

Action for capercaillie



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What we are doing

The capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus* is one the key woodland species identified for action under the Scottish Forestry Strategy 2006. This note summarises the action being undertaken by Forestry Commission Scotland, either ourselves or in partnership with others, to help conserve the capercaillie. There are links to more detailed information.

The Capercaillie is an iconic woodland species, found mainly in native pinewoods and also in planted forests of pine and other conifers, and associated open habitats.

In the UK, capercaillie are only found in Scotland, and mostly within a few core areas, as shown in Figure 1. The species has been in long-term decline, although the 2004 national survey suggests that this trend has now been halted. The species is afforded a high degree of protection, and the requirement for widespread specific management is now well understood across all the relevant agencies and by private landowners. Management on such a scale requires co-ordination at a strategic level. The **Capercaillie Species Action Framework Plan 2007-2012**, published by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), summarises action agreed by all relevant partners. This note explains in more depth how Forestry Commission Scotland will contribute to this overall effort.

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Current status

In the UK, capercaillie became extinct in the mid-18th century and were re-introduced in the mid-19th century. Numbers have fluctuated since then, but over recent decades populations have declined rapidly throughout the species range in northern Europe, and the most recent UK winter population estimate in 2003/04 was just 1,980 birds.

The capercaillie has legal protection by inclusion on Annex 1 of the EU Birds Directive and Appendix II of the Berne Convention, as well as Schedules 1, 2, 3 and 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.

In 2004 an amendment to the Wildlife & Countryside Act made it an offence to recklessly or intentionally disturb a capercaillie whilst it is lekking (a lek is a site where breeding displays and mating habitually occurs). For example, if bird watchers visit a lek and disturb the birds this could be classed as reckless behaviour. Capercaillie nests, incubating hens or hens with dependent young are also protected from reckless or intentional disturbance.

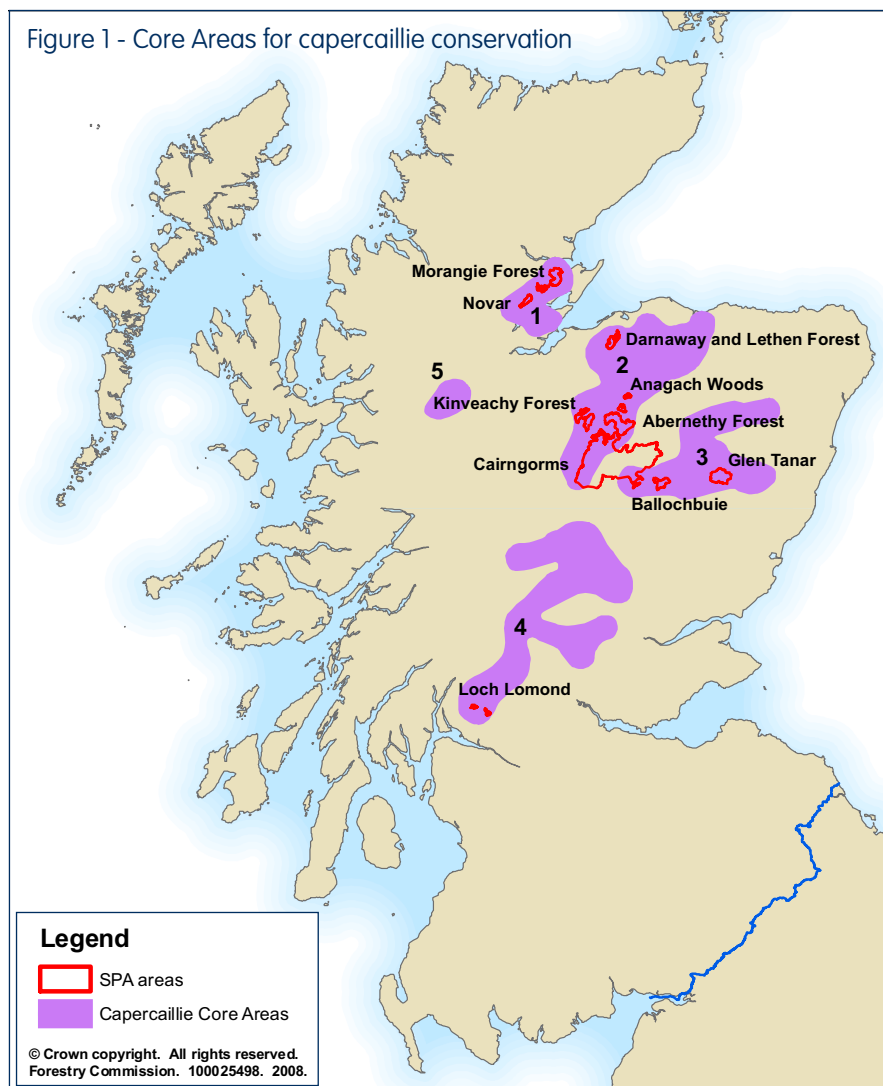
In 2004 the Wildlife and Countryside Act was amended to remove capercaillie from the quarry list, so it is no longer a 'game bird'.

