

## **MINUTES OF THE 13<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE SCOTTISH WILDCAT ACTION STEERING GROUP**

**Monday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2016**  
**SNH Battleby**

**Attendees – see Annex 1**  
**Chair – Eileen Stuart**

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### **AGENDA ITEM 1 - WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

Annex 1 provides a list of attendees.

Apologies were received from George Macdonald.

### **AGENDA ITEM 2 - PRIORITY AREAS PROJECT UPDATE**

See Annex 2 which provides a written report from RC. The issues raised were discussed and the following action points agreed:

- **Action point 13.1** – RC and Project Team to provide initial thoughts on the barriers/constraints to the uptake of the wildcat SRDP package, to be circulated to the Steering Group before the next meeting
- **Action point 13.2** – RC and Priority Areas staff to provide VM with images of high scoring wildcats for use in comms work
- **Action point 13.3** – RC and Project Team to look at the extent of clustering of wildcat records to assess the extent to which individuals may be interacting
- **Action point 13.4** – ALL to note that the next Steering Group meeting will include an agenda item to look at the results of the monitoring work and to discuss how these can be used to help prioritise future actions.

### **AGENDA ITEM 3 - *EX SITU* PROJECT UPDATE**

SR provided an update. RZSS staff have been to visit the Iberian lynx captive breeding facilities in Spain and Portugal and met with lead specialists. This has been a very successful project, and a lot of the experience gained to date has many direct applications to a Scottish wildcat *ex situ* conservation programme.

RZSS are reviewing the trapping work with which they have been involved. There is a question as to whether they need to be more proactive, rather than opportunistic. RZSS will work on this further and share their thoughts with Steering Group members before the next meeting.

RZSS genetics specialists are planning to complete a study of the inter-relationships of captive wildcat stock before the end of 2016, to inform the wildcat stud book and any future

breeding programme. It was noted that, unlike the Iberian lynx project at the start of its work, we are fortunate in having at least some captive animals available now.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 4 - ACTION PLAN PROGRESS AND REPORTING**

There was some discussion on the most effective way of further planning and reporting on the action plan. It was agreed that the planning of action points would be more effectively done through a meeting of the key partners thereby increasing opportunities for coordination and synergy.

- **Action point 13.5** – RC/Project Team to organise a round of project planning for Priority Area work, RZSS to organise a round of project planning for *ex situ* work. These, and the wider action plan actions, to be discussed with the wider partnership at the next Wildcat Forum, or at an earlier event.
- **Action point 13.6** – SNH staff to organise a date for the Wildcat Forum event asap

#### **AGENDA ITEM 5 - COMMS UPDATE**

VM led on providing a verbal update.

There have been a number of recent, high profile stories in the media about the SWA project e.g. BBC 'Into the Wild', as well as a range of articles by various project partners.

Recent Wildcat Haven statements and coverage – It was noted that many media outlets did not cover the story as they had made a point of checking the facts first. A lot of time that could have been more usefully directed at wildcat conservation work had to be diverted to correcting the mis-information that had been circulated.

SWA website – The usefulness of the website could be improved. At the moment the blog is being accessed a lot mainly as a result of being directed there straight from social media.

There is also a need to improve comms with the wider SWA partnership, and to coordinate fund-raising activities more effectively.

The responsible cat ownership campaign will be put on hold until February 2017 to allow efforts to focus on TNVR comms issues. TNVR comms work has included:

- Progressing the TNVR leaflet and infographics
  - Progressing the TNVR video
  - Progressing the TNVR/provisional survey results press release
  - Progressing the TNVR Q&A document
- **Action point 13.7** – ALL to look at draft TNVR Q&A paper and let VM have any comments by 17/6/16. *[Also see Action point 1.20 below].*

There then followed a short discussion about wildcat/cat management and land management issues. The SGA were unable to attend this meeting so it was suggested that this be added to the agenda of the next steering group meeting to allow a fuller discussion.

- **Action point 13.8** – KK, WBW, with input from GM, to prepare for a discussion at the next Steering Group meeting on some issues and ideas relating to land management. Paper to be discussed at the next Steering Group meeting.

