

Scotland's Wildcat Strategy 2025-2045



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Foreword

The wildcat *Felis silvestris* is our only remaining native felid, and one of our most iconic species. Although wildcats were once widespread across Great Britain, its range is now restricted to north and central Scotland, where current conservation efforts are focused. These endeavours build on prior vital work over the last two decades and have resulted in significant steps being taken to help the Highland tiger. This work has resulted in legal protection, deeper knowledge about wildcat biology, ecology and threats and, most recently, the establishment of Britain's first large-scale dedicated conservation 'breeding for release' centre for wildcats in Scotland under the Saving Wildcats partnership.

In 2023, it was great to see the first round of wildcat releases completed into the Cairngorms National Park. Indeed, it is hugely encouraging to see the species progress from functional extinction in recent years to a position where more than 50 wildcats have been born through the captive breeding programme with 46 successfully released and, most significantly, 24 kittens born in the wild last year to those wildcats released in 2023.

This new strategy builds on these early successes and moves from a dedicated focus on the Cairngorms National Park and to a nationwide recovery of this incredible species. The strategy is designed to guide efforts that overcome the continuing challenges, in particular the current low population size and density of wildcats, and hybridisation with domestic cats. These challenges, compounded by habitat loss and change, persecution and the consequences of mistaken identity during feral cat management, will not be overcome easily. However, I believe that the collaborative cross-sectoral process that was undertaken to produce this strategy can and must be a catalyst for change.

The 2045 vision for this strategy conveys a recognition of the complexity and diversity of interactions between people and wildcats. Words such as '*thriving*' and '*co-existing*' highlight the desire for an expanding population of wildcats living successfully within an ever-changing human landscape and that we collectively value wildcats as a fundamental part of our native wildlife that enhances local communities and livelihoods. Habitat restoration and improved connectivity, the establishment of new wildcat populations, reductions in hybridisation and further

cross-community collaboration will be required along with other efforts to deliver on these ambitions.

I commend everyone involved in the development of this strategy and thank the IUCN Conservation Planning Specialist Group for helping to guide the collaborative process to its successful conclusion. Now a new chapter begins in which we work together to put the strategy into practice. The nationwide recovery of wildcats in Scotland will require all hands on deck, as no single group or organisation can realise the vision alone. This is one conservation effort where all members of Scottish society can play a role. This iconic species deserves that dedication.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gillian Martin', with a stylized, flowing script.

Gillian Martin

Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs

Executive Summary

The wildcat *Felis silvestris* is Scotland's last remaining native cat species and, as such, is of significant value to Scotland's natural ecosystems, human communities and culture. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) describes wildcats as Critically Endangered in Scotland and so substantial efforts have been made over the last few decades to improve the conservation status of the species, most recently through the 'Saving Wildcats' project. However, the restoration of the wildcat in Scotland will take many decades and require much dedicated and coordinated effort.

It was therefore decided that a new national wildcat strategy was needed to help guide this process over the years ahead. 'Scotland's Wildcat Strategy' is the end result. It addresses the conservation goals for the wildcat, the potential wider ecosystem benefits (including cultural ecosystem services) associated with wildcats, and the implications of wildcat presence for land management, and domestic cat ownership and management. Perceptions, attitudes and experiences of wildcat restoration differ greatly, and so the development of the strategy has involved a range of key stakeholder groups.

In March and April 2025, 42 stakeholders from 25 organisations gathered for a one-day online workshop and then met in Perth for a three-day workshop, to develop the national strategy and an associated action plan for the wildcat in Scotland. Both workshops were facilitated by the IUCN Species Survival Commission's Conservation Planning Specialist Group (CPSG) and based on an internationally recognised core set of Species Conservation Planning Principles and Steps, with a focus on maximising collaboration and building consensus among the stakeholders involved.

During the one-day, online workshop stakeholders gathered knowledge on wildcat biology and human-wildcat conflict, including domestic cat management and ownership, through thematic presentations. By the end of the workshop and

follow-up online sessions, group agreement was reached on the overall direction of the problem statement and the vision.

These were followed by the in-person, final workshop. This started with presentations on wildcat conservation efforts to date and a general summary of the threats and challenges affecting the species to bring all participants up to speed. The participants were divided into four groups covering different threat and challenge themes, with each group formulating a series of relevant goals, objectives and actions. These were then discussed by all participants in plenary sessions. By the end of the workshop overall agreement was reached on the vision, draft goals, objectives and actions of the national strategy and associated action plan. Missing details were addressed after the workshop during online meetings with the respective groups and through the collaborative editing process.

This strategy also recognises the need for clear and purposeful governance to ensure its effective implementation, and the formation of a new Scotland's Wildcat Advisory Group (SWAG) to achieve this. The SWAG will monitor, review and guide implementation of the strategy, providing balanced advice and support to all delivery partners, including those managing local projects.

The aspiration is for the wildcat population to recover to a sustainable level by 2045 by removing the biggest threats to the species. The 2045 vision is supported by a detailed ten-year action plan designed to be used by SWAG and stakeholders. The action plan sets out 10 goals, 27 objectives and 63 associated actions. It will tie in with the existing conservation efforts for the species and act as a catalyst for new conservation efforts.



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Vision for 2045

The wildcat in Scotland is a conservation flagship for biodiversity. Wildcat populations have been successfully restored in Scotland through collaboration and are thriving with limited intervention. The main threats to wildcats have been mitigated. Stakeholders are supported in co-existing with wildcats and adopting practices that ensure the long-term survival of wildcat populations. As a society, we value wildcats as a fundamental part of our native wildlife that enhances local communities and livelihoods.

Progress towards this vision will be realised when:

- the species is downlisted on the UK Red List and is moving towards recovery on the IUCN Green List of threatened species;
- the species is adopted as an indicator in at least two of six large-scale landscape restoration partnership projects and is supporting the development of local nature restoration skills;
- habitats are restored and reconnected, resulting in successful recruitment and range expansion;
- translocation into existing sites is only required to increase genetic diversity (because populations are demographically stable);
- guidance for wildcat-friendly predator control measures is widely followed;
- domestic cat management through scaling up of microchipping and an increase in acceptance and uptake of neutering and vaccination is successful;
- levels of hybridisation are reduced in wildcats to negligible levels through effective management and control of feral and hybrid cats;
- mortality from roads, the need for lethal predator control and human-wildlife conflict are reduced;
- the species is recognised as having intrinsic value, receives high public recognition and provides local economic opportunities.

Policy Context

The wildcat is Scotland's last remaining native cat species, and as such, is of significant value to Scotland's natural ecosystems, human communities and culture. Substantial efforts have been made over the last few decades to improve the conservation status of the species, most recently through the [Saving Wildcats](#) project. However, the restoration of the wildcat in Scotland will take many decades and require much dedicated and coordinated effort. Therefore, key stakeholders decided that a new national wildcat strategy was needed to help guide this process over the years ahead.

The wildcat has previously been the subject of other strategically planned programmes of action including the [Species Action Framework 2007-2012](#) and the [Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Plan 2013-2019](#). An immediate contribution to the goals of this strategy was the [announcement](#) in January 2026 by NatureScot of a grant of over £400K from the Nature Restoration Fund towards continuing the work of the Saving Wildcats project.

The wildcat is a European Protected Species (EPS) and [fully protected](#) in Scotland. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature recognises that wildcats in Scotland are [Critically Endangered](#). Wildcat conservation supports wider biodiversity and community objectives. Actions detailed in this strategy are linked to strategic conservation objectives at global, national and regional levels. Globally this includes delivery on Target 4 of the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) to Halt Species Extinction, Protect Genetic Diversity, and Manage Human-Wildlife Conflicts. At a regional level the wildcat is a Priority Species in the [Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2022-27](#). At a national level there are a wide range of actions within this wildcat strategy, which have synergy with those in the [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045](#), and its [Delivery Plan to 2030](#), and some of these are outlined in Appendix 1. Wildcat conservation, through the promotion of responsible domestic cat ownership, also supports the Scottish Government's [Welfare of Cats: Code of Practice](#).



