

Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Plan Partnership – Steering Group

14th May 2015, SNH Battleby

Draft minutes

Present: Eileen Stuart (chair) – Scottish Natural Heritage
Hugh Dignon – Scottish Government
Andrew Kitchener – National Museums Scotland
Lindsay Mackinlay – National Trust for Scotland
Sarah Robinson - Royal Zoological Society of Scotland
Will Boyd Wallis – Cairngorms National Park Authority
George Macdonald – Scottish Gamekeepers Association
Jenny Bryce – Scottish Natural Heritage
Roo Campbell – Scottish Wildcat Action
Vicky MacDonald – Scottish Wildcat Action

Apologies: Anna Meredith – Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Sciences

1. Welcome and Apologies

Hugh and Vicky were welcomed to the steering group meeting. It was noted Olly's replacement should be in post with SWT in early June.

2. Minutes, matters arising from previous meetings

From 6th 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.**

From 18th March 2015

AP 1 The new team to be announced in the national and local press. JB to prepare a draft news release for circulation. **Discharged.**

AP 2 – JB/ RC To develop a standard line to take on the interaction between Wildcat Haven and Wildcat Action for all partners to use. **Discharged.** JB to circulate with Q&A.

AP 3 – all were asked to provide comment to LM by 6th April on whether we should employ a cloud based system or rely on SNH systems for supporting volunteers. **Discharged.**

AP 4 – OD to contact the comms task group re-redesigning the logo. **Discharged.**

AP 5 - HS to revise the genetics thresholds paper following discussions and recirculate. **Discharged.**

AP 6 - JB to send genetics thresholds paper for review on behalf of the Steering group. HS had organised. **Discharged.** SR to ask HS to finalise the paper for the forum.

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. **Carried forward** – to be – re-visited for the Forum.

AK raised that there is a danger of the genetic assignment % being regarded as a definition rather than a tool for distinguishing between wildcats and their hybrids. What makes a wild cat a wildcat relates to their behaviour, ecology, appearance and genetics – all of which are independent *samples* of the genome.

JB had previously produced a blog post on this topic –

<https://scotlandsnature.wordpress.com/2014/12/15/species-of-the-month-wildcat/>

It was noted the thresholds for conservation breeding may change over time and may be difficult to regard as a legal definition, but are a pragmatic starting point.

New 1 AP Vicky to help craft communications on how we use these tools to identify wildcats in different situations.

AP 8 SR to re-circulate the conservation breeding trapping protocol to the steering group. **Carried forward.**

AP 9 JB, WBW, LM and SR to discuss proposals and organise forum. **Discharged.**

AP 10 Action Leads to review budgets, timescales and milestones for their actions and update on the dropbox version hosted by Andrew. **Carried forward.** JB to update the version on dropbox and schedule time to go through this in detail at the next meeting.

Matters arising

AK had circulated a measurement protocol.

New AP 2 JB to investigate providing priority area boundaries as GIS files for partners.

ES has responded to the filmmaker indicating our support but that currently all the Project resources are committed to the agreed outputs.

3. Scottish Wildcat Forum

New AP 3 JB to issue a final call for interest in the Forum.

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

4. Captive breeding for release update

Procedures are now in place, but no trapping is planned during the main period when cats may have dependent young.

Helen Dickinson has now left RZSS and will be replaced by David Barclay as their Cat Conservation Project Officer from 1st June (also covering Pallas cats).

5. Press coverage and responses

The Minister, SNH and RZSS had received some correspondence on the back of a news release from the Captive Animal Protection Society and Wildcat Haven. We had welcomed the opportunity to correct the inaccuracies in the new release and had responded directly to the relatively small number of enquiries. Following which several people had thanked us for our replies. SNH, SG and RZSS had worked together on the responses. It was agreed that having some published Q&A might help circumvent such inaccurate reporting.

6. Interactions between Scottish Wildcat Action projects

A few examples have highlighted that different parts of the action plan could impact on one another and hence there is a need for all partners to be aware of this and mitigate accordingly.

One example is where members of the public report a wildcat sighting. If the landowner in the same area is subsequently approached about trapping wildcats for conservation breeding, it might have the undesirable effect of discouraging further public sightings. This requires some sensitive explanation of why the conservation breeding programme is necessary. It may be difficult to contact everyone who may have reported a sighting in an area, but we should be alert to this issue.

TNR is being promoted in the priority areas and the protocol agreed with Cats Protection, aims to return all cats other than those classed by the vet as unhealthy. The conservation breeding programme license allows for wildcats that are not selected for breeding to be released unneutered, but some may not be where there are health or welfare issues or where the landowner would not want 'known hybrids' back.

The different approaches under different parts of the action plan are quite nuanced and need to be well explained as may affect the support in priority areas for the TNR programme and the wider responsible domestic cat ownership campaign.

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

All asked to be briefed on the agreed approach.

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

1. Project update – Roo Campbell

Roo provided an update on team induction and training.

Work is underway to put the necessary arrangements in place in the priority areas to allow work to start. This includes access arrangements with landowners, establishing contacts with vets and CP branches developing procedures for volunteers. CP are developing an electronic system for recording neutering, which should be helpful for the project accessing their data.

SNH had commissioned a simulation study of camera trapping survey designs to inform the likely power of detecting population change – adjusting the numbers of cameras, camera spacing and survey duration. This had highlighted the challenge of having sufficient power to detect even a 25% population change with 120 cameras per priority area and 80 day surveys. This level of effort will be challenging to deliver; relying on staff and volunteer effort. Roo, Keri and Matt have subsequently been reviewing the project's monitoring proposals.

New 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.

Roo and Hebe had visited Glen Isla with FCS staff who are trailing 24 artificial dens, this work will eventually input to the action on land management guidance.

It was discussed that it would be helpful to have FCS attend meetings as lead partner on several actions in the action plan and as the major landowner in three of the priority areas.

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

2. Project Comms update – Vicky Macdonald

The Scottish Wildcat Action web site is under development. It is being geared towards a non-expert audience. The web site is seeking to have engaging material with a view to people seeking some deeper insight and getting involved. At the time it was planned to go live on 17th June, but has since been put back to mid-August so some proactive publicity can be planned.

The logo has been agreed, with the Highland Tiger brand mark, but updated colours and the Scottish Wildcat Action branding.

A schedule of blogs is planned with staff and partners contributing. Reciprocal arrangement for sharing content with partner organisations is also planned by sharing of upcoming items.

The Communications Task Group is continuing to meet to help advice on comms approaches.

The HLF focused Communications Plan is to be refreshed to encompass the other elements of the action plan.

A sharepoint site (Office 365) has been developed to allow sharing of logos, images and media content. Some brand guidelines and privileges will be set up so partners can communications staff access.

Hugh Dignon raised that there could be an opportunity to invite the Minister to a visit e.g. involving land owners or volunteers as part of her summer tour.

New AP 8 RC to provide Hugh Dignon with some options for a Ministerial visit to the project.

Hugh asked Vicky to include SG media team in project social media.

Summary of outstanding actions

From 6th November 2014

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From 18th March 2015

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From 14th May 2015

New AP 1 AP Vicky to help craft communications on how we use these tools to identify wildcats in different situations.

New AP 3 JB to issue a final call for interest in the Forum.

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

New AP 5 RC, AM and SR to explore if cats not selected for conservation breeding could be neutered by the priority areas team and returned (where the landowner was willing to have the cats back).

New 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.

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

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