## **AGENDA ITEM 6 - PROJECT REVIEW MEETING OF 3<sup>RD</sup> JUNE – FEEDBACK**

See draft note of Review meeting circulated for summary of issues discussed. LM summarised these during a verbal update.

There was a particular focus on the need to ensure that the work being done in the priority areas was achievable and realistic in light of the resources available, and to ensure key wildcat conservation aims were being met.

The Steering Group agreed that, for the next year, the project should fast-track three of the priority areas. This will be where the majority of project officer time should be invested. These three areas will be Northern Strathspey, Strathbogie and Strathpeffer.

However, although there will be fast-tracking of these three sites, the project will still maintain involvement with the other three sites. The details of how this work will need to be refined, and will be partly dependent on final monitoring results. , There are options for using other personnel on the ground in these areas.

Angus Glens: There was some discussion about Angus Glens which may contain relatively superior wildcat (although to be confirmed). Alternative management strategies for this area will be sought that may include contracting external individuals to conduct some of the project's work.

Morvern: An assessment of the wildcat population at Morvern is still required. Therefore a survey over the coming year is planned, this may involve enlisting the help, or contracting, relevant specialists and/or forming volunteer work-parties to assist in the survey.

Strathavon: Results from this particular area here may be relatively poor compared to the others. It was suggested work will be put on hold for this priority area for the next year, and will be reviewed later.

- **Action point 13.9** – SNH to make appropriate project management changes to implement the fast-tracking of three priority areas. Other alternative approaches to be applied at the other priority areas, in collaboration with ALL (e.g. NTS).

## **AGENDA ITEM 7 - MINUTES OF LAST MEETING + ACTION POINTS**

The draft minutes were approved. The action points of the previous meetings are listed below:

From 17<sup>th</sup> August 2015

- **AP 2/3/4** 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. **DISCHARGED**

From 10<sup>th</sup> December 2015

- **AP 5** SG members to request help from their fundraising teams (where appropriate) to help with co-ordinating a few select and carefully targeted applications in early 2016. **CARRIED FORWARD** but action point amended - SNH to look whether there is staffing support available for helping with fund-raising work, and then appropriate funding packages to be identified in collaboration with ALL.

From 10<sup>th</sup> March 2016

- **AP 1** WBW to explore if there is any capacity in CNPA to assist a LEADER application **CARRIED FORWARD** but action point amended - to link in with need to identify appropriate funding packages as described in AP5 of 10<sup>th</sup> December.
- **AP 2** SR offered to look into setting up monthly donations to SWA **DISCHARGED** (it was confirmed that this approach was not practical).
- **AP 3** LM, SR and RC to lead in developing a projects review meeting in May. **DISCHARGED**
- **AP 4** all to provide Vicky with any comments on the outline for the campaign asap. **DISCHARGED**
- **AP 5** The collation of wildcat survey details and results outwith priority areas to be encouraged via the Scottish Wildcat Forum. **CARRIED FORWARD**
- **AP 6** GM, WBW and one of SWA project team (TBC) to look into venues and bring ideas for the forum to the next meeting. **CARRIED FORWARD**

## **AGENDA ITEM 8 - DOMESTIC CAT ISSUES PROPOSAL**

Elspeth Stirling (ES) joined the meeting for this and the following agenda item. See the draft proposal produced by AM circulated for a summary of the issues discussed.

The paper was introduced by AM. AM noted that she was currently involved with another Defra-led group that has been examining wider issues relating to pet ownership. She has circulated the draft to some animal welfare organisations to get their initial impressions. The Steering Group agreed that the overall aims of the proposal were ambitious but ultimately the potential benefits to wildcat conservation, wider biodiversity, and health and welfare benefits to domestic cats, were worth pursuing. It was seen as a potential, important legacy of the project. The proposal will be revised further and then they broad principles will be discussed with some key parties to test wider support for this approach.

