



spring 2023

cairn

The magazine of the Cairngorms National Park

Rangers

Meet the team
helping us care for
the Cairngorms
National Park

Inside

Community news:
Affordable
housing push

Nature spotlight:
Bringing back
beavers



To find out more information on the stories within this magazine please scan the QR code



**Cairngorms
National Park**
Pàirc Nàiseanta a'
Mhonaìdh Ruaidh

Do you have a question about something in the National Park? The contacts on this page will help you to get to the correct person or organisation to help you.



Business support

GrowBiz

connect@growbiz.co.uk

Cairngorms Business Partnership

office@visitcairngorms.com



Local council services

Aberdeenshire: **01467 534 333**

Angus: angus.gov.uk

Highland: **01349 886 608**

Moray: **0300 123 4561**

Perth & Kinross: **01738 475 000**



Land management and conservation

landmanagement@cairngorms.co.uk

nature@cairngorms.co.uk



Paths and accessing the National Park

outdooraccess@cairngorms.co.uk

outdooraccess-scotland.scot



Planning

All planning questions should go to the relevant local authority in the first instance (see contacts on left) or visit eplanningcnpa.co.uk to view and comment on live applications.



Recruitment and current vacancies

recruitment@cairngorms.co.uk



Volunteering

volunteers@cairngorms.co.uk



Visitor information

visitcairngorms.com

visitscotland.com



Something else?

enquiries@cairngorms.co.uk

Switchboard: **01479 873 535**

Or to visit in person:

Cairngorms National Park Authority

14 The Square

Grantown on Spey

PH26 3HG

Front cover image: seasonal ranger Craig out in the National Park. **Other images** © Alpha Projects, Airborne Lens, Beaver Trust, Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Ltd, Cairngorms Connect, Cairngorms National Park rangers, Cathleen Nicol, Charlotte Milburn, David Lintern, Highland One World, James Lee, Josie Slade, Juno Snowdon, Laurie Campbell, Louise Fenlon, Luke Massey / 2020VISION, Mark Hamblin, Markus Stütz, Naomi McIntosh, National Trust for Scotland, Pete Short, Rachel Keenan, RSPB Scotland and Saving Wildcats.

Fáilte / Welcome

Welcome to the spring edition of *Cairn*, a magazine which has been created for all the folk who live and work in the Cairngorms National Park.

We all know how special the National Park is – our majestic munros, rivers and lochs, the variety of rare and endangered species found here, our rich and diverse cultural heritage.

The Park Authority exists to protect and enhance all the things that make the Cairngorms special and this magazine – which comes out three times a year – showcases how we and over 100 partners are going about it.

Collectively, we support projects and activities in every community across the National Park, from nature conservation to planning and business support.

This magazine will bring you news of what's taking place in your area, as well as across the whole National Park.

It will let you know how you can get involved and who to contact if you have ideas or questions for us.

We've also taken steps to ensure this publication is as environmentally friendly as possible. Printed on 100% recycled paper using vegetable-based inks, we'll balance any carbon impacts by creating native Scots pine, birch, rowan, willow and aspen woodland right here in the National Park.

We'd love to hear what you think of this spring edition. You can get in touch with us by calling **01479 873 535** or you can email us on haveyoursay@cairngorms.co.uk



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Issue highlights



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Beaver tales

Green shoots

A new programme is reaching out to people that don't usually have a chance to experience the National Park. The Park Authority and partners are providing safe and engaging introductions to volunteering. See cairngorms.co.uk/volunteers.

Beinn a' Ghlà carpark

In response to parking issues on sensitive areas of Beinn a' Ghlà, the Park Authority, Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland, NatureScot and the landowner have created a 61-space car park on land away from the Special Area of Conservation. Funds raised will be reinvested in maintaining paths and supporting volunteer work.

Tipi on tour

Ahead of the opening of the UK's first outdoor dementia resource centre at Badaguish, Alzheimer Scotland have pitched their tipi in locations across Strathspey, talking to members of the community living with dementia. Find out more about the project on page 17.

