



Guidance for Wildcat Friendly Predator Control

Introduction

The wildcat, *Felis silvestris*, is the UK's last remaining native felid species and it is in danger of genetic extinction. Historic hunting, habitat change and changes to prey availability have reduced wildcat numbers to a critical level, which now means that hybridisation (cross-breeding with feral cats) is threatening the species further. While Scottish Wildcat Action (SWA) have been working hard in [five priority areas](#) to remove the threat from hybridisation, this work will be to no avail unless other threats to the wildcat are also reduced across Scotland.

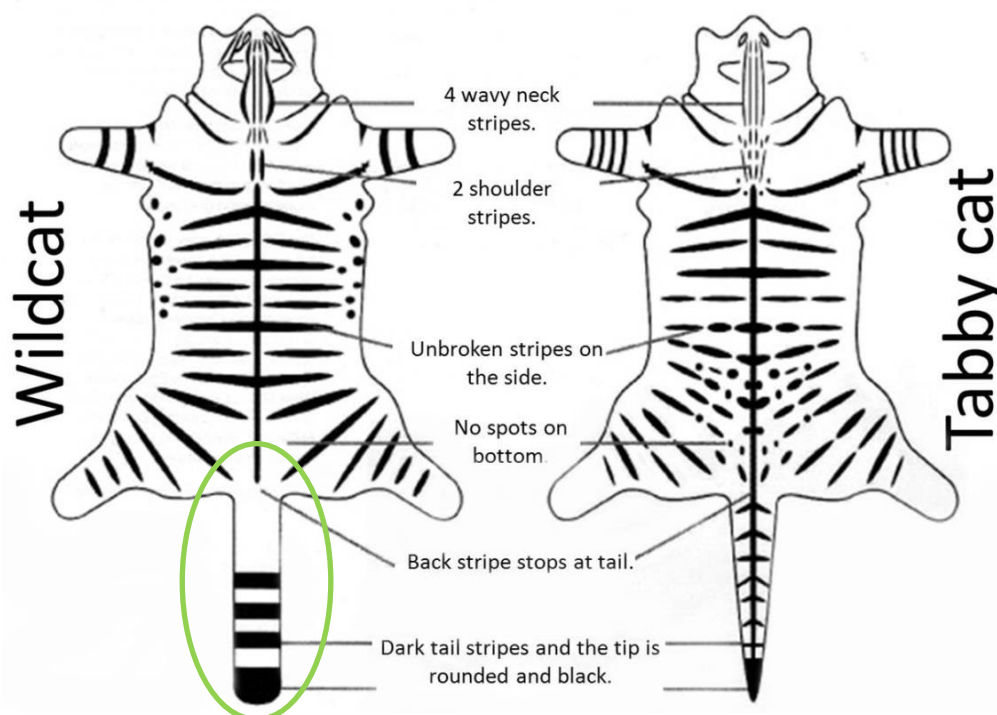
Land managers north of the Highland Boundary Fault and particularly in the five priority areas play a key role alongside others in the future conservation of the wildcat, in particular by controlling feral cats. Lethal control of feral cats is a legitimate and legal activity, but there is a risk of injury or killing wildcats and therefore breaking the law.

Identifying wildcats in the field is difficult – they are superficially similar in appearance to domestic tabby cats and hybrid cats. However, there are several important characteristics that can be used to identify wildcats at close quarters.

Wildcat Field Identification

If a cat has all of the following, assume it is a wildcat:

1. Tabby markings
2. Thick, ringed, blunt tail
3. No stripe down tail
4. No white feet



A key threat to wildcats is that they can accidentally be killed during legal control of feral cats and foxes by lamping, shooting and snaring.

In addition to abiding by the current Code of Practice for [Night shooting](#) and [trapping and snaring](#), when any cats are caught and found to match the Field Identification of a wildcat, these cats must be released unharmed.

Wildcat Friendly Predator Control

The following protocol has been developed by the Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Plan partnership and is in addition to the existing legal requirements. By adhering to the protocol, land managers will play a significant role in protecting and conserving the wildcat in Scotland.

Steps to take:

- Before undertaking predator control, use local knowledge and results from baited camera trapping to indicate whether an area is within a wildcat range and to inform your choice of methods. SWA recommends cameras should be checked once a week over a period of one month prior to predator control operations. SWA staff can help assess camera images of potential wildcats. Thermal imagers are not able to distinguish between wildcats, hybrids or ferals, but are useful to help survey for wild-living cats and in establishing suitable camera trap locations.
- If a wildcat is detected on the same camera as a feral cat, avoid setting traps between mid-March and the end of August when there is a risk to kittens.
- In any area where there may be known or suspected wildcat populations, cage trapping should be used to control feral cats rather than shooting or snaring.
- Traps should ideally be covered and be checked at least every 12 hours (i.e. twice daily), where there is a chance of a wildcat being caught.
- As a precautionary principle, if you are in any doubt as to whether the cat you have caught is a wildcat, let it go.

How you can help us

- Take photos of any trapped cats (wildcats, hybrids or feral cats) as a record of their trapping and of their pelage markings. These should show side and top views, including tail and head. These can be sent to landmanagement@scottishwildcataction.org
- Record all new wildcat sightings on the [reporting page](#) of the Scottish Wildcat Action website.
- Send hairs (complete with follicles) or tissues (blood or scat) found in a trap from any trapped wildcats or hybrids similar to wildcats for genetic testing to: Scottish Wildcat Action, Scottish Natural Heritage, Great Glen House, Inverness, IV3 8NW. Hairs samples should be in a labeled envelope and tissue in a sealed container or bag (also labeled), with date, name and grid reference.

How we can help you

- We are able to loan a limited number of trail cameras to land managers in our priority areas, please contact us at: landmanagement@scottishwildcataction.org
- SRDP funding is also available to help purchase trail cameras and cage traps under the [Wildcat Friendly Predator Control option](#). Contact us as landmanagement@scottishwildcataction.org

Further Information

- Scottish Wildcat Action website: www.scottishwildcataction.org
- BASC Codes of Practice: <https://basc.org.uk/cop/> and Practitioners Guide to snaring in Scotland: <https://basc.org.uk/basc-scotland/snaring-in-scotland-what-you-need-to-know/>