Scottish Wildcat Action's Trap Neuter Release Project. Vets neutering feral farm cats in Aberdeenshire.
©Lorne Gill/NatureScot

Process

In 2024, NatureScot approached the IUCN Conservation Planning Specialist Group (CPSG) for assistance in developing a national strategy and associated action plan for the wildcat in Scotland, based on the collaborative process outlined in the Conservation Planning Principles and Steps ([CPSG, 2020](#)):

- plan for action;
- promote inclusive participation;
- use sound science;
- ensure good design and neutral facilitation;
- reach decisions by consensus;
- generate and share outputs quickly and;
- adapt to changing circumstances.

By following a set of agreed steps, effective planning can be achieved by ensuring that any plan produced can be carried out and supported by all involved in the process.



Checking a camera trap in the field as part of the Saving Wildcats project. © Saving Wildcats

Preparatory work

A small Organising Team (OT), made up of representatives from a cross-section of stakeholders, was formed to carry out the preparatory work (Appendix 2). The OT members held a total of seven online meetings to agree the way forward for the process, conduct a stakeholder analysis and produce relevant workshop materials, such as the background information and the draft problem statement.

Workshops to develop a national strategy and action plan

The development of the strategy and action plan was carried out mainly through two workshops held during March to April 2025. In both workshops a mixture of plenary and group work took place to ensure rapid progress, but ensuring participants had the opportunity to influence all steps of the process.

The first one-day workshop was held online on 12th March 2025 and was attended by 36 participants from a range of stakeholder groups (listed in Appendix 3).

Introductory presentations summarised the species biology, human-wildcat conflict, and domestic or hybrid cat management and ownership. The remainder of the day focused on the development of a comprehensive problem statement and a 2045 vision. Following the workshop, a couple of online-sessions were held with a group of volunteers who participated in the workshop, to advance work on the vision and problem statement ahead of the second workshop.

The second workshop was held in Perth, Scotland from 1st-3rd April 2025. The workshop was attended by 35 participants from a range of stakeholder groups (listed in Appendix 3).

The first day started with thematic presentations on conservation efforts to date. This was followed by a general summary of the threats and challenges affecting the population (also see Appendix 4). Nine discrete threats were identified by the participants and the relative importance of each of the threats was discussed. This was then followed by a collaborative threat ranking exercise in which each workshop participant ranked the nine threats according to two criteria:

- Scope: Perceived *extent* of the impact of each threat on the current and predicted expanding wildcat population within the next 10 years. (Rating on a scale of 1 = Low (<30%), 2 = Medium (30-70%), 3 = High (>70%))
- Severity: Perceived *depth* of impact of each threat on the current and predicted expanding wildcat population within the next 10 years. (Rating on a scale of 1 = Low (<30% population lost), 2 = Medium (31-70% population lost), 3 = High (>70% population lost))

The individual scores of all participants were then multiplied together to obtain an overall score for each threat. The average value per threat (from 2 = least important to consider, to 9 = most important to consider) was calculated. This calculation was then used to rank the threats in order of importance (Table 1).

Table 1: The nine main threats to wildcats in Scotland, ranked by average scoring from high (= 9) to low (= 2). These threats were divided into four broad thematic groups.

Threat	Average score
1. Low population size and density	9
2. Hybridisation	9
3. Land-use practices, habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation	9
4. Non-discriminatory feral cat management	6
5. Persecution	6
6. Non-discriminatory predator and pest control	4
7. Infectious disease	2
8. Environmental contaminant exposure	2
9. Roads, linear infrastructure and other built developments	2

Detailed descriptions of these nine threats are provided in Appendix 4. The nine threats were then divided into four thematic groups. Workshop participants were assigned to one of these four thematic groups to undertake further analysis of the threats, and to identify what was known, assumed or remained unknown for each:



A delayed release enclosure used to release wildcats into the wild. © Saving Wildcats

- **Thematic group 1:** Small population size as a threat, and understanding and mitigating disease and environmental contaminant exposure (encompassing threats 1, 7 and 8 in Table 1)
- **Thematic group 2:** The hybridisation threat and its impact on the identification and intrinsic value of wildcats (encompassing threat 2 in Table 1)
- **Thematic group 3:** Addressing non-discriminatory predator and pest control, and persecution (encompassing threats 4, 5, and 6 in Table 1)
- **Thematic group 4:** Habitat change, human development and land-use practices (encompassing threats 3 and 9 in Table 1)

The remainder of day 1 of the workshop was spent identifying potential goals to address each of the priority threats. Goals were defined as the desired change and how this change was projected to positively impact the species. The work on goals was finalised on day 2 and followed by formulation of objectives and actions (days 2 and 3). Objectives were defined as the tangible steps ('rungs of the ladder') to be taken in order to achieve each goal, with actions being the assigned work required to achieve each objective and so contribute to each goal. The groups met several times in plenary to report and share the results of their discussions and then refined their work based on the feedback received. In addition, on the afternoons of days



A released female wildcat with kittens. © Saving Wildcats

1 and 2, volunteers from various stakeholder groups met in different configurations to finalise the vision and the problem statement, and to draft a series of success indicators.

By the end of the workshop a list of specific goals, objectives and actions had been identified. In some cases, it was not possible to finalise all the actions and so the relevant working groups finalised drafts after the workshop during online meetings. A working group was also established to develop the future governance of the strategy, and the role of a new governance body that participants named 'Scotland's Wildcat Advisory Group' (SWAG). Draft statements were subsequently shared and agreed with all the workshop participants during the production of the final strategy document and action plan.

Drafting of the strategy document

Once the working groups finished their drafts during the workshops and online meetings, the OT collated the information and produced draft strategy documents and associated action plans. Efforts were made to rationalise the action plan (e.g., to avoid repetition of the same types of actions identified by the different thematic groups). The CPSG had the lead editorial role. Drafts were shared with the workshop participants and, through an iterative process of sharing comments and edits, a final version was produced. This was shared with the participants and other stakeholders and they were invited to endorse it.

We have listed the overarching 10 goals and 28 objectives of the action plan in the next section. They are also listed in Appendix 5 together with the main 61 actions. The Appendix 5 table is designed to be succinct for the purposes of this strategy document, and a more detailed version (including 84 sub-actions identified during the second workshop) will be made available to SWAG as a key reference tool and to help stakeholders, including the lead and collaborator organisations/



A released female wildcat. © Saving Wildcats

partnerships, plan and prioritise actions and resources within the capacities they have available. Individual action details may inevitably be amended once they are taken forward - for example, potential leads or collaborators for certain actions may change in response to capacities and emerging opportunities. Lead organisations/partnerships are not expected or required to fund all the actions they are listed against, (noting that some have a very high number allocated to them), but have the role of identifying how they can be resourced using their or other sources. This will be informed by SWAG's assessment of prioritisation of the actions, ensuring that work is realistic, achievable but ambitious.



The Saving Wildcats Conservation Breeding for Release Centre. © James Shooter/Rewilding Europe

Overview of Goals and Objectives

Further details of the goals, objectives and actions are provided in Appendix 5. The following thematic group descriptions highlight key issues raised during the workshop discussions.

Thematic group 1: Small population size as a threat, and understanding and mitigating disease and environmental contaminant exposure

If any wildcat populations survive in Scotland today, they have declined to such a small size and have become so fragmented and isolated, because of a range of threats over the last centuries, that they are no longer viable. Moreover, releases of captive-bred wildcats will initially produce small, isolated populations. Such populations face an additional set of threats that relate directly to their size and distribution. Small populations are inherently vulnerable to environmental perturbation, fluctuation and disaster events, to which larger populations are more resilient. Such events could include extreme weather or seasonal conditions, natural fluctuations in prey cycles, outbreaks of disease, fires, flooding or other disturbance events affecting key habitats. Larger connected populations can normally withstand extreme events. However, small populations may simply fluctuate to extinction, even in response to relatively minor natural cyclical events.