Park for all

We've partnered with LGBT Youth Scotland on their charter mark, a programme that enables organisations to proactively include LGBTQ+ people in every aspect of their work. This included a series of blog pieces to mark LGBT History Month in February. See cairngorms.co.uk/voices for details.

Housing hope

12 new homes have been completed in Tomintoul.

The houses, developed by Tomintoul and Glenlivet Development Trust, were built on the site of an old secondary school and were made available for affordable rent and discounted sale. The project was part-funded by the Park Authority and supported by the Communities Housing Trust.

Elsewhere, the Cairngorms Business Partnership – supported by Highlands and Islands Enterprise – have launched a partnership to improve access to homes for local workers. Four families who work for businesses near Aviemore moved into new homes last year and around 30 mid-market rental properties will be made available over the coming years.



Cosy boxes

19 projects have been awarded a total of £242,000 from the Cairngorms Community Led Vision Fund, a Cairngorms Trust initiative supported by the Park Authority.

Projects which have received funding include the creation of a log bank in the Marr Area (to the east of the Park) and the provision of 'cosy boxes' to help elderly residents facing fuel poverty in Badenoch. Three communities also received funding to help develop affordable housing, which will hopefully inspire other community-led projects to come forward.



Culture cabin

After a decade of work and over 200 artist residencies, Inshriach Bothy is being retired as a residency location.

Some of the final artists to benefit from this inspirational location came through a couple of recent Park Authority projects.

Funding from the Cairngorms Trust enabled the Cairngorms Youth Action Team and the Bothy Project to run a residency specifically for young artists. Rachael Horsburgh was the first recipient and created a gorgeous

interactive folklore map of the area around the bothy. She was succeeded by Isabel McLeish, who has been working on beautiful art creations of elm trees.

Between December and January, Naomi McIntosh also spent two weeks at the bothy as part of the Heritage Horizons: Cairngorms 2030 programme, exploring ideas around memory, the passing of time and our feelings about place.

Naomi McIntosh. Cocoon 2, 2020
Photo by Juno Snowdon



Back on track

The Cairngorm Mountain funicular railway – owned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and operated by Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Ltd – is back in action after an absence of four years.

Reinstatement works have included a complex engineering

project to strengthen the viaduct and install a new control system, all within the strict environmental requirements of a unique mountain environment. This is Scotland's only funicular railway and is the highest in the UK, reaching the Ptarmigan

building at over 1,065m. Weather permitting, the two-kilometre railway will now run a regular service taking visitors to the top of the slopes in around five minutes.

The reinstatement of the railway comes alongside other major improvement works including new 'magic carpet' conveyor belts for the beginner slopes, car park improvements and the refurbishment of the Ptarmigan building.





Access Mhor

A new adaptive bike and offroad wheelchair hub has opened at Badaguish Outdoor Centre.

Access Mhor hires out equipment to anyone who needs it, whether that's individuals, families or groups.

It's the first of its kind in the Cairngorms National Park and makes it possible for more people to get out and experience what the Cairngorms has to offer.

"There is a real need in this area," explains Gemma Hendry, Organisational Manager from Able 2 Adventure. "Normal wheelchairs are just not suitable for many of the trails

we have here in the Cairngorms. Even small stones and gravel can make a flat path impassable.

"People have been getting in touch with us to hire offroad wheelchairs or adaptive bikes for some time and now we can help. With the equipment people can explore the local forest trails in Glenmore Forest and can venture even further with our wheelchair access vehicle."

The hub would not be possible without the support of the Speyside Trust, and thanks to support from the Cairngorms Trust and SSE Hydro there are plans to build a fleet of different adaptive bikes and offroad wheelchairs, too.

Youth voice

Pupils at Speyside High School have welcomed Moray Council's declaration of a nature emergency across the Shire.

Pupils recently participated in a Climate Learning and Education project, which aims to empower young people to take action to tackle climate change and enhance nature across the National Park.