It is illegal to release capercaillie without a licence from SNH, and current conservation efforts are focused on improving conditions for the existing population rather than releasing birds.

Distribution

The Capercaillie Core Areas map in Figure 1, which is maintained by Forestry Commission Scotland, shows the main current distribution of the species in Scotland. Capercaillie occupy a only part of the suitable range within each area. The core areas map helps to prioritise management activities for the species at a national level. The 2003-4 survey did show evidence of capercaillie on the fringes of the core areas, and the Capercaillie Project Officer (see below) can advise on individual cases

Figure 1 - Core Areas for capercaillie conservation



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where capercaillie are thought to be a management consideration outside the core areas. The most important capercaillie sites, each comprising more than one percent of the current population, are designated as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for the species, and these are also shown and named on Figure 1 on page 2.

Threats to capercaillie

The main threats to the species have recently been both physical and organisational. Physical factors, in no particular order, include fence collisions, loss of eggs and chicks to predators, overgrazing, loss and fragmentation of pinewood habitat, lack of suitable brood habitat and human disturbance. Last but not least, a series of cold springs and wet summers, possibly connected to wider climatic change, has resulted in greater chick mortality.

Organisational factors have included a limited capacity for long-term management and monitoring within core capercaillie areas, although this has improved substantially through recent conservation action.

Effective future management of capercaillie must deal with this broad range of issues.



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Capercaillie habitat requirements

Capercaillie require large tracts of woodland to be managed in a sympathetic manner.

You can learn about the essential habitat requirements, population movements and life history of the species on the **Capercaillie Biodiversity Action Plan Group** website.

Capercaillie conservation action to date

Recent action has focused mainly on a major project funded partly by EU LIFE funds, partly match funded by Forestry Commission Scotland grants and action on the national forest estate. It delivered the following outputs in the period 2002-7:

- population monitoring on all project sites, covering 35,000 ha
- over 1,000 hectares of habitat improved for chicks
- over 400 hectares of new chick habitat created through variable density thinning and glade creation within dense plantations
- capercaillie-friendly management in 1,600 hectares of plantations
- predation reduced in over 34,000 hectares of forest
- 12 kilometres of deer fencing taken down to stop capercaillie collisions
- 22 kilometres of deer fencing marked to reduce capercaillie collisions.

For more detailed information on the LIFE Project, see **Caper LIFE website**.



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In addition to work carried out for the LIFE Project, appropriate woodland management work has been supported by our grant schemes (Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme, SFGS, and before that the Woodland Grant Scheme, WGS). These included a WGS Challenge Fund in 2001, which resulted in the removal or marking of 300 kilometres of deer fencing to prevent capercaillie from flying into them. Forestry Commission Scotland has also contributed significantly from our own budgets on the national forest estate, and SNH has contributed from its Natural Care budget.

The capercaillie species action plan

Capercaillie is a UK priority species for conservation action. The Capercaillie Biodiversity Action Plan Group is responsible for delivering the species action plan for capercaillie and is the essential lead contact for conservation advice, background guidance and more detailed information on the species. They also co-ordinate research and policy development and have a wide and representative membership.



The Capercaillie Project Officer, funded by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), SNH and Forestry Commission Scotland, has an important advisory role and encourages and assists forest managers to implement action for capercaillie in their forests.

For further information on the Capercaillie BAP Group, or for advice on Capercaillie management, please contact:

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Forestry Commission Scotland action for capercaillie

Forestry Commission Scotland action will help to deliver the **Capercaillie Species Action Framework Plan 2007-2012**, which is aimed at achieving the targets in the capercaillie species action plan. These are to increase the population by 2010 to 5000 birds (from 1980 birds in 2003/4), and to increase the range to 45 occupied 10km squares (from 40 in 2003/4).