Small populations also have a tendency towards increased relatedness of individuals over time and this inbreeding and concurrent loss of genetic diversity can bring its own set of concerns: increased disease susceptibility, lower survival, and loss of adaptability - for example, the ability to develop resistance to novel pathogens. The potential for inbreeding to affect survival has been studied and confirmed in the captive wildcat population, but evidence is currently lacking for wild populations. However, globally there are many species where similar challenges have been documented. On the other hand, small population size and fragmentation are also thought to increase the risk of hybridisation of the wildcat with the domestic cat (see thematic group 2, below).

Actions are required to establish a healthy, viable set of interconnected wildcat populations, referred to as a metapopulation. These are centred around the management of the captive population so that it can support multiple releases long into the future, thereby establishing further populations, and boosting existing and future populations both numerically and with sufficient genetic diversity to increase their resilience. Releases across multiple sites, including elsewhere within the species' historic range in Britain, need to be coordinated to secure the long-term viability of the species. Because domestic cats are in close contact with wildcats and appear to transmit infectious disease to wildcats, there has also been long-term concern about the potential impact on wildcat populations. Research and monitoring is also required to increase our ability to understand and act on the threat of infectious diseases and environmental contaminant exposure.

Goal 1.1. Create a managed metapopulation of wildcats in Scotland across target sites to ensure long-term viability

Objective 1.1.1 Identify target sites for future wildcat conservation actions

Objective 1.1.2. Create a long-term strategy for metapopulation management (spanning the wild and captive populations)

Objective 1.1.3. Establish long-term demographic monitoring of released populations to inform metapopulation development

Objective 1.1.4. Further develop the *ex situ* breeding programme to support future reinforcement/reintroductions, including through sourcing new founders from Europe

Objective 1.1.5. Conduct further translocations to support metapopulation development

Goal 1.2. Minimise the impact of diseases and environmental contaminants on wildcats to foster health and population growth

Objective 1.2.1. Improve our knowledge of wildcat health and ensure this understanding is applied to conservation management



Students at a primary school learn about the threats facing wildcats through an interactive board game. © Saving Wildcats

Thematic group 2: Hybridisation threat and its impact on the identification and intrinsic value of wildcats

The hybridisation of the wildcat (*Felis silvestris*) with the domestic cat (*Felis catus*, encompassing both owned and feral domestic cats) is a key threat to wildcats in Scotland. The domestic cat originated from the African wildcat (*Felis lybica*). The two species are separated by around one million years of evolutionary history and, since the arrival of the domestic cat, have been in contact in Britain for around 2,000 years. However, hybridisation between the two species has only advanced within the last 100 years. There is also evidence from mainland Europe that the wildcat and domestic cat can live alongside each other without significant hybridisation. Therefore, it is considered that hybridisation is most likely a symptom of the population decline of wildcats caused by other threats (see Table 1 and Appendix 4), not a primary cause.

Today genetic analysis shows that the majority of wild-living non-wildcats with a wildcat-like appearance (or 'phenotype') in Scotland have significant recent genetic ancestry from domestic cats, i.e. they are hybrids. Conservation work is currently focused on two main strategies: 1) re-establishing a core population of wildcats through release, where animals will be able to meet and mate with each other, and 2) minimising the presence of unneutered domestic 'owned' and feral cats as well as unneutered hybrids with high levels of domestic cat genetic ancestry (or introgression) at the sites where re-established wildcats are present.

Whilst wildcats and domestic cats can be separated using scientific methods, there are considerable challenges around wildcat and hybrid identification that complicate work operationally on the ground, creating confusion, uncertainty and delay. This has the potential to then play into a 'conservation devaluing' of the wildcat species by a wide range of stakeholders. Fundamentally people will be only motivated to protect what they understand and value.

Goal 2.1. Ensure people are able to understand and apply operational definitions for the identification of wildcats to support conservation management

Objective 2.1.1. Develop clear wildcat operational definitions (including production of clear ID tools) based on available evidence, stakeholder experience and emergence of novel technologies, including an understanding of the efficacy of application

Objective 2.1.2. Investigate ways of providing enhanced legal protection for wildcats in the context of hybridisation

Goal 2.2. Achieve a sustained reduction in the wild-living non-wildcat population at targeted sites to reduce hybridisation and competition and foster wildcat recovery

Objective 2.2.1. Gather data and form partnerships to enable TNVR/cat removal at target sites

Objective 2.2.2. Use data to inform decisions around future release sites for wildcats where there is the lowest risk

Objective 2.2.3. Increase proportion of owned cats vaccinated, microchipped and neutered (before 4 months old) with focus on target sites

Goal 2.3. Enhance how people value the wildcat as part of Scotland's natural and cultural heritage to encourage support for conservation and rural economies

Objective 2.3.1. Develop and implement social marketing strategy (branding, campaigns, educational messages, champions, review previous and others)

Objective 2.3.2. Ensure wildcat conservation efforts create engagement with young people and engage the young workforce

Objective 2.3.3. Understand and promote potential socioeconomic benefits of wildcat presence



A wildcat walking along a wall in the Angus Glens. © Forestry and Land Scotland

Thematic group 3: Addressing non-discriminatory predator and pest control and persecution

Non-discriminatory feral cat management, alongside persecution and non-discriminatory pest and predator control, are key threats to wildcats. Historical persecution and non-discriminatory feral cat management were probably two of the main drivers of population declines in wildcats. Persecution remains a threat where conflict between wildcats and human interests, such as gamebird and poultry rearing, are not resolved. Targeted and non-targeted control methods, such as trapping and shooting, have a high potential to harm wildcats, which are often mistaken for feral cats, hybrids or other predators.

A collaborative approach to resolve conflict between wildcats and human land-use is essential, and clear precautionary identification protocols and improved training for land managers to minimise the risks of wildcats being killed. Clear guidance is also necessary to enable effective trap-neuter-vaccinate-return (TNVR) programmes aimed at reducing wild-living feral and hybrid cat numbers. Continuing collaboration between conservation bodies, cat welfare organisations and landowners is also essential, supported by increased information sharing and joint stewardship of wildcats. There is a need to work together and foster trust between the different stakeholders, and to develop, trial, disseminate and implement practical solutions that balance wildcat conservation with land-use needs.

Goal 3.1. Further improve communication with stakeholders to reduce conflict with wildcats and build trust and collaboration to develop practical solutions to support positive outcomes for wildcat recovery

Objective 3.1.1. Foster trust between stakeholders, through joint working and generation of employment and placement opportunities

Objective 3.1.2. Improve communication and collaboration to develop and share practical solutions that mitigate conflict

Goal 3.2. Risks to wildcats from non-discriminatory pest control method are known and mitigated

Objective 3.2.1. Gather information on the extent and drivers of use of each non-discriminatory method in order to assess risks to wildcats



Tracking of released wildcats. © Saving Wildcats

Thematic group 4: Habitat change, human development and land-use practices

Habitat loss, fragmentation, degradation, historic changes in land uses and current land-use practices are key threats to wildcats. Historically, habitat loss and land-use changes were some of the primary causes of the decline of the wildcat in Britain and elsewhere in Europe. Changes in habitat and land-use practices can negatively affect prey diversity and population densities, and connectivity and the amount of suitable wildcat habitat. These can impact wildcat population size, densities, home-range sizes and breeding success. They may also lead to local increases in human-wildlife conflict through increased predation of non-native prey species including game birds and domestic poultry. In addition, some land-use management practices can have a direct impact on wildcats, particularly juveniles, through injury and death. Furthermore, habitat suitable for wildcats is often found in the human landscape, increasing the risk of wildlife conflict, hybridisation with and disease transmission from domestic cats, and road-traffic accidents.

There is a need to incorporate wildcat-friendly habitat practices across all scales of local and national landscape initiatives. This is linked to the improvement, development and implementation of best practice and legislation for different land-use practices and habitat management to mitigate against the threats and to improve habitat suitability for wildcats. Continued engagement, training and awareness across all stakeholders is required, and more research into the habitat-prey relationship and the impact of developments (including new roads and green initiatives) on wildcats, and how these could be mitigated. The threats and opportunities posed by habitat management and different land uses on a large scale requires collaboration across many different stakeholders, with a focus on continuing dissemination of new and existing information to ensure practical solutions can be effectively carried out.