Part of the Heritage Horizons: Cairngorms 2030 programme, the project has involved pupils from secondary schools in Kingussie, Grantown on Spey, Aboyne, Alford and Aberlour.

Over the coming months, pupils from these schools will be working to make their visions a reality by developing projects which take positive action in their communities.

Pupils at Alford Academy taking part in climate workshops



Short-term lets

The Park Authority has welcomed a move by The Highland Council requiring short-term let holiday accommodation in Badenoch and Strathspey to apply for planning permission.

Evidence suggests that it has become increasingly difficult for people to buy or rent in the local area over the past few years. Requiring planning permission to turn a dwelling into a short-term holiday let should help alleviate the problem, along with other policies such as a requirement for 45% affordable housing in new developments in the communities that are under the most pressure, such as Aviemore.

Way ahead

A £191,000 project bringing major improvements to the Speyside Way through Anagach Woods in Grantown on Spey has been completed.

The project included resurfacing the existing path, upgrading drainage to remove muddy sections, and creating a large section of new path. New signage and waymarkers were also installed.

The project was led by the Anagach Woodland Trust and supported by grant funding via Scottish Government's Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, administered by NatureScot.

Further path improvement works have been carried out recently in Kinraig and work is ongoing to improve path networks across the National Park.



On your bike

'Bikepacking' – a combination of backpacking and all-terrain cycling – is rising in popularity and a new 165-mile route will help bikers explore the National Park sustainably.

The route has been designed by Bikepacking Scotland in partnership with VisitCairngorms and follows old military and drovers' roads. No new paths have been built; instead the route links and improves existing trails.

Cyclist and filmmaker Markus Stitz has created a short film, 'Home Is Where The Trails Take You', in which he documents the route and meets the people and businesses that call the Cairngorms home.

The project was supported by the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, VisitScotland, Scotrail and Schwalbe. To watch the film go to visitcairngorms.com/cycle



Roy-al opening

400 people gathered for the opening of Castle Roy last year.

The opening was made possible thanks to 29 years of community-led fundraising by the Castle Roy Trust, including grant funding from the Park Authority.

Power up

A new battery energy storage facility has been approved by the Park Authority's Planning Committee. The 49.9 MW facility will be built just outside Boat of Garten, next to an existing electricity sub-station. The committee also approved a 200m surface tow on Cairngorm Mountain.

Spotlight

An innovative, low-impact lighting project has illuminated national parks including the Cairngorms. Green Space Dark Skies brought together people from all walks of life for a unique experience at Loch Insh. A Countryfile special on the project can be seen at bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001drlr

Top of the range

Junior Rangers is an exciting outdoor learning programme for ages 11 to 18. Monthly sessions run in Badenoch and Strathspey and Deeside, and five-day Junior Ranger weeks are also available through local high schools. Check out cairngorms.co.uk/junior-rangers

Top cats

The Saving Wildcats project is celebrating a successful breeding season. 22 wildcat kittens were born last year in a dedicated breeding for release centre in a quiet area away from visitors at the Highland Wildlife Park, near Kincaig.

It's hoped these kittens will be amongst the first of their kind to be released into the wild in the Cairngorms this year.

Led by the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, alongside partners including the Park Authority, the project team have been busy conducting fieldwork



across the Cairngorms in preparation for these releases.

They have gathered a significant amount of information about species presence in potential release areas and, whilst there's a lot still to do, many project milestones have already been reached. Visit savingwildcats.org.uk/news-events to find out more.

Talon-ted volunteers

The team at RSPB Loch Garten are working with residents on a volunteering initiative to protect ospreys at the site.

Last season a group of 15 volunteers dedicated their evenings to observing the nest and making sure that human disturbance did not upset the breeding chances of the birds.

The breeding pair (affectionately known to some as Asha and Axel) were the first to use the site in five years and they reared two chicks. Their success is in part down to the wonderful people who helped keep watch for them.