- **Action point 13.10** – AM to revise the draft proposal, and incorporate comments on legal implications, and then circulate to Steering Group members.
- **Action point 13.11** – AM to have informal discussions with Cat Protection and other relevant organisations over the proposal.
- **Action point 13.12** – LM and other relevant Steering Group NGO reps to have informal discussions with LINK partners/Wildlife Forum over the proposal and the MSP Species Champion.
- **Action point 13.13** – ES to have informal discussions with SG over the proposal

## **AGENDA ITEM 9 - TNVR DISCUSSION**

See the paper produced by ER circulated for an update on TNVR issues and proposed ways forward, following the experience gained to date. ES was also present for this agenda item.

It was emphasised that from now until autumn the priority for TNVR will be to ensure further training is done, and methods well established. The main TNVR effort will then run from autumn through winter. Efforts need to be planned and sustained, with key and committed personnel doing the work on the ground. Suitable contractors may be employed at some sites.

- **Action point 13.14** – ER, with input of RC and Project Officers, to draft a volunteer specification for help with the TNVR.
- **Action point 13.15** – RC and Project Officers to identify where accommodation support needed for TNVR volunteers/staff and let Steering Group and wider partners know – then ALL to identify potential accommodation (no cost or low cost) within the relevant Priority Areas that could be made available to volunteers/staff working on TNVR.
- **Action point 13.16** – RC to look at budget implications for using contractors for TNVR work
- **Action point 13.17** – ER to cost up and design an appropriate and portable facility for taking care of any kittens, in the event that any need to be held for a temporary period.
- **Action point 13.18** – ER to send protocols for dealing with kittens to AM. AM then to forward these to the BMVA, and discuss appropriate best practice advice etc.
- **Action point 13.19** – RC, Project Officers and Comms leads – Follow-up discussion to be held on TNVR media launch before VM goes on leave in July (timing, approach etc.).

## **AGENDA ITEM 10 - ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was a brief discussion on the future of the chairing role of the steering group. Proposals were made for a future chair who could be either an independent, or continue to be steering group member, or SNH as at present. The chair could regularly rotate between individuals/partners. The person concerned could also have more of a 'champion' type-role to raise the profile of the project, or the champion could be separate from the chair.

- **Action point 13.20** – ALL to send proposals for future chair and/or champions to MG/ES by 20 July

There was no other business.

**Martin Gaywood SNH.**

**24 June 2016**

## **Annex 1**

### **Attendee list**

#### **SCOTTISH WILDCAT ACTION STEERING GROUP 13<sup>th</sup> June 2016**

##### Present:

- Will Boyd Wallis – Cairngorms National Park Authority
- Kenny Kortland – Forestry Commission Scotland
- Andrew Kitchener – National Museums Scotland
- Lindsay Mackinlay – National Trust for Scotland
- Anna Meredith – Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies
- Sarah Robinson- Royal Zoological Society of Scotland
- Eileen Stuart (chair) – Scottish Natural Heritage
- Martin Gaywood – Scottish Natural Heritage
- Roo Campbell – Scottish Wildcat Action
- Vicky MacDonald – Scottish Wildcat Action
- Emma Rawling – Scottish Wildcat Action
- Pete Haskell – Scottish Wildlife Trust

For agenda items 8 & 9 – Joined by Elspeth Stirling

##### Apologies:

- George Macdonald – Scottish Gamekeepers Association

## Annex 2

### SCOTTISH WILDCAT ACTION STEERING GROUP 13<sup>th</sup> June 2016

## SCOTTISH WILDCAT ACTION PROJECT MANAGERS UPDATE 13<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2016

### Monitoring

The formal survey continued on some cameras into March, with a few stragglers continuing to April. The focus of the project officers activity following the survey end was in collecting equipment back in from volunteers, alongside the SD cards containing all the images taken during the survey. Many volunteers had not managed to pass on SD cards to staff during the survey and so project officers were handed up to four SD cards on images per camera at the end (totalling over 1,200 SD cards, Table 1). A large part of the project officers' work for the remainder of the quarter has therefore been extracting images from these SD cards; cross-referencing to ensure no cats had been missed by volunteers (some had not noticed images of cats visiting cameras they were operating); identifying the presence of other species at the camera (not just raccoons); and, of course, identifying and scoring cats. This activity is still on-going though is nearly complete, which will finally allow statistical analysis of the cat data. Several volunteers kindly assisted in this activity. The process of data handling and input has taken a long time and we will investigate ways we can reduce the workload and make the process more efficient. Final tallies of cats are not yet available. However, the headline results from provisional pelage scores showing a mixture of cats in all five areas surveyed, with wildcat detected in all these except Strathavon. Strathbogie, Angus Glens and Strathpeffer appear to contain the most wildcat, while Morvern was not surveyed. Early indications are that we detected 10 or fewer wildcat even in these best areas. We don't expect to detect every individual during the survey but nevertheless, the low number in Strathavon in particular is noteworthy .