Goal 4.1. Improve habitat quality and connectivity in order to increase prey abundance and diversity, reduce wildcat hybrids, reduce hybridisation and increase wildcat populations

Objective 4.1.1. Disincentivise the conflicts with and incentivise the direct benefits (including fiscal) of wildcats in land-use practice

Objective 4.1.2. Improve our understanding of wildcat ecology, so as to better support conservation decision-making for species recovery

Objective 4.1.3. Develop our understanding of wildcat interactions with other protected species (e.g., capercaillie, red squirrel, waders)

Objective 4.1.4. Ensure wildcats are considered in large-scale habitat restoration initiatives

Goal 4.2. Improve road design to mitigate and avoid negative impact of new infrastructure in order to decrease wildcat mortality

Objective 4.2.1. Ensure all consultees are aware of the threat roads pose to wildcats

Objective 4.2.2. Instigate a road awareness campaign to make the wider public aware of the threats that roads pose to wildcats

Objective 4.2.3. Identify road traffic accident hotspots and mitigate the risks associated

Goal 4.3. Wildcats are protected effectively through knowledge, legislation and best practice guidance so that negative impacts from land management and development are reduced

Objective 4.3.1. Improve, develop and implement best practice and legislation for different land uses and habitats

Objective 4.3.2. Ensure wildcat are considered in legislation reviews and development proposals

Objective 4.3.3. Increase awareness (and long-term monitoring) of wildcats among stakeholders in the landscape in order to protect and enhance wildcat populations



Complex enrichment, designed to promote the use of innate behaviours, being added into a wildcat enclosure in the Saving Wildcats Conservation Breeding for Release Centre. © Saving Wildcats

Strategy governance

Scotland's Wildcat Advisory Group (SWAG) will monitor, review and guide implementation of the strategy, providing balanced advice to and support for all delivery partners, including those managing local projects. SWAG will consist of single representatives from organisations with national remits and specific local projects, who could have an impact on, be impacted by (positively or negatively), or have expertise to contribute to the delivery of the strategy.

Initially composed of about 15 representatives, SWAG will consult and represent the diversity of views of their organisations/members and other organisations with similar interests. To widen the community of interest, it is anticipated that SWAG members will also feed back to their sector (including public bodies, local authorities, fisheries and water, land management and conservation) the key issues arising through the work of the group.

Membership of SWAG will be kept under review to ensure that it remains fit for purpose in guiding implementation of the strategy. The initial Chair of the SWAG will be proposed by NatureScot and will need the approval of the membership before beginning their two-year term of office. Thereafter, proposals for the Chair will come from the SWAG members.

The work of SWAG will include, but not be restricted to, driving and monitoring the implementation of the strategy; working with key delivery partners to support effective linkages of the strategy to wider national policy and programme developments; steering and encouraging the development of wildcat restoration projects in appropriate areas; promoting consistent, coordinated messaging, policy,

and best practice across different wildcat projects that were developed in line with the strategy approach; and promoting the use of clearly defined metrics and evidence-based decision-making throughout the implementation of the strategy. It will prioritise and review actions and suggested timeframes in the strategy's action plan to ensure resources are most effectively and efficiently focussed. Potential funding mechanisms, collaborative opportunities and an assessment of available resources will be taken into account.

An early task for SWAG will be the development of an induction process for members of the group to foster collaborative work and nurture trust and transparency between members of the SWAG and between the group and their stakeholder constituencies.

SWAG may form sub-groups on an *ad hoc* basis to advise and report on specialist topics, such as funding, research and innovation. Members of the sub-groups may include both SWAG members and non-members. Members of SWAG may propose additional representatives to report or present on specialist topics at SWAG meetings on an *ad hoc* basis.

SWAG will meet on a half-year basis (usually online) with minutes of the meetings, reflecting a summary of key points and action points, being made publicly available through a dedicated webpage hosted on the NatureScot website. Additional special meetings will be called when it is judged there is a particular need. The webpage will also provide information on the function of SWAG; terms of reference for the group; membership and sub-group information; links to technical and site-specific information; and contact information.



Wildcat hybrid investigating a camera trap. © Scottish Wildcat Action

Appendix 1: Synergies between the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and Scotland's Wildcat Strategy

Objectives and actions within the [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Delivery Plan 2024-2030](#) which have synergy with those on Scotland's Wildcat Strategy.

Target of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Delivery Plan to 2030	Synergy of this wildcat strategy with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045	Examples of linked goals and objectives in this wildcat strategy
Objective 2. Introduce a Programme of Ecosystem Restoration.	Wildcats need a mixture of high-quality interconnected woodland-grassland habitat, which also supports a wide range of other priority species. Wildcat presence provides an acid-test of whether restoration of these ecosystems is happening effectively.	Goal 4.1 Improve habitat quality and connectivity in order to increase prey abundance and diversity, reduce wildcat hybrid numbers, reduce hybridisation and increase the wildcat population.

Objective 4, Action 21.1. Develop effective species recovery, reintroduction and reinforcement programmes.	Work is being undertaken to recover wildcats through an internationally recognised conservation translocation programme.	Objective 1.1.5. Conduct further translocations to support metapopulation development.
Objective 5, Action 27. ...investment in, green skills and local economic opportunities supporting nature-based education, nature restoration skills and volunteering.	Wildcat recovery projects provide an opportunity to develop skills and jobs in rural areas, which fit with the ambitions of a Just Transition.	Objective 2.3.2. Ensure wildcat conservation efforts create engagement with young people and engage the young workforce.
Objective 6, Action 28. Engage and strengthen the connection between people and communities with nature.	Wildcats are one of Scotland's most iconic and loved species and provide significant opportunities to engage a wide range of people in both urban and rural areas in nature conservation.	Goal 2.3. Enhance how people value the wildcat as part of Scotland's natural and cultural heritage to encourage support for conservation and rural economies.
Objective 7. Ensure Grouse Moor management sustains healthy biodiversity.	Many wildcats inhabit estates managed for gamebirds. There are challenges to traditional management from wildcat presence, predation and disturbance, but there is also significant opportunity to develop a positive coexistence.	Objective 3.1.2. Improve communication and collaboration to develop and share practical solutions that mitigate conflict.



Interpretive display on wildcats at the Grantown Show. © Saving Wildcat Action

Appendix 2: Organising Team members

Facilitation/Chairing:

Katharina Herrman, IUCN SSC Conservation Planning Specialist Group

Jamie Copsey, IUCN SSC Conservation Planning Specialist Group

Team members:

Martin Gaywood, NatureScot

Roo Campbell, NatureScot

Cameron Balfour, British Association of Shooting and Conservation

Sarah Elliott, Cats Protection

Andrew Kitchener, National Museums Scotland

Helen Senn, Royal Zoological Society of Scotland

Team support:

Paul Robertson, NatureScot



Presentation to the public during the Scottish Wildcat Action project. © Scottish Wildcat Action

Appendix 3: Attendees of Scotland's Wildcat Strategy workshops, online and Perth 2025

	Attended online workshop 12 th March	Attended 1 st April	Attended 2 nd April	Attended 3 rd April
Adrian Davies (Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management)	NO	NO	YES	YES
Alice Bacon (Saving Wildcats)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Alice Palombo (Cats Protection)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Alistair Green (Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust)	NO	YES	YES	YES
Andrew Kitchener (National Museums Scotland)	YES	YES	YES	YES

