

Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Plan Partnership – Steering Group

10th March 2016, SNH Battleby

Approved minutes

Present: Eileen Stuart (chair) – Scottish Natural Heritage
Anna Meredith – Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies
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
Pete Haskell – Scottish Wildlife Trust
Jenny Bryce – Scottish Natural Heritage
Roo Campbell – Scottish Wildcat Action
Vicky MacDonald – Scottish Wildcat Action
Keri Langridge – Scottish Wildcat Action

Apologies: Kenny Kortland – Forestry Commission Scotland

1. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

ES recognised the continued activity of the action plan in recent months with surveys ongoing and good media coverage.

Minutes of Steering Group meetings have yet to be posted on the SWA website, pending a suitable location being identified. It was agreed they should go on the resources page at present so that they are available.

From 10th December 2015

AP 1 ES to coordinate a message of support for the team recognising the challenges and the significant progress made. **Discharged.**

AP 2 Steering Group to revisit our statement on relations with Wildcat Haven clarifying the licensing situation and recognising the ongoing difficulties in operating against a backdrop of criticism of the partnership. JB to circulate a draft. **Discharged.** Statement is now available on the Resources page of the SWA website.

AM updated the group that the personal licence of the vet working for Wildcat Haven to work under her HO project license to work on wildcats has been revoked as they are only working on owned cats (covered by the Veterinary Surgeons Act s rather than HO) and she has no clear line of responsibility over the work of Wildcat Haven.

It was clarified that under licences currently held by Wildcat Haven, their work should be limited to working with owned pet cats.

ES raised that SNH, RZSS and Wildcat Haven and their legal representatives are due to meet on 16th March. SNH have responded to FOI requests from Wildcat Haven and from a journalist regarding correspondence with Wildcat Haven. SG members expressed interest in knowing more about the scope of the WH work, progress with their genetics work and their willingness for the respective projects to work together.

AP 3 VM to be asked to review terminology for wildcats and hybrids in project comms. **Discharged.**

AP 4 AM to forward the note of the meeting to JB and JB to produce updated Q&A briefing on this topic reflecting these discussions. **Discharged.**

An updated Q&A had been circulated. It was agreed that the proposed changes be accepted and the document circulated as a working document (with date and version referenced) to be used by the partners in guiding responses to enquiries.

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.**

AP 6 JB to reconvene Fundraising Task Group in January. **Discharged.** JB had met on a 1:1 with a number of the partners funding teams (NTS, SWT, RZSS). A summary note was tabled highlighting the best prospects identified; LEADER, corporate sponsorship and Robertson's Trust. Other options were highlighted. Help from partners is requested to progress these applications. It was noted that there needs to be a relationship with funders and hence the same partners would need to be involved in managing and reporting on any awards.

New AP 1 WBW to explore if there is any capacity in CNPA to assist a LEADER application.

RZSS have asked the Steering Group for clarification of arrangements for SWA donations that they manage. The following was agreed.

1. Within the SWA Fund - restricted codes have been set up for the priority areas (HLF) project and for conservation breeding. Hence donors can be specific about what they want to fund. Unspecified donations will be split 50:50 between these projects and allocated bi-annually.

2. Funds raised by donations at HWP will go into the restricted conservation breeding code.

3. Funds raised by the RZSS 'adopt a wildcat scheme' will go into the restricted conservation breeding code.

LM suggested that a facility be provided to collect monthly donations.

New AP 2 SR offered to look into setting up monthly donations to SWA.

The option of recruiting a fundraiser was again discussed, but it is currently unclear how this could be facilitated within the partnership.

It was proposed that fundraising be a substantive item for discussion at the next meeting.

AP 7 JB to seek approval for changes to the original proposal and budget from HLF. **Discharged.**

AP 8 LM to circulate a list of NTS properties to be surveyed for wildcats. **Discharged.** Subsequently provided as;

- Inverewe & Corrieshalloch Gorge
- Torridon
- Balmacara (nr Plockton)
- Crarae (nr Inveraray)
- Ben Lawers
- Linn of Tummel (nr Pitlochry)
- Aberdeenshire properties

AP 9 LM to clarify with VM NTS time available to help with video editing. **Discharged.** VM and LM to follow-up practical details.

