-tailed eagle on an ECMP estate, the first in Deeside for around 200 years. However recent events surrounding raptor persecution cast doubt on the progress of delivery actions and there remains a very high risk that the CNAP target will not be met.

It is unlikely that sufficient actions on the ground will be in place such that continued interventions are enabling a sustained increase in home range occupation and breeding success of golden eagle, hen harrier and peregrine.



### Invertebrates

The work on invertebrates as a whole has expanded since the start of the plan with good progress being made on habitats, data as well as other measure including captive breeding and translocations for wood ants at Mar lodge. In particular concerted effort by several organisations to survey and record species has discovered new sites, including Northern Damselfly, Northern February Red Stonefly, Kentish glory and Dark bordered beauty moth.



## Scottish Wildcat

Knowledge about population figures is patchy, partly due to the elusive behaviour of wildcat and also because of interbreeding with domestic/feral cats resulting in hybrids that can be difficult to tell apart from pure bred wildcat. The Highland Wildlife Park near Kincaig are hosting a breeding and reintroduction programme for Scottish wildcat, Saving Wildcats. This should boost the population of Scottish wildcat in the National Park in future years.



## Grasslands

Grasslands are only covered within a single nature friendly farming action. However they deliver for plant and invertebrate diversity as well as farmland birds and perhaps they should be given a higher priority within the plan. The recent resurvey and GIS assessment of 2009 data has shown a decline in B&S of these important grasslands. This work has highlighted a trend of decreasing extent and quality of species rich grassland in Badenoch & Strathspey. 39% of sites surveyed in 2006/07 have shown a loss in species diversity and cover. Of the 87 sites where species rich grassland was the predominant cover in 2006/2007, 58% have experienced significant losses. The main cause of loss, responsible for 56% of the changes (in both groups) has been due to a reduction in grazing, and the second biggest factor, responsible for 22% of changes/losses has been development. Other factors included woodland planting (2%) and livestock damage (2%). Surveys are underway in Glenlivet and Deeside to establish if this pattern will be found elsewhere. As a consequence of this data, we are developing new projects focused on maintenance and restoration of species rich grassland.

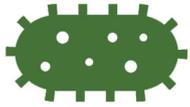


## Curlew

The National Park is one of the most important UK mainland sites for breeding wading birds due to its combination of wetlands, wet grasslands and low-intensity mixed farming. Nevertheless, curlew have seen their numbers dramatically reduce by over 62% between 1994 and 2017. Despite this targets affecting wading birds are expected to be met by the CNAP.

## Other issues affecting biodiversity –diseases, non-native species

Non-native species can kill, harbour disease, and/or compete with native species



### Pathogens

Pathogens can cause death or reduce viability of populations of host species, which has implications ecosystems and biodiversity. In the Park, the main issues relate to tree health:

- Dothistroma (red band) needle blight is a fungus that causes the premature loss of pine needles, weakening the tree which may lead to premature death.
- Ash die back or Chalara (*Hymenoecyphus fraxineus*) is a fungus causing dieback and mortality in ash trees.
- Ramorum *Phytophthora ramorum* is a fungal disease of larch.
- *Phytophthora austrocedraeon* is a fungus that causes dieback and mortality in juniper where it attacks the roots and stems.

## Advancements in Data Collection



### Technology

The use of technology has increased and is delivering more understanding as well as results faster and less expensively than before.

The use of DNA sequencing for wildcat, capercaillie and pine hoverfly is pivotal in determining the best way to conserve these species. Environmental DNA (eDNA) for Northern February Red stonefly, and great crested newt, is helping to see if presence can be detected even without seeing the species.

Drones for aerial surveys and satellite imagery are all helping to get a much better understanding of habitats, land cover and change. Satellite tagging and motion cameras continue to be used for monitoring individual animals and species.



## Further Information

### **Cairngorms Nature:**

<https://cairngormsnature.co.uk/index>

### **Cairngorms Nature Action Plan:**

<https://cairngorms.co.uk/working-together/authority/national-park-strategies/cnap/>

### **Protecting biodiversity in the Cairngorms National Park:**

<https://cairngorms.co.uk/working-together/biodiversity/>

### **Cairngorms Capercaillie Project:**

<https://cairngormscapercaillie.scot/>

### **Cairngorms Capercaillie Framework:**

<https://cairngormsnature.co.uk/capercaillie-framework>

### **Cairngorms Wild Cat Project Final Report (NatureScot , 2012):**

<https://www.nature.scot/cairngorms-wildcat-project-final-report>