Becky Priestley (Trees for Life)	YES	NO	NO	NO
Ben Oliver Jones (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Cameron Balfour (British Association for Shooting and Conservation)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Cathy Dwyer (Scotland's Rural College)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Claire Raisin (IUCN CPSG Facilitator)	YES	YES	YES	YES
David Barclay (Royal Zoological Society of Scotland)	YES	YES	YES	YES
David Bavin (Independent)	YES	NO	NO	NO
Eileen Stuart (NatureScot)	NO	YES	NO	NO
Elspeth Stirling (Independent)	YES	YES	YES	NO
Flavio Winkler Ford (Aigas Field Centre)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Hebe Carus (Forest and Land Scotland)	YES	NO	NO	NO
Helen Senn (Royal Zoological Society of Scotland)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Helena Brailsforde (Cats Protection)	NO	YES	YES	YES
Jamie Copsey (IUCN CPSG Facilitator)	YES	YES	YES	YES

Jenny MacPherson (Vincent Wildlife Trust)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Kat Walsh (Natural England)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Katharina Herrmann (IUCN CPSG Facilitator)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Katie Beckmann (Royal Dick School of Veterinary Studies)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Kelly Ann Dempsey (Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management)	YES	YES	NO	NO
Keri Langridge (Saving Wildcats)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Kerry Kilshaw (Wildlife Conservation Research Unit – Oxford University)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Lona Johnson (Cats Protection)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Louise Hughes (Saving Wildcats)	NO	YES	YES	YES
Martin Gaywood (NatureScot)	YES	NO	NO	YES
Nathan Bryceland (Scottish Land and Estates)	YES	NO	NO	NO
Paul Robertson (NatureScot)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Rob Ogden (Royal Dick School of Veterinary Studies)	NO	YES	YES	NO

Roo Campbell (NatureScot)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Ross Macleod (Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Roy Dennis (Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation)	YES	NO	NO	NO
Sam Turner (Scottish Government)	YES	NO	NO	NO
Sarah Elliot (Cats Protection)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Sean Meechan (Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty Against Animals)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Stuart Brooks (National Trust for Scotland)	YES	NO	NO	NO
Tim Kirkwood (Wildland Ltd)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Urs Breitenmoser (IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Windy Arey- Kent (IUCN CPSG Facilitator)	YES	YES	YES	YES



Wildcat in the Saving Wildcats Conservation Breeding for Release Centre. © Saving Wildcats

Appendix 4: Description of challenges and threats

The challenges are a clear reflection of the complex landscape around conserving wildcats in Scotland. Working on the challenges will influence each of the threats to the species in different ways. During the workshop, a number of challenges were identified, which were taken into account by the participants in their further work on the threats (see below and Table 1):

- Difficulty around clear **identification of a wildcat** from a hybrid or a domestic cat (due to weak diagnostic options in field situations).
- **Legal definition of a wildcat** (existing policy and possibilities of interpretation of the law).
- Need for adequate **funding streams** for **closing knowledge gaps** on wildcat behaviour and ecology and for **post-release monitoring**.
- **Public perception** of the species and its **“value”** to people and habitats (i.e. the benefit of having wildcats).
- Management of wildcats: **preventing** newly released wildcats from **hybridising and measures to control predators**.
- Habitat-related factors: competing priorities in **land use and management** due to the emergence of new technologies and changing government policies, e.g., impact of solar parks on habitat.
- Management of the domestic cat population.

The threat summary that follows makes reference to different ‘types’ of cat which are explained as follows:

- Wildcat – the European wildcat *Felis silvestris*
- Domestic cat – *Felis catus* which was derived from the closely related African wildcat *Felis lybica*
- Hybrid cat – a hybrid resulting from the crossing of the wildcat and the domestic cat with varying proportions of wildcat and domestic cat genes
- Wild-living non-wildcat – any hybrid or domestic cat that is living independently of humans
- Feral (domestic) cat – an unowned domestic cat that is living more-or-less independently of humans. Note that within the context of the use of “feral” in this threat summary, there is a range of commensalisms from completely independent (as in “wild-living”) to cats that are unowned but rely on humans for food (e.g., many stray cats and some farm cats). This broad definition has been used here for simplicity and is different from some of the terminology used by others (e.g. [Palmer and Thomas, 2023](#))

Threats to the European wildcat in Scotland have been, and are anticipated to be, multifaceted and frequently interacting. The main threats can be divided into nine groups (also see Table 1) within the four broad themes described in the ‘Process’ chapter, and are set out below.

1. Small population size as a threat, and understanding and mitigating disease and environmental contaminant exposure

Threat: Low population size and density

Low population size and density can be viewed as an overarching threat which is both caused by and serves to amplify or catalyse the other threats listed below. A large population of a species is inherently more resilient to factors that increase mortality or reduce reproduction. Very small populations are prone to a variety of problems, such as extirpation from stochastic events, or the effects of inbreeding and genetic drift, while individuals in populations at very low density may struggle to find mates. This last factor may have been an instigator for hybridisation (see below). Low population size is also a threat for the *ex situ* population.

Threat: Infectious disease

Infectious disease has the potential to negatively impact the viability of the wildcat population in Scotland. Many common feline diseases are spread through direct contact, such as fighting or sexual contact. While it is not possible to know definitively whether some common feline diseases were circulating naturally in the

wildcat population in Scotland prior to the introduction of domestic cats, the latter have the potential to act as a reservoir and source of feline infectious diseases. They could host and introduce novel diseases not currently present in Scotland and, due to their higher local population densities, maintain the circulation of diseases in an area.

There are 11 feline infectious diseases regularly monitored in the domestic cat population, and during the Scottish Wildcat Action (SWA) project all were found in the wild-living non-wildcat population, including Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV), which had not been detected in wildcats or hybrids previously. It is likely that breakdown in the breeding barrier between wildcats and domestic cats, as evidenced by the 'hybrid swarm' in the wild-living population, also resulted in a breakdown of any epidemiological barriers too. Therefore, many common feline diseases are now likely to be freely circulating within the wild-living population. These diseases may reduce survival or fecundity and so impact on population viability. They could also influence the selective pressures the wild-living population experiences and further promote hybridisation because domestic cats carry genes that may better protect them against some common feline diseases.

Threat: Environmental contaminant exposure

Carnivores such as wildcats have the potential to bioaccumulate toxins and pollutants. These chemicals have been found in wildcats in Scotland and elsewhere. Some of these, such as dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethanes (DDT) and other persistent organic pollutants, are now banned. However, they still persist in the ecosystem and have been detected decades later in other carnivores. The effects of rodenticides (see 'Non-discriminatory feral domestic cat management' below) on wildcat population viability is unknown.

2. The hybridisation threat and its impact on the identification and intrinsic value of wildcats

Threat: Hybridisation

Hybridisation between the European wildcat and the domestic cat has been identified as a threat to wildcats in Scotland since the early 1900s, but genetic and morphological analyses suggest this did not proceed significantly until after the 1950s. Most populations in Europe exhibit low to negligible levels of hybridisation (although regional areas with higher rates exist in some countries). In contrast, the population in Scotland now consists of a 'hybrid swarm'. Hybridisation could be regarded as a symptom of other factors acting on the population, but once present hybrids could be perceived as a threat.

Existing hybrids may act as a bridge between wildcats and domestic cats, meaning that even in the absence of other potential drivers of decline, such as low population density, the presence of hybrids increases the risk of further introgressive hybridisation (where wildcats, hybrid wildcat and domestic cats have

mated freely with each other over many generations leading to the development of a hybrid swarm). This results in a gradual decline in the wildcat genome in wild-living non-wildcat populations. Hybrids may not be as adapted to living in certain environments in Scotland (although see 'Infectious disease', in this appendix), which could reduce population viability. Hybrid presence creates additional risks, such as disease transfer and an inability for many welfare, conservation and land management practitioners to distinguish between these different groups of cats during management of feral domestic cat and hybrid cat populations. These are discussed in other sections of this appendix. Hybrid cats have significant niche overlap with wildcats and therefore compete for resources and home ranges with wildcats.

High levels of hybridisation have the potential to undermine the conservation status of wildcats, as not being worth the resources or effort for conservation action, as well as the cultural value of wildcats, which would be perceived as impure and not worth saving. This could also undermine public support for wildcats and stakeholder involvement in conservation action.

