

What is the Lynx to Scotland project?

Lynx to Scotland is a partnership between SCOTLAND: The Big Picture, Trees for Life and the Lifescape Project. Since 2020, we've been assessing whether lynx could return to the Scottish landscape.

Scientific studies show that Scotland has enough habitat and prey to support a healthy population of lynx. But social acceptance is equally important. That's why we've been exploring how people feel about bringing back Scotland's missing lynx.

Identifying key concerns

In 2021, we asked the Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT) to look at the social feasibility of bringing lynx back to Scotland. Following 129 meetings with farmers, gamekeepers, conservationists, rural residents and other stakeholders, they found a variety of views, but a shared appetite to learn more.

This study also highlighted that stakeholders want to know:

- Is there enough habitat and prey for lynx?
- What impacts might lynx have on:
 - livestock
 - protected species such as capercaillie and the Scottish wildcat
 - deer and stalking interests
 - gamebirds
- What social and economic opportunities could a lynx reintroduction bring?



Scan to read the full report

Scotland's National Lynx Discussion

In 2024, we commissioned the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to bring together 53 representatives from a range of national organisations. The resulting meetings formed what became known as the **National Lynx Discussion**.

Using European evidence and local expertise, these stakeholders agreed a set of statements and recommendations on the questions set out by the VWT study. They also considered forestry and lowland deer management.

The resulting statements – shown throughout this exhibition – are not endorsements of a lynx reintroduction. Rather, they highlight areas of agreement on potential impacts and the kinds of management that might be needed if lynx were to return.



Scan to read the full report

Local consultations

Now we want to hear from you – the people living in the regions where lynx could one day be reintroduced. Your views will help shape how a reintroduction might be managed, if it were to go ahead.

Please talk to our staff if you have questions and complete a questionnaire before you leave.



We hope you enjoy the exhibition and take this opportunity to share your views.



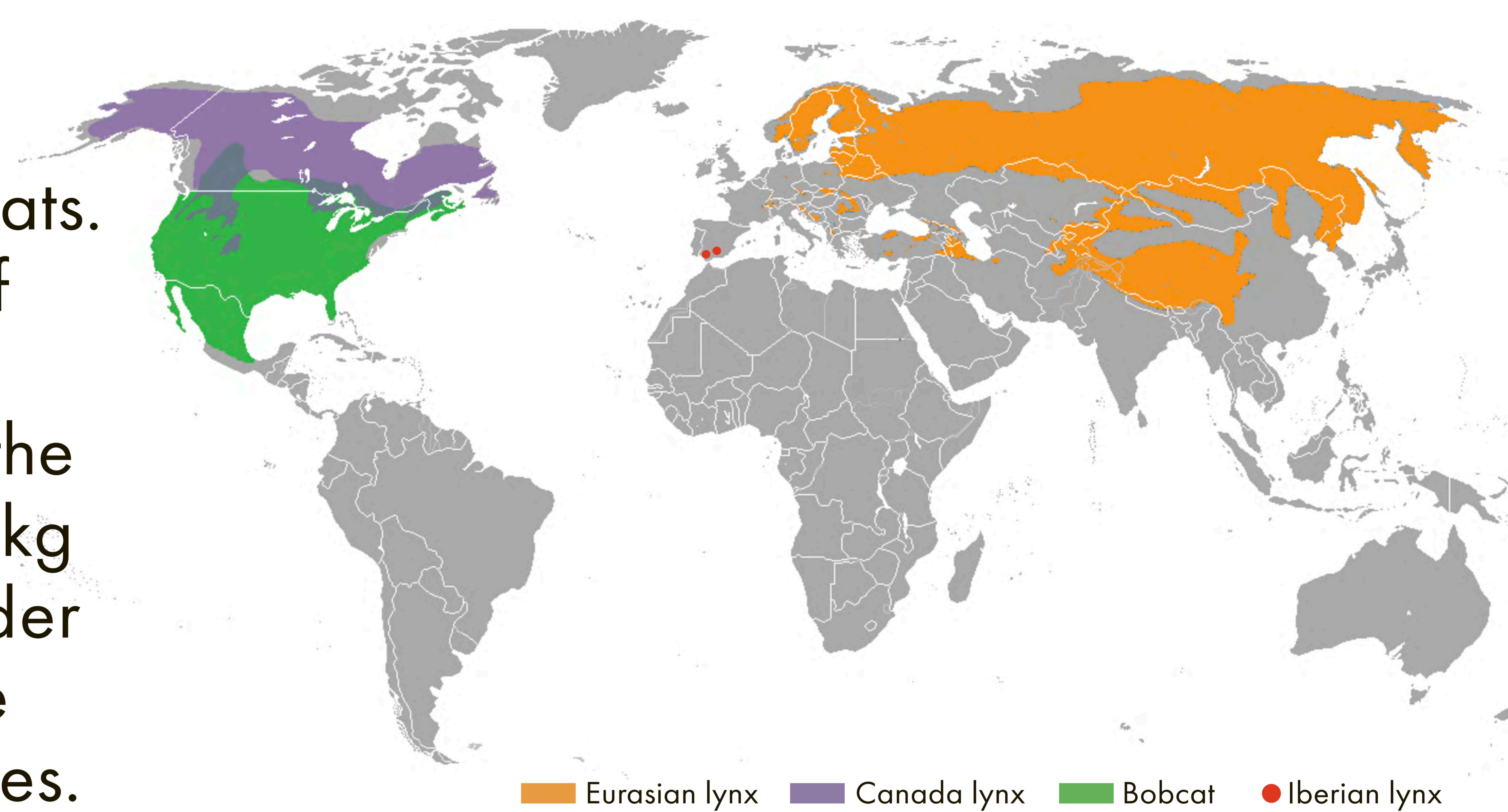
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What do we know about lynx?