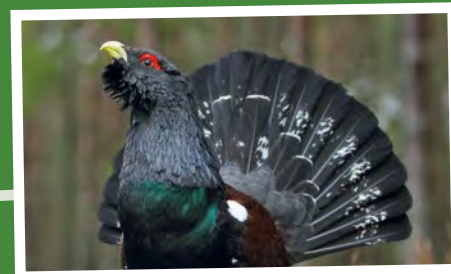
Hopes are high that the pair will return this spring and, if you are interested in volunteering, the team at RSPB Loch Garten would be delighted to hear from you.



Bird's eye view

The Park Authority is working with land managers, conservation partners, local communities and government to secure the long-term future of the critically endangered capercaillie.

The latest national capercaillie survey, undertaken by RSPB Scotland and part-funded by the Park Authority, has estimated that only 542 of the birds remain in Scotland, with 85% living in the National Park.



There are several issues facing capercaillie, not least available habitat, predators and human disturbance. The Cairngorms Capercaillie Project is working with communities and land managers to increase awareness of the bird's plight; reducing disturbance in sensitive areas alongside mountain bikers, dog walkers and other recreational users; and funding predator control work through a dedicated project gamekeeper.

The project is also waiting on the results of a genetic diversity study into the capercaillie population to determine whether the gene pool needs to be expanded. To find out more visit cairngormscapercaillie.scot

For peat's sake

Our Peatland ACTION team has been working with local civil and plant businesses to increase the number of skilled contractors able to carry out peatland restoration work.

Peatland restoration forms a key part of the new National Park Partnership Plan, with a target of restoring at least 38,000 hectares by 2045. Contractor availability is a major hurdle to scaling up activity.

To tackle this – and to create further green rural jobs – a new entrants' programme has been created, providing training for eight local contractors so far (with more to follow). To get involved or to learn more see cairngorms.co.uk/peatland-action



High flyers

Critically endangered pine hoverflies have bred successfully thanks to conservation efforts by the Rare Invertebrates in the Cairngorms partnership, part-funded by the Park Authority.

The species is only found in a single location in the UK, a small forest patch in the National Park. Surveys found larvae in previously unoccupied tree stumps, meaning at least some of the pine hoverflies bred by the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland and released across three sites in October 2021 and March 2022 have completed a full breeding cycle, marking a real step forward in efforts to save the species.



Wader work

Despite declining nationally, waders continue to do well in the eastern Cairngorms, where members of the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership have taken steps to conserve these special birds. Latest figures show that populations of a variety of wader species on partner landholdings remain stable.

Local venison

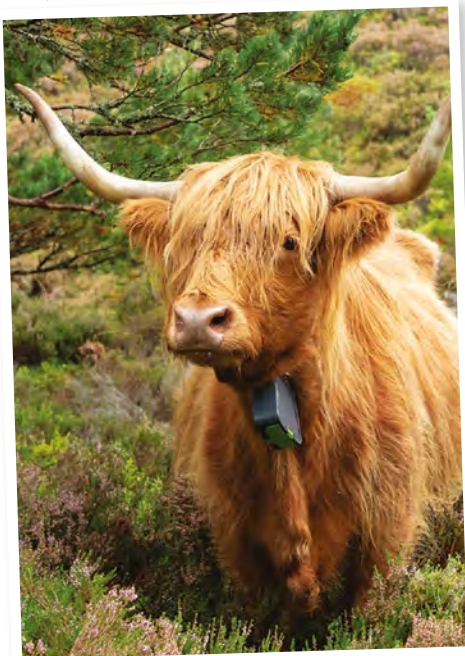
Cairngorms Connect have partnered with Lynbreck Croft to produce a range of venison products. Project partners control deer on their land to reduce the impact of grazing on the landscape, and this quality local produce is not only sustainable but helps support conservation work on the ground.



Perfect pair

Efforts to protect the rare twinflower have been showcased in an episode of the BBC's *Landward*.