Table 1: Levels of volunteer recruitment and cameras deployed for winter survey

Area	Monitoring volunteers	Number of cameras	Volunteers – other activities
Angus Glens	20	63	0
Norther Strathspey	19	65	0
Strathavon	20	60	5
Strathbogie	40	80	4
Strathpeffer	40	79	1
Total	139	347	10

Despite not yet having complete results from the survey, project officers followed up on the preliminary results with stakeholders and volunteers. This took the form of reports to individual landowners where requested and, in all five areas, presentations of some of the highlight images from the local survey. The presentations also involved an award ceremony, with awards (Cairngorm Wildcat beer in many instances) given in a range of categories including Best wildcat; Funniest/cutes image; Most effort/cameras; Best non-wildcat. Following these awards, we are considering whether to have a national level heat that puts each area's award winners head-to-head.

## TNVR

After the purchase this quarter of additional TNVR equipment (crush cages, family-traps, micro-chip scanners, gloves, disinfectant etc), Emma has divided these up into kits ready to be deployed out to TNVR volunteers as they come on stream.

Testing of the TNVR procedure continued in Strathpeffer with Keri and local vet and TNR volunteer Alice Bacon. This testing has highlighted the complexity to this process:

1. From trail camera data, identify all the cats at the proposed TNVR location
2. Coordinate trap access with landowners
3. Set out cage traps on pre-bait
4. Produce individual ID sheets for each suspected owned cat (in many cases, any cat that's not a wildcat), containing photos, description and timing of visits
5. Produce publicity material from this for each cat to help identify owners
6. Upload material onto social media and monitor responses to see if it's owned
7. Door-to-door visits in the vicinity of the trap (1-2km in this trial) to speak with cat owners or to drop of information leaflets about our TNVR activity.
8. Coordinate trap times and equipment with volunteers and vets
9. Set plan for unexpected capture of previously unknown cats, lactating female cats or wildcats.
10. Commence trapping

Five trap nights were spent in Strathpeffer during May following this procedure but last-minute shifting of the trap by a landowner meant nothing was captured.

During May, twelve trap nights have been spent in Strathavon and six in Strathbogie, with more timetabled over the next three months and TNVR vet kits have been dropped off at the vets in those areas. By the end of May, no cats had been captured. TNVR plans are being developed for Northern Strathspey and Angus Glens and vets contacted in those areas.

## Land management

In May the team met to discuss implementation of the land management work stream. Due to the need to develop relationships with individual land managers in each priority area, individual project officers will be delivering local land management activity. Hebe will act as a coordinator and source of advice for other staff. The team felt that there was a need to be flexible with priority area boundaries in relation to SRDP as we react to further information on the locations of wildcat in and around the priority areas. We would therefore like to examine boundary changes as part of the on-going reactive management process. We will also produce a protocol of how SWA staff contribute towards development plans in priority areas. SRDP is currently under external review following the first round of application assessments. The wildcat-friendly predator control option received only one application in this first round (from an estate in the Angus Glens) and Hebe will feed into why this might be the case. This may include:

- a) A mismatch between habitats where the option applies (moorland) and habitats preferred by wildcat (woodland and scrub edges), though this doesn't mean that wildcat are not trapped on moorland
- b) Low value of the SRDP option

Ultimately however, we as a project have not yet had the chance to raise the profile of this option directly with landowners in priority areas and their agents. This is something we will be doing in the future.