From 17th 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. **Carried forward.** AM sought to clarify the audience for this paper. It was proposed that the paper should be a position statement that could be used for briefing in a variety of ways. AM to circulate a draft to be discussed at the next meeting.

AP 7 JB to contact action leads individually and seek to develop some key performance measures, milestones and costs. **On agenda.** Updated reporting spreadsheet circulated.

AP 8 All to provide comments of the draft Q&A responses and any missing questions by 27th August. **Discharged.**

SWA Project Steering Group

2. Priority areas project update – RC

Keri Langridge has been appointed as the project officer covering Morvern (in addition to Strathpeffer) and with a lead on the projects monitoring programme. Hence Keri is now full time.

During December and January, over 300 cameras were placed out by staff and volunteers across five of the priority areas (no monitoring is taking place this winter in Morvern due to changes in staffing). Most cameras will have completed their allotted 60 day survey period by the end of March.

This huge effort required the input of around 130 short-term volunteers (each looking after 1-4 cameras) and five long-term volunteers who managed tens of cameras each. These long-term volunteers were Kirstin Mair (Angus Glens), Jen Clarke (Northern Strathspey), Laura Braunholtz (Strathavon), James Walker (Strathbogie) and Claire Hill (Strathpeffer). Our thanks go out to all volunteers and especially these five. See item 3 for monitoring results update. The scale of the survey conducted this winter (the largest simultaneous survey ever conducted on wildcat) has been a huge undertaking; landowner permissions, volunteer recruitment, volunteer training, equipment and bait deployment to volunteers, on-going volunteer management, data management and equipment returns. Lessons learned for conducting future surveys will be reviewed.

Prey surveys

We have agreed to conduct small-mammal monitoring using adapted trail-camera in late summer. For assessing rabbit populations, we have opted to make use of the existing winter camera survey data by assessing the presence or absence of rabbit caught on each camera used in the survey.

Assessment of the genetic status of wild-living cats with in Priority Areas

We continue to collect samples from road casualties which are passed to NMS. The salmon oil used in the intensive survey hasn't proved particularly effective at attracting cats to hair lure posts, but some success has been had in placing hair posts near meat bait. These hair samples will be collated at the end of the survey and sent to WildGenes for analysis. As data comes in, we will provide a summary of these results.

Trap Neuter Vaccinate and Release (TNVR) programme and domestic cat neutering

Emma Rawling has created vet kits containing sample vials and snap tests, ready to be delivered to local veterinary practices. A small trial of TNR has been conducted with a view to testing methods. The rollout of TNVR in priority areas will start following the survey results from May onwards, gradually training up TNVR volunteer teams. In the first instance, we will aim to form these teams from existing volunteers, with a view to supplementing them with targeted recruitment of new volunteers.

Alongside this, Vicky Macdonald is currently working on local responsible cat ownership campaigns that we will run over this summer. We hope to create a synergy between our activities in the

neutering of feral cats and encouraging others to neuter their own cats; report intact un-owned cats to the project and Cats Protection; and informing cat owners that we are live-trapping in their area.

Budget

We are currently updating our forecast spend to the end of the financial year, but it is unlikely to change significantly from that reported at the previous meeting (£323,577 of which £316,253 is within the 2015-2016 financial year). Over December and January, we received a total of £979.53 in donations through the website.

Communication Summary

Partners and funders have again helped to facilitated communications for Scottish Wildcat Action with further articles pending. We have also had help with communications from other supporters including Angus Glens Moorland Group and Scottish Agricultural College.

Table 1 lists numbers of users on the various communication platforms over February

Table 1: (figures in brackets are from the previous quarter, September – November 2015).