The Cairngorms Rare Plants and Wild Connections Project, led by Plantlife and supported by the Park Authority, features in episode 19 of the programme and can be viewed at bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m001dljp



Moo-ve along

If you're out in RSPB Scotland's Abernethy reserve you might spot some cattle free-grazing in the forest and wonder where they've come from. Far from being escapees, however, this herd is being carefully controlled by a combination of collars, satellites and a dedicated phone app.

The innovative 'no-fence' system allows the farmer to define specific areas to graze and those to avoid, such as around wood ant nests. Each animal wears a collar and the phone app is

used to create a virtual fence. If cattle cross the invisible boundary the collar will 'buzz' and they soon learn this means they should turn around and return to the herd.

This approach replicates the behaviour of ancient cattle who grazed on heather and churned up the ground with their hooves, creating space for new flushes of blaeberrries and crowberries, which trials have shown benefit many species, including capercaillie.

The project is being supported by LIFE 100% For Nature project, the Endangered Landscapes Programme and The Famous Grouse.

Nature networking

Work is underway to restore habitats in Glen Geldie on the National Trust for Scotland's Mar Lodge Estate. The Geldie is a tributary of the River Dee and its banks are mostly treeless, with little shade for aquatic species such as Atlantic salmon.

Over 100,000 native trees will be planted on the Geldie's banks across a total of 120 hectares. The trees will be planted irregularly to mimic natural woodland and a diversity of native species will be used. Over time these trees will provide cooling shade and leaf litter to enrich the nutrient-poor water.

The project will also see woodland habitat between the catchments of the Dee and Spey reconnected. The new planting will extend woodland westwards up the Dee catchment, bringing it to within a kilometre of the River Feshie, where Wildland Ltd are working to expand native woodland eastwards. This restored nature network in the heart of the National Park could benefit a wide range of both aquatic and woodland species.

The Geldie Woodland Project is led by the National Trust for Scotland and delivered in partnership with the Park Authority, Dee District Salmon Fishery Board, River Dee Trust and Scottish Forestry.





**CAIRNGORMS
NATURE
FESTIVAL**
**FÈIS NÀDAIR
A' MHONAIH
RUAIDH**

The Cairngorms Nature Festival is coming, 12-21 May 2023

The Cairngorms Nature BIG Weekend has evolved! With two whole weekends of public events and a week in between full of community events, this year promises to be bigger and better than ever.

The Cairngorms Nature Festival brings together people, businesses and organisations who love, support and depend upon the nature of the Cairngorms to create this unmissable showcase of all the Cairngorms has to offer.

Now spanning 10 days, there will be a huge range of events to interest everyone. Guided walks, online talks, self-guided trails, volunteer experiences, family activities, arts and crafts workshops, nature masterclasses, cultural highlights, adventure activities

and much more... All celebrating the spectacular and unique nature of the Cairngorms and giving you the chance to experience it like never before.

You will not want to miss it!

A new website for the festival is currently in the works where you will be able to find event information and book specific events. Sign up for all the latest updates by visiting cairngormsnaturefestival.co.uk

And if you're a business, charity, community group or other organisation in and around the National Park we'd love to chat to you about how you can get involved. Email nature@cairngorms.co.uk for more info.



Nature Festival in numbers

10 | **50**
days | partners

75+ events

Ages **0-120** welcome





A ranger
year in
numbers

51

rangers in total

over

31k

people engaged

192

live fires
dealt with

595

bags of litter
removed

440

dogs off a lead
secured

Far-ranging

The Cairngorms National Park is a world-class destination for nature and attracts visitors from across Scotland and beyond. This year around two million people will visit the area and a third of these will be coming for the very first time. Happily, we have a dedicated ranger team ready and waiting to welcome them when they arrive.

The team of 20 Cairngorms National Park rangers – working side-by-side with over 30 rangers in partner organisations and estates – exists to help everyone enjoy the National Park in a caring and responsible way. They are skilled in working with all sorts of people, from families with children to younger visitors, special interest groups and local residents.

