

wildcats

A Policy Brief



**Saving
Wildcats**
#SWAforLIFE



Wildcats are **Scotland's last remaining native cat species**, and as such, have significant value to Scotland's natural ecosystems, human communities and culture. Wildcats have been driven to near extinction by **habitat loss** and **persecution**, and their remnant populations are now threatened by **hybridisation and disease transfer from domestic cats**. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature recognises that wildcats in Scotland are Critically Endangered. Without urgent action, wildcats will be lost forever from Britain. Saving Wildcats is a partnership project, led by the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, that has been releasing wildcats into the Cairngorms National Park to restore the population, whilst mitigating the threats they face.

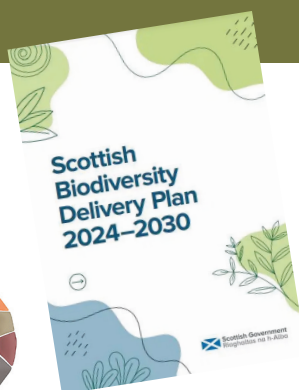


wildcats and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy

Wildcat conservation supports a wide range of biodiversity and community objectives. Actions of Saving Wildcats are linked to strategic conservation objectives at a global, national and regional level. Globally, this includes delivery on **Target 4 of 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 on the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2022-27**. At a national level, there are a wide range of actions conducted by Saving Wildcats which deliver on the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045, some of these are outlined in Table 1. Wildcat conservation, through promotion of responsible domestic cat ownership, also supports the **Scottish Government's Welfare of cats: code of practice**.



Kunming-Montreal
GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK



Target	Synergy with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045	How?
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.	Wildcats are a key biodiversity indicator species returned to the Cairngorms Connect restoration landscape.
Objective 4, Action 21.1: Develop effective species recovery, reintroduction and reinforcement programmes	Work is being undertaken to recover wildcats through an internationally recognised reinforcement programme by Saving Wildcats.	28 released wildcats have lent to the formation of a small, reproducing population within the release area of Badenoch and Strathspey. Ongoing releases will support its 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.	Based at Highland Wildlife Park, Kincaig, Saving Wildcats provides 14 full time roles, and has trained 23 volunteers. Over £3 million has been spent in the local area.
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 have proven they provide a significant opportunity to engage a wide range of people in both urban and rural areas through nature conservation.	More than 53,000 people have engaged on the project.
Objective 7: Ensure Grouse Moor management sustains healthy biodiversity	Many wildcats are at home on estates managed for gamebirds. There are challenges to traditional management from wildcat presence, predation and disturbance, however there is also significant opportunity to develop a positive coexistence.	Saving Wildcats is sharing data and working with local estates to solve challenges. The project shares GPS data with 15 estates and has held its third annual workshop for gamekeepers.

Key actions for wildcats that need your help

- Supporting the implementation of the report on responsible ownership and care of domestic cats (*Felis catus*) in Scotland by the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission. Including:
 - **Compulsory microchipping and registration of owned cats in Scotland**
 - **NatureScot commissioning a report on making it compulsory to neuter or contain owned cats in vulnerable areas**

Why? Despite intensive effort over decades, the threat to wildcats from domestic cats remains high.

- Support funding allocation to species conservation through a new round of the Nature Restoration Fund and through supporting the UK rejoining the EU LIFE funding scheme as a third party.**

Why? For wildcat conservation to be successful, it will require a sustained effort. UK species conservation projects benefited disproportionately from the LIFE funding scheme, which drives excellence and international best practise in species recovery. No other funding scheme has this focus on delivery, international cooperation and socioeconomic actions that promote Just Transition. It would be possible for the UK to rejoin LIFE, as has happened for Horizon.

- Support agencies to produce clear, revised guidance for land managers living alongside wildcats, especially within the forestry and gamebird sectors.**

Why? Clear guidance means that land managers will have the confidence to manage their work alongside wildcat recovery. This will reduce conflict, uncertainty and burdens to NatureScot licencing.

- Support the actions that require greater cross-compliance from landowners in receipt of public funds to allow access for (sensitively, responsibly and collaboratively conducted) wildlife monitoring and management actions for critically endangered species.**

Why? Saving Wildcats has had fantastic cooperation from many land managers and landowners. However, access for operations like camera trapping, GPS tracking, and conducting trapping for collaring of wildcats or neutering of feral domestic cats, can be challenging in some circumstances. Access restrictions to conduct critical conservation work may hamper the healthy reestablishment of the population and increase the risk of hybridisation.

