

## **Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Plan Partnership – Steering Group**

17<sup>th</sup> August 2015, SNH Battleby

### **Final minutes**

- Present:
- Eileen Stuart (chair) – Scottish Natural Heritage
  - Anna Meredith – Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Sciences
  - Lindsay Mackinlay – National Trust for Scotland
  - Olly Davies - Royal Zoological Society of Scotland
  - Will Boyd Wallis – Cairngorms National Park Authority
  - George Macdonald – Scottish Gamekeepers Association
  - Pete Haskell – Scottish Wildlife Trust
  - Kenny Kortland – Forestry Commission Scotland
  - Jenny Bryce – Scottish Natural Heritage
  - Roo Campbell – Scottish Wildcat Action
  - Vicky MacDonald – Scottish Wildcat Action
- Apologies:
- Sarah Robinson - Royal Zoological Society of Scotland
  - Andrew Kitchener – National Museums Scotland

### **1. Welcome and Apologies**

Kenny and Pete were welcomed to their first steering group meeting.

### **2. Feedback from Scottish wildcat Action Forum**

The Forum had taken place on 28<sup>th</sup> May at Boat of Garten Community Hall. In general it was felt the format had worked well and that there was good discussion and feedback. SNH had received some correspondence to suggest some changes to the implementation of the action plan.

- i. Related to the size of priority areas – proposing that these should take in additional areas suggested by those supporting the proposal.
- ii. Relating to the powers the Wildlife & Natural Environment Act (2011) and how these could be used to bring about greater management of feral cats.

The steering group recognised that the HLF project is only resourced to cover the existing priority areas and should seek to avoid effort becoming spread too thinly to be effective. However, the partners should collectively seek to explore where actions in support of the action plan can be supported elsewhere, e.g. NTS surveys on their properties.

**New AP 1** JB to respond to correspondence and highlight that the resources of the priority areas work is currently focused, but in the surrounding areas we support and encourage those keen to see action to engage with partners to see where additional benefits can be gained.

There was recognition that the TNR work in priority areas would not be enough to turn off the tap of feral cats in these mainland populations. Hence other measures should be explored that can complement this approach. The HLF project also requires that we ensure a legacy for this work.

The Code of Practice on INNS specifically excludes domestic pet cats, but does include those outwith human control – feral cats. The interpretation of ‘owned’ with regard to the varying levels of care given to cats is recognised as problematic.

However, the Steering Group supported the sentiment of the proposal and agreed that the partnership should be gathering evidence and investigating the case for compulsory cat micro-chipping and neutering.

New legislation is being introduced to make dog micro-chipping compulsory in Scotland from April 2016. <http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Chip-in-16dd.aspx> The justification for this is understood to relate to public concern for dangerous dogs and the case for including cats or other pets, in these measures is not currently viewed to be as strong as for dogs.

**New AP 2** AM to engage the TNR task group in the preparation of a justification for enhancing the powers to address the issues posed by feral cats and irresponsible domestic cat ownership, with some practical options for implementation. This should focus on, but not be restricted to impacts on wildcats.

**New AP 3** Steering Group to test the support for enhanced powers relating to domestic cat ownership with Scottish Government and other bodies SSPCS, CP, BVA, Species Champions.

**New AP 4** All to explore with colleagues how to help build support for proposals for enhancing powers relating to domestic cat ownership.

### **3. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising**

From 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014

**AP 2** – The Fundraising Task Group to be asked to meet and develop a plan for fund raising to deliver the SWCAP in full. **Carried forward.**

It was recognised that this action had now been carried for some time. A one page summary was tabled to clarify what is needed. The first step is having costed packages of work that we can take to funders and to identify key funding staff in the partner organisations who can contribute to fundraising efforts. The Funding Task group had previously discussed options including; an appeal, charitable trust and corporate sponsorship. The funding deficit in the HLF match funding is currently c. £142,500, and additional funding is required for conservation breeding and other research identified in the action plan that is not currently funded.

**New AP 5** All to suggest funding colleagues to contribute to a meeting in the autumn.

From 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015

**AP 7** - Need to consider how we communicate these thresholds to a wider audience. JB/ RC to develop some lines to take and bring back to Steering Group for comment. **Discharged** to be covered in Q&A in Communications workshop.

From 14<sup>th</sup> May 2015

**AP 1** Vicky to help craft communications on how we use these tools to identify wildcats in different situations. **Discharged**- to be covered in Q&A in Communications workshop.

**AP 3** JB to issue a final call for interest in the Forum – **Discharged**.

**AP 4** JB to develop a Q& A briefing for the Steering group and staff for the Forum. **Discharged**.

**AP 5** RC, AM and SR to explore the options for cats not selected for conservation breeding. **Carried forward**.

Further discussion on this topic had taken place, but had not yet been resolved. It was considered a clear rationale is needed for staff and the public. SR, RC, VM, AM to discuss and propose workable options and bring back to the group for approval.