3. Addressing non-discriminatory predator and pest control and persecution

Threat: Non-discriminatory feral domestic cat management

Feral cats are mainly managed through two approaches in Scotland. Land managers, particularly those working with game such as grouse and pheasants, manage cats through legal killing, while animal welfare organisations manage such cats through neutering. The intentions behind these two main approaches are also different, with land managers attempting to remove immediate risk to their game through 'removal', whereas animal welfare organisations are more concerned with the welfare of the individual cats. Both methods can reduce feral cat populations.

Wildcats and domestic cats that display tabby (striped) markings are not easily distinguishable for inexperienced practitioners. The presence of hybrids further complicates identification. Therefore, both approaches carry risks where they are conducted in areas with wildcats and there is the potential for misidentification and consequent killing or neutering of wildcats. Some approaches carry more risk than others, but killing through 'lamping' (use of a spotlight at night to detect and target cats by their eye-shine) is particularly significant. Thermal-imaging-assisted night-shooting is a more recent development, which carries similar risk, with neither method allowing reliable differentiation between feral cats, hybrids and wildcats prior to shooting.

Threat: Persecution

It is thought that persecutory killing was the main cause of the original decline in wildcats in Scotland prior to 1915 and it is likely that killing was also a major contributor to the reduction in the wildcat population and subsequent increased

levels of hybridisation from the 1950s onwards. Following the legal protection of wildcats in 1988, the rate of killing has been unknown and prior to releases of wildcats by the Saving Wildcats project there was a perception amongst many land managers and others that no 'pure' (and therefore legally protected) wildcats remained in Scotland.

Monitoring by Saving Wildcats has found human-wildcat co-existence issues remain unresolved, particularly with pheasant shoots and small-scale poultry keeping. Wildcats sometimes predate both pheasants and poultry, and disturb pheasants near release pens, so that the remaining pheasants move away from the area, potentially making the shoot unviable. Unless the impacts of wildcats on these land uses can be effectively mitigated, loss of support from these stakeholders for further releases and, at its most extreme, illegal persecution remain significant threats.

Threat: Non-discriminatory predator and pest control

Predator control in Scotland involves the killing of native mammalian species that are not protected, including red foxes, brown rats and some mustelids, such as stoats and weasels. Other non-native species that are controlled include American mink, ferret and grey squirrel. Reasons for predator control may be to protect game or to conserve species such as protected ground-nesting birds. For some of these native predator species the control is conducted under a general licence. Foxes are mainly controlled by lamping, from which the risks to wildcats are outlined above in the context of feral cat control. The mustelid species are commonly controlled using spring traps, which are housed in tunnels to restrict access to larger non-target species. Although these mustelids are smaller than adult wildcats, there may still be a risk of by-catch of smaller juvenile wildcats and potential injury to adults exploring the tunnels for prey. Rabbits are often controlled during forestry planting and restocking, and to protect agriculture.

Some methods could carry risks to wildcats, such as gassing of warrens and the use of drop-box traps and spring traps. Wildcat kittens could theoretically be captured as by-catch and, if they become separated from their mother during this process, they are unlikely to survive. Spring traps used for rabbit control are larger than those used for stoats and so exclusion may not be as effective against by-catch. To our knowledge no data exist on by-catch rates for any of these methods.

Another method, commonly used for rodent pests, is rodenticides. These are poisons, generally anticoagulants, set out as edible bait. Rodenticides were detected in 61% of wild-living cat carcasses during the Scottish Wildcat Action (SWA) project, frequently at potentially toxic levels. There was no evidence that rodenticides had contributed to the deaths of these cats, but the very high concentrations in some individuals warrant further research. More recently, third-generation rodenticides have been developed, which are more potent, but theoretically have a lower risk of secondary poisoning. There have also been changes in the way that rodenticides may be legally presented, which could also affect exposure to carnivorans.

4. *Habitat change, human development and land-use practices*

Threat: Land-use practices, habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation

Wildcats have been lost from their former refugia in the far north and west of Scotland, where many of the main threats, such as persecution and hybridisation, are considered to be lower than elsewhere. This suggests that other factors are involved, in particular habitat and land-use change. Following their c.1915 range minimum, wildcats were able to expand back into other areas of Scotland (north of the Highland Boundary Fault) without evidence of widespread hybridisation with domestic cats, suggesting there was still sufficient habitat to sustain a robust population.

While persecution was probably a key driver for the population decline and subsequent hybridisation in the mid-20th century (see above), a productive and intact habitat could have buffered the wildcat against this threat. This appears to have happened in much of the rest of Europe, where threats such as persecution and hybridisation also exist. Fragmentation of habitat may also increase hybridisation risk, as has been shown elsewhere in Europe. More research is needed on the significance of this factor. Apart from predator control (see above) the key land-use changes and practices that threaten wildcats relate to agriculture and forestry and the implications for prey species.

Agriculture

In Scotland there are no areas with very large-scale, intact native forests. Sixty six percent of land is used for farming, so it is likely that agricultural land of varying types provides key habitat for wildcats. However, agricultural intensification since the mid-20th century has reduced habitat heterogeneity in these landscapes. This intensification includes a reduction in hedgerows and a concomitant increase in field sizes, a move from hay to silage production, more autumn sowing of crops and increased specialisation of farms, including a homogenisation away from mixed cattle and arable farms. The main impact of agricultural intensification on wildcats may be through a loss of structural diversity within the landscape.

Forestry

Around 43% of productive forestry in Scotland is spruce conifer, a proportion of which is mature standing forest that is not generally suitable for wildcats. However, wildcats and hybrid wildcats frequently use areas of clear-fell, scrub and windthrown tree areas within plantations for hunting, denning and resting. Thinned mature stands of some other conifer species, such as pine, can provide suitable habitat for wildcats. Breeding females will also often hide kittens within log or brash piles and move kittens on a regular basis. They may need a series of sites with different protective and hunting features. Windblow and areas of deadwood are particularly important for denning females, although as a result kittens and young juveniles

are at risk from forestry practices, such as the destruction of hiding structures, as well as loading of wood piles, mechanical planting, preparation of clearings and windthrow management. This is further complicated by the difficulties in identifying wildcat den sites and the large number of resting sites used by wildcats across their home ranges. This is recognised in legislation and guidance for forestry operations: In areas known to have wildcats, surveys should be conducted to identify wildcat resting and breeding sites and mitigation put in place. Reliable identification of these has proved difficult in practice, though wider use of camera trapping has helped.

Where wildcats are using conifer forest, they are also often using the surrounding agricultural land, with a preference for the interface between these habitats. Broadleaf woodland provides better quality habitat than mature conifer stands. The larger conifer forests that support good wildcat numbers in Scotland tend to be the forests that have a diverse age class of stands ('coupes'), so that the cycle of planting, thinning and clearing in the different coupes in different years creates a habitat mosaic, which provides wildcats with their prey and cover requirements. The suitability of smaller forests are influenced by the wider landscape structure as well as the management of the forest itself. Recent moves to plant more broadleaf and native woodland may further improve forest habitats for wildcats in Scotland. Wildcats also frequently use gorse scrub for resting and hunting, particularly where there are rabbits. However, under the Woodland Creation Scheme in Scotland payments can be made to clear this habitat to allow tree planting. If it is replaced by a diverse native broadleaf woodland, then the overall effect may be neutral or positive in the longer term. But if the trees planted are non-native conifers, then the overall impact may be negative.

Prey

The main impact on wildcats of land-use change is through effects on prey availability. Many areas no longer support diverse and abundant prey. Probably the single most important prey species for wildcat populations in Scotland is the rabbit which is a non-native species, although it has been present for many centuries. Rabbit populations have seen dramatic declines in Scotland, starting with myxomatosis outbreaks in the 1950s, followed by a slow partial recovery and then further decline following haemorrhagic fever outbreaks in the late 1990s. Rabbits are also impacted locally by prolonged periods of heavy snowfall or rainfall. Alongside persecution, rabbit population declines may have been one of the key drivers behind the population loss and hybridisation of the wildcat population in Scotland after 1950. These factors may interact with rabbit population losses and the loss of habitats of other prey species, resulting in wildcats preying on gamebirds and poultry, thereby bringing them into conflict with gamekeepers and poultry keepers. Woodland creation schemes often involve removing rabbits where they still exist (see 'Non-discriminatory predator and pest control' above). Since rabbits are patchily distributed, this may mean the loss of a key prey resource for wildcats in those areas.