“My team are passionate about sharing their knowledge and helping visitors enjoy and care for the National Park,” says Lucy Ford, Ranger Manager at the Park Authority. “Whether it’s finding the best places to spot a red squirrel or the best place to park, rangers are here to help guide people and support local communities so that everyone benefits.

“During busy periods, a ranger is likely to speak to hundreds of people each week. Some of these people will be

confident in the countryside, but many others need a bit more help and guidance.”

The Park Authority employs five countryside rangers all-year-round, and they work in partnership with local authority rangers and those employed by estates. However, covering the whole of the National Park during the busy visitor season is too big a job for this core team, so early in the new year recruitment starts for a team of seasonal rangers, who play a key role in ensuring everyone has an enjoyable and safe visit.



Members of the 1st Skene-Westhill Boys' Brigade, our ranger service and Forestry and Land Scotland help clear western hemlock and Sitka spruce saplings in Glenmore Forest Park



A ranger clearing an old fire site on Deeside



“My team are passionate about sharing their knowledge and helping visitors enjoy and care for the National Park.”

Lucy Ford,
Ranger Manager



Fiona Brewis is one of this year's team and her day job can vary enormously. “Since I started I've been lucky enough to see an array of wildlife – a cautious slowworm, mating adders, an osprey feeding chicks – and I've also had to intervene to help a group of lads floating down the River Dee on a slowly deflating kayak.

“I've been offered refreshments by kind campers, learned how to firmly but politely encourage someone not to do something, and how to entice visitors to a stall about responsible toileting by dancing around in an emoji poo costume.”

A huge part of the rangers' job is to educate visitors and help them act responsibly, whether that's encouraging them to use a camping stove or teaching them about the impact of wildlife disturbance.

Lucy continues: “We want people to have a wonderful experience when they visit but we also need to ensure that our wild habitats and communities are cared for. Thankfully most people do act responsibly and our family of rangers will be out on the ground this season to ensure that everyone has a positive experience in the Cairngorms.”

If you see a ranger out in your community, please do stop and have a chat: they're always looking to add to their stock of local knowledge and are always delighted to meet residents.

If you would like to find out more about the work of our rangers visit cairngorms.co.uk/rangers-services or email rangers@cairngorms.co.uk

New horizons



It's easy to feel powerless in the face of a global climate and nature crisis. We believe it doesn't have to be this way. Inspired by the Gaelic word Dùthchas – the deep-rooted connection between people and nature – we're giving the people of the Cairngorms the power to do something about it.

In July 2021 the National Lottery Heritage Fund awarded up to £12.5 million for Heritage Horizons: Cairngorms 2030, a programme led by the Park Authority and over 45 committed partners. Its aims over the next five years are:

- To put local people at the heart of decision-making
- To work with land managers to restore and enhance landscapes



- To make getting around the National Park easier, safer and greener
- To foster healthier, happier communities with wellbeing at their heart

In order to help shape this work we've been gathering the views of people who live, visit and work in the National Park. Over 30 community events and workshops have taken place so far and more than 1,200 responses have been received online. Whilst many of these conversations are ongoing, progress has been made on a number of fronts.





Empowering communities

We don't just want communities to have a say in what projects are taken forward, we want them to be able to access funding to make them a reality. In partnership with the Cairngorms Trust we've explored new ways of giving out funding, working with a youth panel to distribute £19,000 of Local Action Group funding, and creating a £37,900 Nature Resilience Fund for small and medium-sized community projects.

We've increased people's awareness and confidence around climate issues via 10 workshops with Keep Scotland Beautiful, and worked with schools to capture their vision for a fairer, more sustainable future. And we're working with artists across the National Park to see how the creative sector might encourage behaviour change around the climate and nature crisis.



Restoring landscapes

Reducing flood risk for communities and encouraging nature-friendly farming practices on six trial farms have been key aspects of the programme.

Our peatland team have identified 3,500 hectares of peatland for restoration over the next five years alongside 7,000 hectares of woodland expansion, whilst new models of green private finance are being trialled on partner estates, with the aim of benefiting both nature and communities.