Table 2. Landowner engagement

Priority Area	Angus Glens	Northern Strathspey	Strathavon	Strathbogie	Strathpeffer
Number of estates participating	7	7	4	4	7
Number of other landowning bodies	2	1	1	1	1
Proportion of priority area by area (approx.).	80%	90%	85%	80%	60%
Number of ambassador estates	0	0	0	0	0
Number of estates with project equipment on loan	1	0	0	1	3
Number of estates providing data	1	1	1	0	0
Number of estates signed up to w-f predator control	2	4	1	0	0
Number of SRDP estates for w-f measures	1	0	0	0	0

Over March and April, we were joined by Martha Gavan, a PhD student placement from the University of Aberdeen. While Martha helped and got experience in several aspects of the project, her main focus while with us was to design a questionnaire targeted at farmers and crofters asking them about rodent pest control practices, rodenticide, secondary poisoning risk knowledge, farm cats and pest control practices. The questionnaire is due to be posted out to over 900 crofters and will be given to farmers at events over the summer as well as shared with farmers and crofters online. Martha will analyse these on her return to the project over August and the results will inform our guidance to framers and crofters on wildcat friendly management practices.

Hebe and Roo attended the Scottish Land and Estates Spring Conference in Edinburgh during May. SWA had a stand at which we were able to speak with a number of landowners. Attendance at the stand was approximately 15 delegates, lower than anticipated, but we spoke with many more delegates away from our stand over the course of the conference. The new Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Roseanna Cunningham, took time out to visit our stand and expressed a keen interest in the project.

## Public sightings

Between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 20<sup>th</sup> April we received nine sightings via the sightings page on the website. A software update issue means that from 20<sup>th</sup> April, further sighting shave not been forwarded to Roo's email. A software update is needed to continue receiving sightings and we are fixing this issue.

The updated Mammal Tracker sightings app (Fig. 1) went live for Android and IOS during late May. Alongside this, an iRecord form has been created by Natural Apptitude, the contractor responsible for the app and sightings portal development and is currently available at <http://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/enter-wildcat-record>. This form will be integrated

into the scottishwildcataction.org sightings page with iFrames over the next couple of weeks. The new system allows direct upload of cat sighting images by the public, though not video. After verification by project staff, records will be automatic added to the records map on our website and will also be submitted to NBN directly.