Threat: Roads, linear infrastructure and other built developments

Over half of the known mortality of wildcats in Europe results from road deaths. Road density significantly affects annual mortality probability. Estimated rates of road casualties for busy roads comparable to the A9, Scotland's longest trunk road running from Perth to Thurso and through the Cairngorms, is 0.4 wildcats killed per km per annum. This equates to 173 cats per year along the 432 km of the A9. The highest rates of road deaths occur in autumn and late winter, which are respectively peak dispersal and breeding seasons. Roads with the highest mortality risk are those that are large and with very high surrounding forest cover. However, wildcats and hybrid wildcats are still killed on smaller roads, sometimes because they are using these to travel along rather than across.

Human developments of all types can lead to habitat loss and/or fragmentation, potentially contributing to the hybridisation risk described above. Roads and linear infrastructure can affect the movement of wildcats too. Individuals may move along fence lines, tracks, railway lines and small roads, whereas they avoid others such as major roads with high traffic volumes. Major roads have been found to act as a partial barrier to wildcat movement in Europe, despite the presence of crossing structures, such as underpasses or wildlife bridges. Other than mortality risk, the effects on wildcat populations of their use of railway lines, quieter roads and tracks to travel along is unknown. Cats may be able to use them to travel further and more efficiently. Effects may include hybridisation risks from a greater connectedness with domestic cat populations and a reduced population density due to individuals being able to maintain larger home ranges more easily.

Fencelines designed to exclude deer and rabbits can also inhibit wildcat movement and present a hazard, though they are unlikely to present a complete barrier. Wildcats are known to use areas within wind farms, but there is limited evidence of the overall effects of such developments. There is the potential for disturbance during their construction and from the increased access resulting from track creation, and denning females may avoid breeding near wind turbines.



A released female wildcat carrying her kitten © Saving Wildcats

Appendix 5: Summarised action plan table

A more detailed version, with sub-actions and further information, has been made available to SWAG members and other stakeholders online.

A list of acronyms used in the action plan table is provided in Appendix 6.

Goal	Objective	Action	Lead body/ partnership (Note that the Lead body/ partnership might not be the funder)
1.1. Create a managed metapopulation of wildcats in Scotland across target sites to ensure long-term viability	1.1.1 Identify target sites for future wildcat conservation actions	1.1.1.1. Agree suitable target sites in which future wildcat conservation action should be prioritised and progressed	SWAG
—	1.1.2. Create a long-term strategy for metapopulation management (spanning the wild and captive populations)	1.1.2.1. Set up a UK -wide metapopulation working group to coordinate planning and share knowledge between active projects across the UK	SWAG

—	—	1.1.2.2. Review existing meta population management plans for other carnivore reintroductions	RZSS/SW partnership
—	—	1.1.2.3. Develop a demographic model for wild-living populations in Scotland	WildCRU, RZSS
—	—	1.1.2.4. Produce an adaptive 10 year metapopulation management strategy supported by the demographic model	SWAG
—	1.1.3. Establish long-term demographic monitoring of released populations to inform metapopulation development	1.1.3.1. Set-up a national wild-living cat (NWLC) monitoring scheme for all wild-living cats in Scotland	SWAG, NatureScot, Leads of target site projects
—	—	1.1.3.2. Conduct detailed monitoring of current released wildcat populations to gain knowledge on behaviour, ecology, demography, hybridisation status and genetic health	RZSS/SW partnership, Leads of target site projects, WildCRU

—	—	1.1.3.3. Use released wildcat data to produce habitat suitability maps for the wildcat across Scotland, including connectivity and potential further translocation sites	WildCRU
—	—	1.1.3.4. Conduct population genetics landscape modelling to identify barriers to gene flow across the landscape	WildCRU, RZSS/ SW partnership
—	1.1.4. Further develop the <i>ex situ</i> breeding programme to support future reinforcement/reintroductions, including through sourcing new founders from Europe	1.1.4.1. Update captive PVA (Population Viability Analysis) and continue monitoring of hybrid status and genetic health	RZSS/SW partnership
—	—	1.1.4.2. Increase the size and genetic diversity of the captive population, including through sourcing new founders from Europe	RZSS/SW partnership
—	—	1.1.4.3. Revise best-practice guidance and long-term management programme for the captive breeding programme	RZSS/SW partnership

—	1.1.5. Conduct further translocations to support metapopulation development	1.1.5.1. Conduct funded releases of wildcats into new sites, following recommendations from the meta population management strategy and the Scottish Code for Conservation Translocations	SWAG, Leads of target site projects
—	—	1.1.5.2. Conduct additional funded releases at current release site and add new founders from appropriate source locations to increase genetic diversity, in line with metapopulation management objectives and a demographic model	RZSS/SW partnership
—	—	1.1.5.3. Establish threat mitigation and long-term monitoring for all newly established populations	Leads of target site projects
1.2. Minimise the impact of diseases and environmental contaminants on wildcats to foster health and population growth	1.2.1. Improve our knowledge of wildcat health and ensure this understanding is applied to conservation management	1.2.1.1. Establish long-term health surveillance of wildcat meta populations and other cat populations (including from TNVR and post mortem data) to identify and monitor disease risks	RDSVS, RZSS/SW partnership, Leads of target site projects

—	—	1.2.1.2. Conduct research on health surveillance data in order to increase our understanding of the impact of infectious disease and environmental contaminants on wildcats	RDSVS
—	—	1.2.1.3. Review evidence including SAVSNET and APHA data to better understand domestic cat health to inform ongoing disease risk for wildcats	CP
—	—	1.2.1.4. Continuing population health monitoring and disease surveillance of captive population including monitoring of indicators of inbreeding depression	RZSS/SW partnership
—	—	1.2.1.5. Conduct periodic review of wildcat disease risk analysis and apply appropriate mitigation methods	RZSS/SW partnership, RDSVS

—	—	1.2.1.6. Deliver identified mitigation actions which may include preventative and reactive health interventions for the wildcat population in Badenoch and Strathspey and other target sites	RZSS/SW partnership, Leads of target site projects
2.1. Ensure people are able to understand and apply operational definitions for the identification of wildcats to support conservation management	2.1.1. Develop wildcat operational definition (including production of clear ID tools) based on available evidence, stakeholder experience and emergence of novel technologies, including an understanding of the efficacy of application	2.1.1.1. Regularly review and update operational wildcat definition based on available evidence, stakeholder experience and emergence of novel technology, including reviewing efficacy of application in different situations	NatureScot
—	2.1.2. Investigate ways of providing enhanced legal protection for wildcats in the context of hybridisation	2.1.2.1. Liaise with Scottish Government wildlife team Crown Office over more effective implementation of legal protection for wildcats	SWAG
2.2. Achieve a sustained reduction in the wild-living non-wildcat population at targeted sites to reduce hybridisation and competition and foster wildcat recovery	2.2.1. Gather data and form partnerships to enable TNVR/cat removal at target sites	2.2.1.1. Form local collaborations with all key stakeholders in order to develop a shared approach to feral cat management	RZSS/SW partnership, Leads of target site projects

—	—	2.2.1.2. Develop/ establish ecological baseline on feral cat population at target sites	Academic partner, NatureScot
—	—	2.2.1.3. Gather data on the scale/ best practice/ experience of feral cat control with focus on target sites and use this to trial spatially collaborative approaches to feral cat management	SWAG, Leads of target site projects
—	—	2.2.1.4. Conduct TNVR / removal of unowned non-wildcats at target sites	SWAG, RZSS + SW, Leads of target site projects
—	—	2.2.1.5. Develop/ establish baseline on cat owner attitudes and behaviour with focus on target sites	CP, SWAG, SAWC
—	2.2.2. Use data to inform decisions around future release sites for wildcats where there is the lowest risk	2.2.2.1. Collate all relevant data from feral cat studies at the release site (management and movement) to help inform future release sites for wildcats	SWAG

