



## Scottish Wildcat Action - Statement on TNVR and wildcat – 19<sup>th</sup> August 2016

Scottish Wildcat Action is embarking on the Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate and Return (TNVR) of feral cats and those cats that show few wildcat characteristics in its Wildcat Priority Areas<sup>1</sup>. This work aims to halt the threat of continuing hybridisation with wildcat and transmission of diseases. We spent our first field season finding out about the wildcats and feral cats in our Priority Areas in order to better target conservation activities<sup>2</sup>. TNVR is our logical next step as we embark on the second field season since the project began. We are delighted that the project is at the stage where we can conduct activities on the ground that will contribute directly to saving the Scottish wildcat.

Because cats that live in the same areas present the greatest risk to Scottish wildcat in terms of interbreeding and disease transmission, we are actively working in and around areas that also contain wildcats.

Wildcat kittens are usually born March – May, are most vulnerable in their first three months and reach independence Aug – Oct<sup>3</sup>. For this reason, we did not conduct any TNVR activity over the spring and early summer. Our peak TNVR season will be late autumn and winter but the build-up to this begins now.

We have done extensive work to ensure that wildcats are not accidentally caught during this process of TNVR. We initially target locations based on the result of the hugely intensive trail-camera survey conducted over the previous winter. We are following this up with recent trail-camera surveys to identify any changes in cat activity since then. Cage traps used for TNVR are initially set locked-open with bait (pre-bait) and monitored with trail-cameras. Trail-cameras are also maintained on any traps set to catch. At this time of year, if a wildcat or a wildcat kitten were to be detected during these various stages, we would stop using cage traps at that location. In the extremely unlikely event that a female wildcat with dependent young ends up in a TNVR trap, it will be released as quickly as possible. As part of our ongoing strategy to improve project implementation and maximise animal welfare, we are actively investigating remote monitoring system to enable us to react more quickly to cats in traps.

All staff and volunteers undergo rigorous training and supervised practical work before they are allowed to conduct TNVR activities and two of our staff members had extensive experience of TNVR prior to joining us.

Scottish Wildcat Action contains within its broad partnership of over 20 organisations and within its staff an extensive body of experience in animal welfare, feral cats and wildcat. We have drawn on this experience in designing the TNVR programme. We welcome scrutiny of our activity and our project operates under the highest welfare standards. For example, we operate a standard trap-check interval that is twice as frequent as the legal requirement. We have asked previously that Wildcat Haven share their methodologies with us but this information has not been forthcoming. We are therefore unable to comment on the welfare standards employed by Wildcat Haven.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scottishwildcataction.org/latest-news/2016/august/news-scottish-wildcats-next-phase-of-official-action-plan-to-tackle-threats/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scottishwildcataction.org/latest-news/2016/august/news-scottish-wildcats-are-out-there/>

<sup>3</sup> Kilshaw, K. 2011. Scottish wildcats: Naturally Scottish. Scottish Natural Heritage. 47 pages. <http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/naturallyscottish/wildcats.pdf>