FEB	Website	Facebook	Twitter	Enews	Youtube	SEO
Users	7039 (2500)	6691 (6444)	1556 (908)	722 (276)	7 (2)	5 (10)

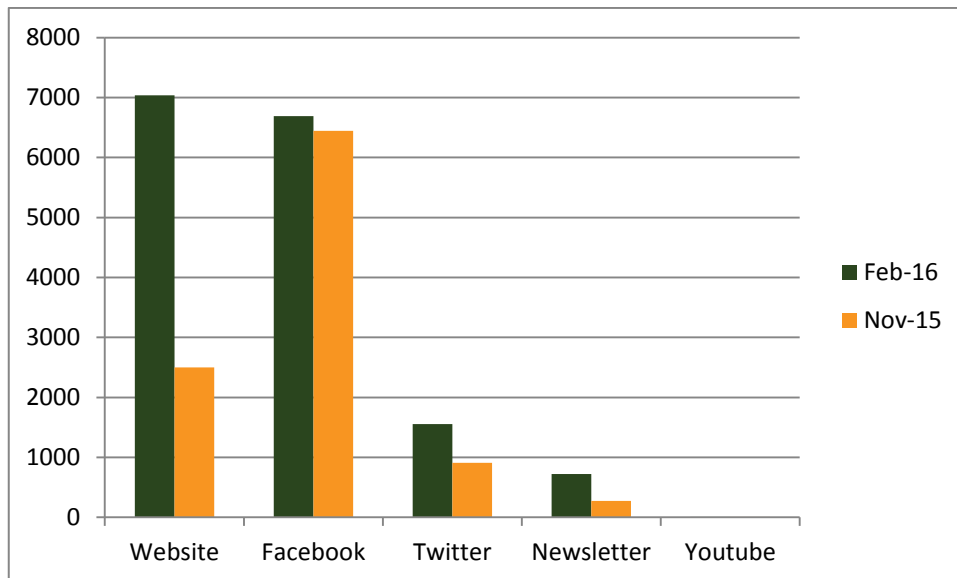


Figure 1: Users on the various communication platforms over February compared with last November

We have seen a significant increase in the number of visitors to our website. We have also seen an increase in Twitter followers, though Facebook continues to be the main channel for social media communication. This is proving really important for volunteer peer support. We have also tripled the number of sign-ups to our eNewsletter. As yet we have not been active on YouTube.

Social media and referrals from other websites continue to be important ways for people to find our website. However, it’s fantastic that more people are finding us through organic search as this demonstrates our Google rankings are improving and we are targeting our keywords more effectively. Paid advertising has also made an impact. Volunteer Declan Duffy, is focusing on improving our SEO and bounce rate for the website, with help from NTS and Project Scotland,

Reflecting the focus of our activity on the ground, many of our social media post have been about the survey and showing off some of the cats captured on camera. These photos are proving very popular with our followers.

Press and media

There has been a lot of positive activity in the press around our survey work (Table 2). BBC Winterwatch featured the wider work of the project (the conservation breeding and genetics) over several episodes. While it was great to highlight the conservation breeding as an essential part of our approach, it may have given the impression that this is the only ongoing work – we hope to redress this with future coverage of the in situ work. Another article, written by Louise Ramsay and quoting one of our own volunteers and supporters, Alan Ross, published in the Ecologist urged the project to be more ambitious and expand the size of the priority areas – this point was previously discussed at the Forum last year highlighting the intention of encouraging work more widely, but ensuring effort is not spread too thinly to be effective.

Sightings records

Development of the sightings app for smart phones is underway. This is an update of the Mammal Tracker app used by the Mammals Society. The app links to iRecord. The app is due to go live in April. Alongside this, we will update the sightings web page so that it holds a dedicated wildcat sightings frame via iRecord. Records will periodically be added to the NBN database. Project staff will be set up as verifiers on iRecord by the Mammal Society.