Forestry Commission Scotland will contribute strongly to all the main actions in the 2007-2012 plan:

- mark or remove high-risk deer or stock fences to reduce capercaillie mortality from collisions

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- create potential habitat for capercaillie broods and adults
- enhance existing capercaillie brood and adult habitat
- promote 'capercaillie-friendly' land management practices
- influence design and uptake of a capercaillie 'package' of options for support through Rural Development Contracts
- targeted predator control to reduce chick mortality
- within capercaillie core areas, encourage suitable capercaillie management in Forest Design Plans for the national forest estate, and Forest Plans for private woodlands
- research studies and monitoring of population response
- communications, education, and interpretation.

The following sections describe our action for capercaillie in more detail.

Capercaillie management on the national forest estate

Our work for Capercaillie on the national forest estate aims to:

- contribute to the Capercaillie species action plan
- contribute to wider Capercaillie management strategies
- incorporate Capercaillie as a management objective in all relevant forest plans
- maintain all occupied leks on the national forest estate by enhancing existing habitat or by creating new habitat
- enhance habitat around currently unoccupied lek ranges and in strategically important forests to facilitate range expansion.

Action on the national forest estate, can be divided into two levels.

Level one actions

These apply to all twenty-seven national forest estate forests that are important for capercaillie, spread across seven forest districts. Eleven of these forests currently have either very low numbers of capercaillie or none at all. However, these forests are important in terms of facilitating future population expansion and are managed for this purpose. As shown in table 1, over 34,400 ha of the national forest estate will be subject to level one action between 2007 and 2012.

Level one action comprises:

- inclusion of capercaillie as a management objective within forest plans
- timing of operations to avoid disturbance of breeding capercaillie
- maintaining and increasing suitable habitat – particularly Scots pine
- adopting capercaillie-friendly silvicultural systems where possible

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- a presumption against the use of deer fencing, and removal or marking of all remaining deer fences
- enhancement of Caledonian pinewood condition within the capercaillie range (approximately 2450 ha).

Table 1 - National forest estate forests subject to level one action from 2007 to 2012

Capercaillie action on the national forest estate - Level one action 2007 - 2012				
Forest district	Capercaillie core area	Number of forests with level one action	Total area (ha)	Number of active leks (and inactive leks)
Dornoch	1	1	3513	8 (0)
Inverness	2	5	9519	6 (5)
Moray	2	9	11262	5 (1)
Aberdeenshire	3	5	1232	3 (1)
Tay	4	5	7330	5 (1)
Cowal & Trossachs	4	1	641	0 (2)
Fort Augustus	5	1	1000	1 (1)
	Totals	27	34497	28 (11)

By incorporating these basic measures within forest plans in all twenty-seven capercaillie forests, most habitat needs of capercaillie should be met through normal forest management which will also satisfy other management objectives such as timber production and native woodland restoration.

Level two actions

As well as level one action, sixteen forests containing all of the twenty-eight known active leks on the national forest estate will benefit from specific work between 2007 and 2012. This work will be designed to increase productivity and so allow capercaillie populations to grow and expand.

These level two actions may include:

- population monitoring: lek counts, brood counts and other essential data are crucial for managing capercaillie
- additional specific habitat work, such as local enhancement of brood habitat (e.g. by opening up the forest canopy or controlling grazing pressure to manage the vegetation structure)
- predator control
- removal or marking of the few deer fences that remain in these areas.

For further information about Capercaillie work on the national forest estate please contact

kenny.kortland@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

We will update this plan for national forest estate sites by 2010/11 and review future needs beyond 2012. Both level 1 and 2 actions are still likely to be needed, but with increasing emphasis on the former.

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Table 2 - Summary of level two action expenditure on capercaillie on the national forest estate from 2007 to 2012

Capercaillie action on the national forest estate - Level two action 2007 - 2012				
2007 - 2008	2008 - 2009	2009 - 2010	2010 - 2011	2011 - 2012
£125,000	£105,000	£115,000	£110,000	£120,000

Management of private woodland for Capercaillie

The Capercaillie Species Action Framework 2007-2012 details actions targeted at the private sector separately from those within the public sector.