Lynx are medium-sized cats. There are four species of lynx around the world, and the Eurasian lynx is the largest, weighing 17-28 kg (about the size of a Border collie). Males tend to be slightly larger than females.



Life and habits

Eurasian lynx keep a low profile, resting in cover during the day to avoid people. Where wild prey is very abundant, lynx densities can reach up to five cats per 100 km² (an area roughly the size of the Isle of Rum), but lower densities are the norm, and lynx are always rarer than smaller carnivores like foxes.

Lynx are woodland creatures, but don't need huge areas of undisturbed forest. Switzerland's largest lynx population is found in the north west Alps with a similar amount of forest to parts of Scotland.

Lynx are generally solitary animals. They mate in the spring and give birth to two or three kittens in mid-May or early June. The kittens spend their first two months in dens before accompanying their mother further afield.

Once independent, lynx may live up to 17 years, although few wild lynx live that long. Most adult lynx deaths in Europe are due to traffic accidents, disease or hunting by humans.

Diet

The Eurasian lynx is an ambush hunter, typically eating one deer per week. They can hunt red, fallow and sika deer, but struggle to tackle red deer stags and show a clear preference for roe deer.

A variety of other animals – including foxes, hares and woodland grouse – also make up a smaller proportion of the lynx's diet.

When did Britain lose its lynx?

The youngest lynx fossils found in Britain include a skull from Sutherland that's been dated to the 3rd century AD, and bones from North Yorkshire, which tell us lynx were present in England as late as the 5th or 6th century AD. But it's possible that some lynx clung on until much later, leaving only intriguing cultural clues, before their final disappearance went unmarked by history.