Improving connectivity

Consultations have taken place across Badenoch and Strathspey, Blair Atholl and Deeside to ask people what would make it easier to walk, bike or use a wheelchair in their area. Ideas from these sessions have been collated and a series of new proposals drawn up.

February and early March saw the project team going back to communities for further feedback. You can also view and comment on these plans online.



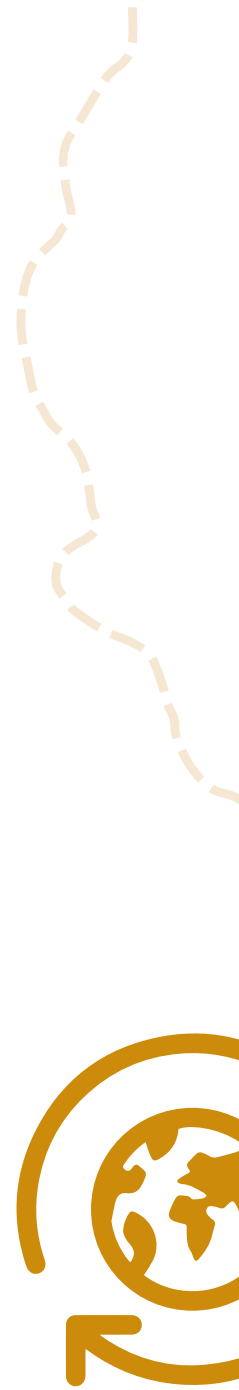
Improving health and wellbeing

We have been working with businesses and partners to explore green solutions to public health issues and discuss what an economy focused on wellbeing might mean in practice.

Next month the UK's first outdoor dementia resource centre will open at Badaguish. Later in the year we'll launch a new NHS green health referral programme, enabling GPs to 'prescribe' nature to benefit people's health and wellbeing.

What happens next?

We're currently pulling together all our findings from the last 12 months into a final proposal to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. If successful, we hope that the next stage of the programme will kick off in January 2024. To see how you can get involved and to sign up for updates check out our project website cairngorms2030.commonplace.is



Heritage Horizons: Cairngorms 2030 is empowering people who live, visit and work in the UK's largest national park to tackle the climate and nature crisis.



24 unique projects



Over 45 partners



£12.5m Lottery funding

Dùthchas

[noun, 'tu:xəs/]

The deep-rooted connection between people and nature



Five football pitches of new woodland a week



3,500 ha of peatland restored



Six pilot net zero farming projects



Transforming public transport and active travel routes



Creating the first outdoor centre for people living with dementia



Prescribing nature on the NHS



Developing a wellbeing economy for people and nature



Giving communities power to decide which projects to fund



Connecting people and nature through arts and culture

To find out how you can get involved visit cairngorms.co.uk/cairngorms2030





In conversation with Gillian Council

Gillian works for Alzheimer Scotland as their Associate Executive Lead for Localities. She lives in Granttown with her husband and their dog Reiff.

What does the Cairngorms mean to you?

The Park really is my playground. Mountains are my favourite place to be and living in Granttown there are lots of opportunities to get out and about. Last year I completed all the munros and we biked the North Coast 500 a few years ago. There's a welcoming community here and that's one of the things I find most special about the place.

Tell us about the Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre

The project is part of the Park Authority's Heritage Horizons: Cairngorms 2030 programme and supports local people with dementia.



Gillian at Badaguish near Aviemore, home of the new outdoor dementia resource centre

People can be forgotten when they get older and that's not good enough. The centre is the first of its kind in the UK and supports people with dementia, their families and caregivers to have enriching outdoor experiences. Anyone can get in touch with us and get support.

What role can nature and the outdoors play?

If someone has dementia, their brain is working hard to operate and when you add in a noisy house or traffic it can be challenging. Nature is really good for our mental health but there's also something about just being

in the moment, with gentle stimuli such as birdsong, rain and wind. The centre gives people a rediscovered sense of freedom to explore the outdoors at their own pace.