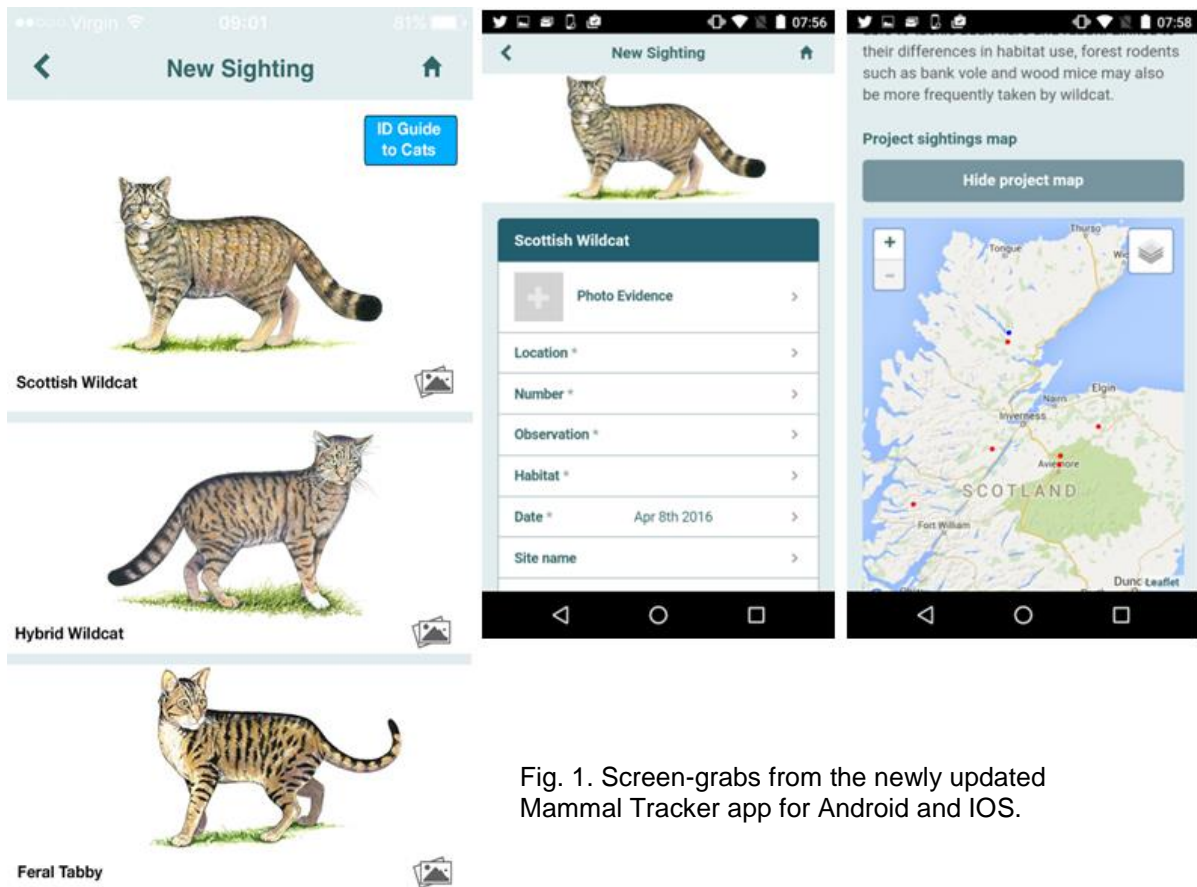


Fig. 1. Screen-grabs from the newly updated Mammal Tracker app for Android and IOS.

## Outreach

Staff outreach has been diverse, with audiences ranging from the general public to wildlife conservation groups and landowners and the delivery from talks and presentations to guided walks and stalls (Table 3). The value of such outreach is great with instantly measurable outcomes in some cases, such as volunteer recruitment or new landowner contacts in priority areas. As a project we do not have the capacity to attend all the events we would like and are frequently ignoring events or lower priority, particularly those outside priority areas. Assistance from our partner organisations in providing outreach would be valuable and we would appreciate details of any events attended by partners where they undertook outreach for Scottish Wildcat Action.

Table 3. Outreach events ran or attended by project staff. Note this doesn't include the stakeholder/volunteer events (see Monitoring).

Date	Staff	Outreach event
06/03/2016	Emma	Guided walk at Greenmyres Community Woodlands open day (12 people)
09/03/2016	Hebe	Talk to Edinburgh University Zoological Society
17/03/2016	Emma	Talk to Scottish Wildlife Trust Aberdeen Group / North East

			Nature Network (60 people)
19/03/2016	Roo		Presentation at North East Scotland Biological Records Forum (11pprox.. 90 people)
19/03/2016	Emma		Talk to HPCLT – Dùn Coilich Project (30 people)
21/03/2016	Keri		Talk to Evanton Rainbows, Brownies and Guides (45 children and 9 adults)
23/03/2016	Roo & Emma		Presentations at Aberdeenshire Council Partnership Biodiversity Champions Launch (11pprox.. 90 people)
08-10/04/2016	Roo & Emma		Presentation at the Mammal Society Easter Conference (11pprox.. 120 people)
16/04/2016	Emma & Keri		Presentation and stall at the Highland Wildlife Fair. With Clare Sevar (vol). 60 people attended presentation and others at stall.
20/04/2016	Keri		Talk to Marybank Primary School, with Clare Sevar (40 children)
21/04/2016	Keri		Talk to Contin Women's Institute
26/04/2016	Keri		Daffodil Tea at Foulis Estate, with Clare Sevar (150 people engaged)
28/04/2016	Emma		Loan of trail cameras and provision of wildcat tracking info to support Glenlivet Ranger Service's Junior Ranger Week.
14/05/2016	Emma		Cairngorm Nature Festival, two guided walks (12 people, 2 of which offered to volunteer)
15/05/2016	Emma		Cairngorm Nature Festival, stall at Tomintoul Museum (50 people)
25/05/2016	Hebe & Roo		Scottish Land & Estates Spring Conference (approx. 120 delegates)

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A communications update will follow.