Table 2: press and other media items this quarter

Story	Date	Published by
Saving Scotland's 'Highland Tiger'. Calls for more ambition in our approach.	19 December 2015	The Ecologist
Winterwatch wildcat conservation breeding	26 January 2016	Several episodes of BBC Winterwatch
Blog about wildcat conservation (mostly WH but also SWA)	12 January 2016	The Dodo
Scots wildcat to be studied by 300 live cameras	22 January 2016	Scotsman
Winterwatch wildcat conservation breeding	26 January 2016	Several episodes of BBC Winterwatch
Possible wildcat near Dingwall	27 January 2016	BBC News,
Largest ever survey of Scottish wildcat begins	27 January 2016	Scotsman, P&J, BBC Radio Scotland Drive-Time
Lindsay Mackinlay: Why we're wild about the Scottish wildcat	28 January 2016	Scotsman
Interview with Emma Rawling and the Moray watch SWT group	30 January 2016	Out for the weekend (BBC TV) and Out of Doors (BBC Radio Scotland)
Wildcat caught on camera in the Angus Glens	05 February 2016	BBC News, STV online, Montrose Review, Forfar Dispatch, Arbroath Herald, Brechin Advertiser, Kincardineshire Advertiser, Kirremuir Herald, Means Leader, Ellon Times.
Wildcat caught on camera in the Angus Glens - Interview with Hebe Carus	06 February 2016	Wave FM radio

Looking forward

- As mentioned earlier, the scale of the work undertaken so far has led to workload pressures for staff. In particular, the survey has taken a considerable amount of staff time. While surveys are essential to the project in informing on what and where we need to target activity and the impacts our actions are having, this has held back progress on some other areas of work and we

need to resolve this for the future. For example in the future we might consider reducing the coverage of the formal 60 day camera surveys and complementing them with a rolling programme of rapid assessment in other areas. Adjusting the survey timing to facilitate a period of TNVR at the end of the survey season.

- The team have suggested the balance of effort in different priority areas may over time need to be adjusted to reflect the degree of threats faced; the PA extent and the viability of wildcat populations as established by surveys.
- Volunteers have been invaluable to the project, but there may be efficiencies and lessons to learn to help improve the experience for all.

At the previous meeting, the Steering group discussed the idea of a review meeting involving staff and the steering group. It was agreed this would be a good way to reflect on the experience of the first year and where adjustments may need to be made. It was proposed that this should include both SWA projects and hence involve RZSS project staff.

New AP 3 LM, SR and RC to lead in developing a projects review meeting in May.

3. Monitoring update – Roo Campbell, Keri Langridge

The next stage is to collate all the data from the cameras. Step one of this is to identify individual cats, some of which may have visited more than one camera location. Identification may, in some cases, involve verification by two people. Once we have a catalogue of cats these will be scored based on pelage characteristics by two members of the team. A subset will be sent to Andrew Kitchener, NMS for quality control checks. Hence we may not have the full results from the survey until late April. Only at that stage can we begin analysis of the complete dataset. We therefore estimate that population estimates won't be available until the summer. Nevertheless, early indications are that Strathbogie and the Angus Glens have several wildcat detected within the survey, Strathpeffer some wildcat and the fewest in Strathavon and Northern Strathspey. In no areas are we detecting large numbers of wildcat above our 17 point pelage threshold, but it is important to highlight that surveys will not capture every individual within the priority area. We should therefore wait for analysis of the full data, along with estimates of detection probability, before we assess likely wildcat population figures.

Keri asked the SG for thoughts on how the survey results should be reported. GM suggested low numbers in some places may stimulate additional reporting. There was some discussion of the potential for reviewing the priority area boundaries to focus on the areas with the most/ 'best' wildcats, however, some areas currently with few wildcats may comprise good locations for potential supplementation and hence all options should be considered when the full results are available.

Keri also highlighted the number of road casualties in the Strathpeffer area since the project started and that this may be impacting on the local population. Information is being gathered to help inform follow up actions. Others agreed it was important to capture information on sources of mortality.