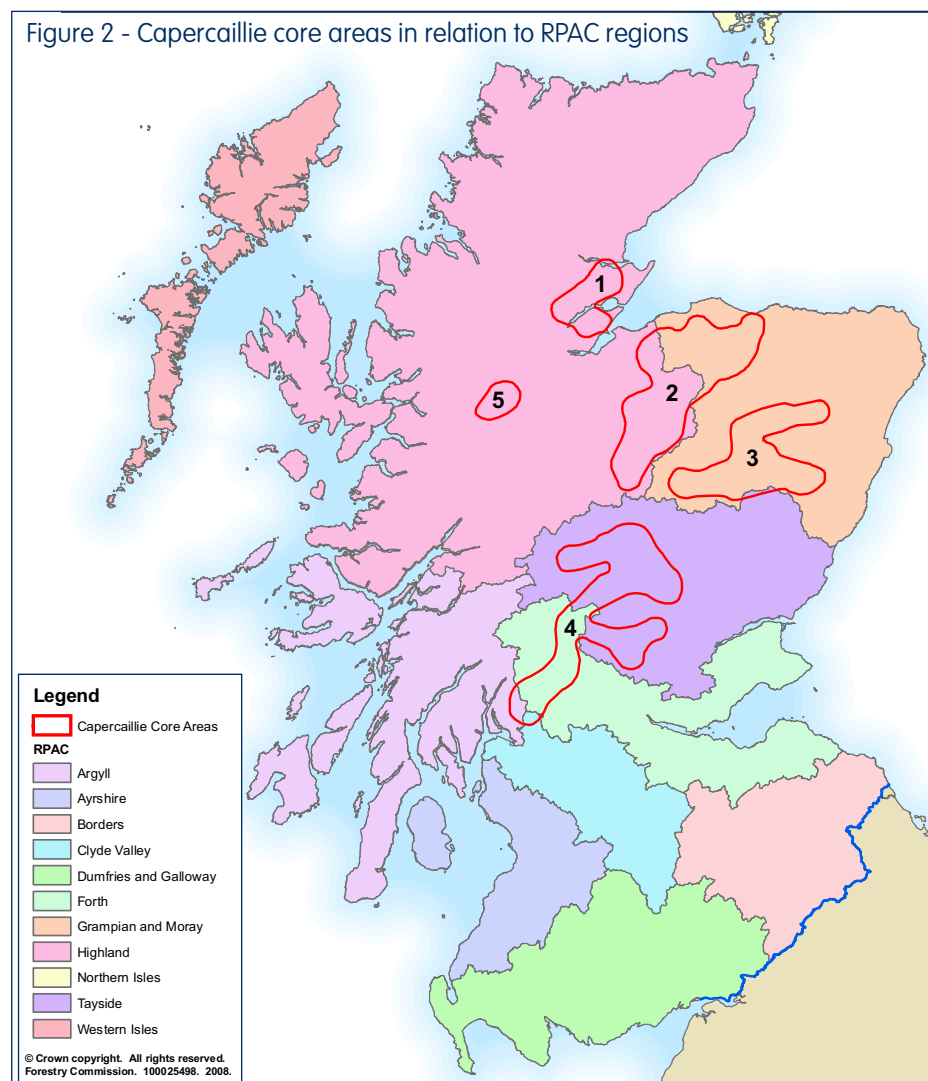
The Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) is now the main source of grant support for measures to help conserve Capercaillie on outside the national forest estate.

Forestry Commission Scotland will work with SNH, and the Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate to promote and support funding applications and develop or update management guidance.

For more information on the package of measures available for capercaillie conservation, visit **Rural Development Contracts - Rural Priorities**.

Figure 2 shows how the Capercaillie core areas relate to Regional Proposal Assessment Committee (RPAC) regions. Each RPAC will decide where to prioritise support for Capercaillie conservation alongside other desired outcomes but the core areas are likely to be priorities. Links to those RPAC areas relevant to capercaillie are provided.

Figure 2 - Capercaillie core areas in relation to RPAC regions



Potential grant applicants can receive advice from a case-worker in their area to help them develop a suitable plan for management of capercaillie. Case-workers will liaise with the Capercaillie Project Officer and other relevant contacts.

Link here for capercaillie information in your local RPAC area:

Highlands

Grampian & Moray

Tayside

Forth

Argyll

Capercaillie management is still being carried out in some areas with Forestry Commission Scotland support under legacy SFGS schemes.

Detailed guidance on management prescriptions for capercaillie can be obtained from the **Capercaillie BAP Group** website.

Reporting and review arrangements

Forestry Commission Scotland will publish an annual summary of our actions for capercaillie on this site and we will contribute to updating the Species Action Framework plan. This document will be revised if required and will be reviewed by 2010/11.

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