

Scottish Wildcat

DESCRIPTION

The Scottish wildcat (*Felis silvestris*) is the only native member of the cat family to be found in the wild in the UK.

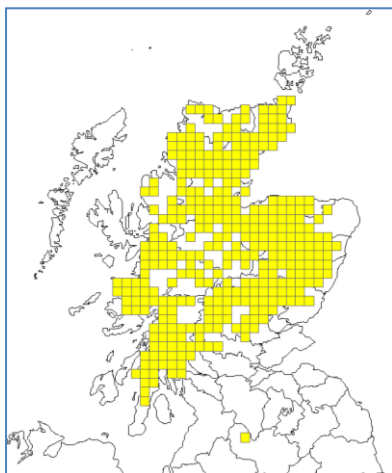
In general, the Scottish wildcat prefers to live in the margins of mountains and moorlands with rough grazing, often combined with forests and some crops. However, research suggests that animals in the east of Scotland prefer marginal agricultural areas with moorlands, pastureland and woodlands, whereas animals in the west favour rough grazing and moorland with limited pastures.

At present, the exact distribution and status of the Scottish wildcat is not clear, due to its elusive nature and the difficulty in separating hybrids from pure wildcats on sight. However, its distribution is approximately north of the Central Belt, with known 'strongholds' in NE Scotland and Ardnamurchan. It has not been recorded south of the Central Belt in recent times and was lost from England and Wales in 1862. Survey work planned in 2013 and 2014 hopes to provide more detail on its distribution in Scotland.

The species is listed on the Scottish Biodiversity List and is also listed on Annex IV of the EC Habitats Directive. It is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended, and is identified as a European Protected Species on the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994, as amended.

THREATS

There are several recognised threats to the Scottish wildcat at present and the Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Group has identified several key areas for work in the coming few years. The key threat is that of hybridisation with feral/domestic cats, which is seen as affecting the genetic integrity of the Scottish wildcat as a species in its own right. Other threats include habitat fragmentation and degradation (including loss of prey, such as rabbits). Disease and predator control and incidental capture are also seen as important threats to its survival.



NBN Gateway
Interactive map of
Wild Cat (*Felis
silvestris*) since 1980
(Accessed
11/01/2013).



Copyright Laurie Campbell (courtesy of NTS Photo)

ACTION REQUIRED

1. Implementation of the forthcoming Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Plan (to be finalised in 2013), currently being produced by the Scottish Wildcat Conservation Group.
2. Support for developing measures to survey the genetic integrity of the Scottish Wildcat and to survey for the species in the field.
3. Increase public awareness amongst cat-owners about the possible effects of hybridisation with domestic/feral cats on the species' conservation.

MSP SPECIES CHAMPION



Rhoda Grant MSP
Member for: Highlands
and Islands
Party: Scottish Labour

FURTHER READING

SNH 5-Year Species Action Framework (2007)