What are your hopes for the future of the project?

I'd like us to show how well this type of activity works in practice and demonstrate that clear referral pathways are in place, working with the NHS. Nature could be 'prescribed' as an alternative to medication in some cases. Ultimately, I hope our project can become a blueprint for other communities to follow.

Bringing back beavers

Beavers have been missing from the Cairngorms – and much of Scotland – since the 16th century but all that is about to change with a new reintroduction project on the upper Spey.

They are often called 'nature's engineers' – a species with a unique ability to shape the landscape around them. To restore and create new wetlands, to naturally coppice trees to regenerate woodland and to improve habitats for a wide range of species. Beavers may have been missing from the Cairngorms National Park for 400 years but soon they will be back at work.

Last year Scottish Government announced its support for moving beavers outside of their current range to help the species re-establish across

Scotland. Here in the Cairngorms, the Park Authority board decided in June that we should coordinate the reintroduction of beavers to the area, informed by research and feedback from partners in the Cairngorms Beaver Group. The project will initially focus on the upper Spey catchment, an area that has been identified by independent experts as being highly suitable for beavers.

Across the UK around 90% of wetlands have been lost in the past century. These are places which store and clean our water, capture carbon and provide a habitat for young fish, insects, amphibians, mammals and birds. They are hugely important both for nature and for the fight against climate change, and beavers create them instinctively, without the need for major intervention by people.

It's important to recognise, though, that much has changed in our landscape since beavers were last here and we need to be mindful of their potential impacts. Over the past month we have held a series of 'Beaver Blethers' across Badenoch and Strathspey to give residents and land managers a chance to hear about our plans and to find out more about mitigation measures that are available via our partners NatureScot. These sessions will be followed by a six-week formal engagement programme starting in May.

We will also continue discussions with Cairngorms Beaver Group partners including the Spey Fishery Board, farming and other land management bodies to help inform a final licence application to NatureScot to move beavers to the National Park, likely later on this year.



Head to
cairngorms.co.uk/beavers
for the latest news





Roisin has advised beaver reintroduction projects in Scotland, England and Wales



In conversation with Roisin Campbell-Palmer

Roisin Campbell-Palmer is the Head of Restoration for the Beaver Trust and previously worked on the Scottish Beaver Trial, Britain's first beaver reintroduction project.

Why should we bring back beavers?

We've been working on beavers for two decades now in Scotland and lots of people are excited to see the return of a species that would still be here had it not been hunted to extinction. Beavers create ideal habitat for a host of other species, slow water flow to prevent flooding downstream, help purify the water supply and create good quality wetlands that store huge amounts of carbon.

What makes you think the species will thrive in the Cairngorms?

We can see from the survey work we've carried out that there is a lot of suitable habitat in the Cairngorms and, whilst there may be some localised issues which require mitigation, on the whole beavers should slot back in extremely well and make a positive contribution to the environment.

Tell us about your time working on the Scottish Beaver Trial

The Scottish Beaver Trial was the first project of its kind so it

was really exciting to be part of. We studied everything from how the beavers interacted with the landscape to how they affected local communities and land managers.

The beavers settled in well and, at the end of the project, there were lots of positive social and economic benefits identified by local people and businesses.

Is there anything that the Cairngorms can learn from the Trial?

It's important to take a measured approach and engage the community because they are the ones who are living with the species long-term.




We've learnt a lot from Europe as they've been doing this for decades, but it's important for people to know that mitigation measures are available should beavers be having a negative impact.

Ultimately it's about making space for nature and ensuring both beavers and people benefit.

What can we look forward to with beavers coming to the Cairngorms?

It's a really special experience to see a beaver – usually around dusk or dawn – and even spotting beaver field signs like a coppiced tree or dam is hugely exciting. There's nothing quite like seeing a species back in its natural environment.



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Roisin Campbell-Palmer,
Beaver Trust

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page 19



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