4. Responsible domestic cat ownership campaign – VM.

VM tabled a summary of the plans for the responsible domestic cat ownership campaign. The aim being to better protect wildcats from the key threats of hybridisation and disease by encouraging pet cat owners to neuter, vaccinate and micro-chip their cats.

The plans are split into local campaigns – focused on the priority areas this summer, building up a toolkit for a national campaign early in 2017.

The campaign specific budget is pretty modest, hence promotional materials will need to be targeted to maximise the impact and make use of local newsletters and other local media.

There will be a focus on hard to reach audiences – AM highlighted a recent PDSA report that cites neutering rates of pet cats at 94%. Methods of evaluating the success of the campaign were discussed and will include data on neutering, but would be greatly assisted by the proposal for a Masters project seeking public views on awareness and uptake of responsible cat ownership.

The overlap with educational aspects of the project was recognised.

New AP 4 all to provide Vicky with any comments on the outline for the campaign asap.

SWCAP Steering group

5. Action plan progress and reporting – all action leads.

JB had circulated an updated action plan reporting spreadsheet. A Q4 update, some budget details and milestones had been added in discussion with lead partners. However, some actions still need timescales to be clarified, budgets and SMART targets outlined. The reporting spreadsheet remains the working document for recording progress against the action plan.

A copy will be held in sharepoint, which partners can access and update, but a copy will also be circulated for those unable to access this. The steering Group should consider it at least bi-annually.

JB drew attention to the land management actions and that while a start has been made on much of this work, the main focus in the first year had been on survey and establishing protocols. Hence this work programme will start to build momentum in the coming year. Many of the actions depend on engaging with land managers, farmers, gamekeepers, crofters and foresters. The plan is to integrate with existing and planned opportunities to reach these audiences through their membership organisations. Hence the timescales would need to be responsive rather than prescriptive. Hebe Carus is leading on this area of work.

JB highlighted the desire to collate wildcat surveys that are taking pace outwith the priority areas, for example by partner organisations, NTS, FES, LLTNPA to add to the national picture of population status, as per Action Plan action 3.7 . The SWA project team have been making available the survey methodology to other groups. This would be further promoted at the Scottish Wildcat Forum.

New AP 5 The collation of wildcat survey details and results outwith priority areas to be encouraged via the Scottish Wildcat Forum.

SR provided an update on the conservation breeding programme. Of 66 captive cats tested across UK collections, so far 50 have met the threshold for breeding and 6 are borderline. RZSS are also looking at relatedness in the studbook. A frozen arc is also being considered. Further analysis of wildcats of known pelage and genetic scores has been carried out with very good correspondence.

RZSS are in contact with EAZA (European Association of Zoos and Aquaria) felid taxon advisory group and with the IUCN Cat specialist Group; keeping them informed of the work and seeking endorsement.

So far 6 estates have expressed an interest in having off-show enclosures for breeding wildcats for release and 13 estates in being involved as potential release sites.

AM updated that a batch of 28 cats sent to NMS are awaiting post mortem so further disease and pelage assessment and tissue samples will be sent for genetic testing.

AK outlined that a large application to NERC is underway looking at some of the research questions yet to be addressed in the action plan (3.3, 3.4). This would involve post doc and PhD studentships and if successful would start in April 2017 for 4 years.

AK is also working with Exeter University on wildcat diet analysis from wildcat whiskers.

6. Plans for Scottish Wildcat Action Forum.

September was proposed for the annual stakeholder Forum to allow reflection on the full range of project actions including TNVR.

We discussed inviting volunteers in addition to partners and existing stakeholder, hence the venue would need to have a larger capacity. A few suggestions were made including incorporating a social event such as a BBQ as a thank you to volunteers.

New 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.

7. DONM – June 2016

JB to send a doodle poll.

Forward Plan for June agenda

1. SWA Fundraising
2. Enhancing powers for responsible domestic cat ownership – AM paper

Summary of outstanding actions

From 17th August 2015

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