**AP 6** RC to bring a paper to the next meeting with some options for monitoring of priority areas – assessing what is practically possible and what we can expect the options will deliver in terms of the project aims. **Discharged**.

Roo and Keri Langridge had produced a paper summarising the recommendations for monitoring in priority areas. The paper focuses on the standardised camera monitoring, hair lures and prey availability. Wildcat disease and genetic monitoring were covered in the earlier version and have not substantially changed. The paper highlights the difficulty of detecting even large scale population trends with statistical confidence. In addition some of the actions being taken would not be expected to bring about the desired population changes in the timescales being assessed. However, the methods and effort proposed should allow populations to be estimated. The proposals are still challenging in terms of delivery concurrently across 6 priority areas and will be reliant on a lot of volunteer effort. Additional metrics are proposed which should provide an indication that the actions being taken are having the desired effect; based on occupancy, survival rates and ratios of wildcats/ hybrids, recruitment rates and mean pelage score.

**New AP 6** All to provide RC with any comments on the monitoring paper by the end of August.

**AP 7** JB to write to Chris Nixon and Helen Sellars requesting that FCS is represented on the Steering Group. **Discharged**.

**AP 8** RC to provide Hugh Dignon with some options for a Ministerial visit to the project. **Discharged**. Vicky had co-ordinated the attendance at the SWA stand at Scone Game Fair and the Minister had contributed a video interview for the website.

#### **4. Action Plan – timetable, milestones and progress**

The Action Plan reporting spreadsheet was originally requested by the steering group to monitor progress on all the actions in the SWCAP. It also aims to capture the cost of the action plan as a whole. Action leads are asked to provide some high level SMART targets, and milestones against which the individual actions can be assessed. These and the resources required have still to be developed for a number of actions (n.b. this will feed into fundraising activity).

**New AP 7** JB to contact action leads individually and seek to develop some key performance measures, milestones and costs.

OD provided some updates from RZSS on progress with the conservation breeding for release work. 55 captive cats have now been assessed against the breeding criteria and all but 6 meet the criteria (4 are borderline). RZSS have met with 13 estates about trapping wildcats for inclusion in the programme and anticipate a slow by regular intake of cats for screening in the coming year.

AM reported the post mortem of 18 cats sent to NMS had been completed. The screening protocol has been agreed. Arrangements for storage and sending of samples has still to be finalised but NMS will continue to receive cats for various onward testing.

## **Part 2: Scottish Wildcat Action – HLF Project steering Group Meeting**

### **1. Project Manager update**

RC provided an update on how the work is progressing. A lot of time in the last quarter had been involved in developing protocols, attending shows and events, staff training and developing the project communications and website. Establishing landowner contracts is at varying stages in different priority areas relating to the degree of prior engagement and is well advanced in Morvern.

It was suggested that partners may be able to help with landowner contacts and the team should consider opportunities where the Steering Group or wider partners can help.

WBW asked if the land manager's protocol had been updated and that it could be brought back to the Steering Group for approval before being circulated.

### **2. Communications workshop**

The SG was joined for this part of the meeting by staff and other partners either in person or by video/ tele-conference.

Dave Barclay - SWA

Emma Rawling - SWA

Keri Langridge - SWA

Matt Wilson -SWA

Sarah Cuthbert-Kerr – NTS

VM led the workshop which aimed to inform partners about the tools and resources that are being developed for all to use to further the action plan. Given the complexity of the subject matter there is a need for co-ordination and consistency of message, hence the communications toolkit includes key messages and some questions and answers to guide responses. The media protocol sets out the expectations in terms of consulting with and acknowledging partners and funders.

After some discussion about the specific wording, a set of key messages were agreed that will be updated to the communications plan. Some stock quotes are to be added to the media protocol, calling on partner's areas of expertise. VM will consult with the relevant persons.

It was highlighted that not all partners (FCS, NTS) may be able to access Sharepoint (Microsoft 365) for security reasons, hence some alternative arrangements may also be required.

The Q&A document still has some answers to be added pending ongoing discussions about protocols and it can be added to as new questions arise. The website feedback will drive what questions people have about wildcats and about the action plan.

**New AP 8** All to provide comments of the draft Q&A responses and any missing questions by 27<sup>th</sup> August.

VM demonstrated the offline version of the website to which the finishing touches are being added; including partner logos.

A press launch is planned for the website going live on 1<sup>st</sup> September. Rhoda Grant MSP and species Champion has been approached to attend a photo shoot with the wildcat mascot.

Follow up coverage or events will be planned in each of the priority areas and staff and partners are invited to suggest ideas for these. Dave Barclay mentioned an upcoming event at RZSS as an opportunity to highlight wildcats.

#### Summary of outstanding actions

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