—	2.2.3. Increase proportion of owned cats vaccinated, microchipped and neutered (before 4 months old) with focus on target sites	2.2.3.1. Campaign for responsible cat ownership, including targeted neutering and microchipping and legislative change	CP, SAWC
—	—	2.2.3.2. Promote TNVR and ESN (Early Spay/ Neuter) in vet community	RDSVS
—	—	2.2.3.3. Commission a report on the advantages/ disadvantages of 'cat containment areas' for wildlife, including compulsory neutering of owned cats in vulnerable areas as recommended by SAWC	NatureScot
—	—	2.2.3.4. Support introduction and implementation of mandatory microchipping including national database	CP
—	—	2.2.3.5. Ensure broad institutional support for microchipping campaigns	CP

2.3. Enhance how people value the wildcat as part of Scotland's natural and cultural heritage to encourage support for conservation and rural economies	2.3.1. Develop and implement social marketing strategy (branding, campaigns, educational messages, champions, review previous and others)	2.3.1.1. Commission and implement social marketing strategy to increase appreciation for wildcats	RZSS
—	2.3.2. Ensure wildcat conservation efforts create engagement with young people and engage the young workforce	2.3.2.1. Tailor engagement opportunities at wildcat sites to include young people	Leads of target site projects
—	2.3.3. Understand and promote potential socioeconomic benefits of wildcat presence	2.3.3.1. Identify an appropriate academic lead and organise commissioning of EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) report	SWAG
3.1. Further improve communication with stakeholders to reduce conflict with wildcats and build trust and collaboration to develop practical solutions to support positive outcomes for wildcat recovery	3.1.1. Foster trust between stakeholders, through joint working and generation of employment and placement opportunities	3.1.1.1. Employ a specific representative or trusted voice for the land management community to act as a liaison at target sites	GWCT
—	—	3.1.1.2. Provide opportunities for land management students to work with gamekeepers and with wildcat conservation	BASC, GWCT

—	—	3.1.1.3. Utilise estate staff to monitor wildcat releases or work on monitoring together with project staff. Seek funding for recruitment of PT liaison officer	RZSS/SW partnership, Leads of target site projects (working with estates)
—	3.1.2. Improve communication and collaboration to develop and share practical solutions that mitigate conflict	3.1.2.1. Collaboration through regional forums to Identify specific conflict areas and research into potential solutions to produce mitigation plan	BASC, GWCT
—	—	3.1.2.2. Set up funded independent (and collaborative) website to share mitigation approaches	NatureScot, SWAG
—	—	3.1.2.3. Create a structured comms and engagement plan to identify issues and common ground, including advice for landowners on unowned cat populations	Project officer employed by a SWAG partner
—	—	3.1.2.4. Produce a co-created mitigation plan then trial, monitor and implement practical solutions	Project officer employed by a SWAG partner

3.2. Risks to wildcats from non-discriminatory pest control method are known and mitigated	3.2.1. Gather information on the extent and drivers of use of each non-discriminatory method in order to assess risks to wildcats	3.2.1.1. Collect and analyse data, using this to inform and disseminate best practice	GWCT, NatureScot
4.1. Improve habitat quality and connectivity in order to increase prey abundance and diversity, reduce wildcat hybrids, reduce hybridisation and increase wildcat populations	4.1.1. Disincentivise the conflicts with and incentivise the direct benefits (including fiscal) of wildcats in land-use practice	4.1.1.1. Identify and review existing strategies, plans and research that impact wildcats	WildCRU, SW, Aberdeen University, Academic bodies
—	—	4.1.1.2. Support the take-up and further development of cross-compliant land management schemes and grants to benefit current and future wildcat populations	RZSS/SW partnership, Leads of target site projects, NatureScot, SG
—	—	4.1.1.3. Improve habitat management in target wildcat areas to benefit current and future wildcat populations	RZSS/SW partnership, WildCRU, Leads of target site projects, SG
—	4.1.2. Improve our understanding of wildcat ecology so as to better support conservation decision-making for species recovery	4.1.2.1. Review existing knowledge and support further research to better understand prey and habitat dynamics	RZSS/SW partnership, NatureScot, FLS, SG, SWAG

—	4.1.3. Develop our understanding of wildcat interactions with other protected species (e.g., capercaillie, red squirrel, waders)	4.1.3.1. Continuing monitoring of interaction between wildcats and protected species	RZSS/SW partnership at Badenoch & Strathspey release site, Leads of target release projects
—	—	4.1.3.2. Use our knowledge of interactions between wildcats and other protected species to develop and publish guidance on managing negative interactions	NatureScot
—	4.1.4. Ensure wildcats are considered in large-scale habitat restoration initiatives	4.1.4.1. Raise awareness of the importance of intact large scale habitat for wildcat	NatureScot
—	—	4.1.4.2. Explore/ promote the use of wildcats as indicator species in habitat restoration efforts	NatureScot
4.2. Improve road design to mitigate and avoid negative impact of new infrastructure in order to decrease wildcat mortality	4.2.1. Ensure all consultees are aware of the threat roads pose to wildcats	4.2.1.1. Update guidance on road development and mitigation and ensure this is followed during developments	NatureScot
—	4.2.2. Instigate a road awareness campaign to make the wider public aware of the threats that roads pose to wildcats	4.2.2.1. Launch a public campaign about wildcat road safety	SWAG

—	4.2.3. Identify road traffic accident hotspots and mitigate the risks associated	4.2.3.1. Gather and analyse data on wildcat road casualty patterns	NatureScot, SWAG
—	—	4.2.3.2. Identify, trial and promote effective mitigation approaches to wildcat road risk	NatureScot, Developers
4.3. Wildcats are protected effectively through knowledge, legislation and best practice guidance so that negative impacts from land management and development are reduced	4.3.1. Improve, develop and implement best practice and legislation for different land uses and habitats	4.3.1.1. Create and implement best practice guidance for land use and development	NatureScot, LAs, SF
—	4.3.2. Ensure wildcat are considered in legislation reviews and development proposals	4.3.2.1. Promote the importance of specialist species knowledge and ensure wildcats are considered in relevant legislation reviews and amendments	NatureScot
—	—	4.3.2.2. Provide independent evidenced reports on issues relating to wildcat	WildCRU
—	4.3.3. Increase awareness (and long-term monitoring) of wildcat among stakeholders in the landscape in order to protect and enhance wildcat populations	4.3.3.1. Create and deliver standardised accredited training programme for wildcat ecological monitoring	NatureScot, CIEEM

—	—	4.3.3.2. Develop a wildcat land management group	NatureScot, SWAG
—	—	4.3.3.3. Active engagement with umbrella groups to ensure info sharing across members	Land managers/ owners, NatureScot

Appendix 6: List of acronyms

Acronym	Full name or meaning
APHA	Animal and Plant Health Agency
BASC	British Association for Shooting and Conservation
CIEEM	Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management
CP	Cats Protection
FLS	Forestry and Land Scotland
GWCT	Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust
LAs	Local Authorities
RDSVS	The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh
RZSS	Royal Zoological Society of Scotland
SAVSNET	Small Animal Veterinary Surveillance Network
SAWC	Scottish Animal Welfare Commission
SF	Scottish Forestry
SG	Scottish Government
SW	Saving Wildcats
SWAG	Scotland's Wildcat Advisory Group
WildCRU	Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, University of Oxford

Supporting Organisations



SCOTLAND



Trees for Life





Scotland's Wildcat Strategy 2025-2045

IUCN/CPSG (2026). Scotland's Wildcat Strategy 2025-2045.
IUCN Conservation Planning Specialist Group. MN, USA.

Above: A male wildcat in the Saving Wildcats Conservation Breeding for Release Centre. © Saving Wildcats