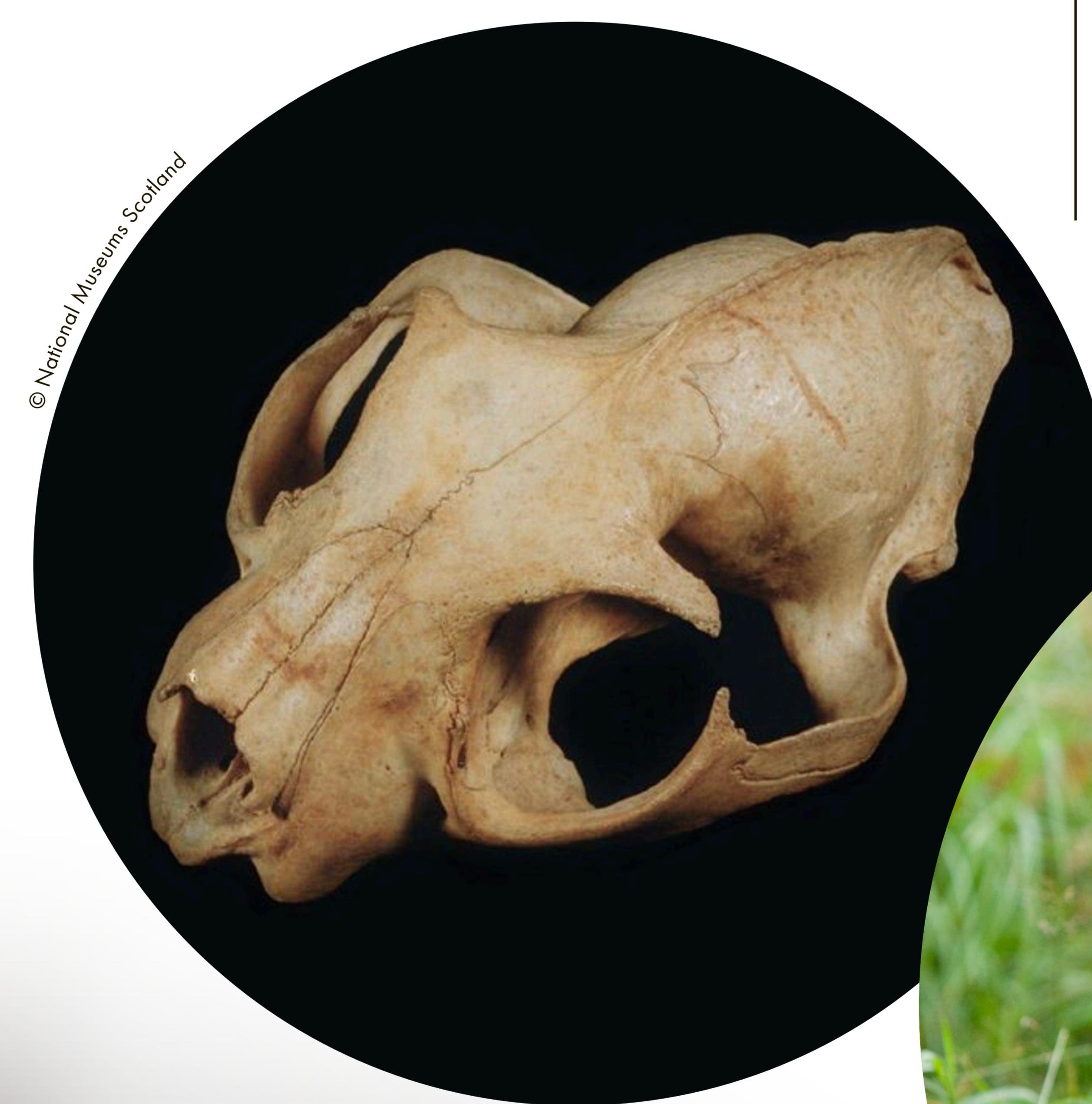
Among these clues, a 9th-century stone carving from the Isle of Eigg shows a large, tufted-eared cat – possibly a lynx – being chased on horseback. An account from Auchencairn in 1760 mentions a yellow-red cat, three times the size of a domestic cat, that some suggest may have been a lynx.

Hunting, widespread deforestation and the decline of wild prey eventually led to the loss of the lynx from Britain. Lynx also disappeared from most of Europe, except for a few strongholds in Scandinavia and the Carpathian mountains of central and eastern Europe.

Comeback cats

Since the early 1970s, lynx have been returning to more and more of Europe, both naturally and with the help of planned reintroductions. Today, there are around 9,000 lynx in Europe and they are found in almost every large European country. But Britain's island status means they will never return to Scotland unless we bring them back.

Scan to learn more about Switzerland's lynx reintroduction.

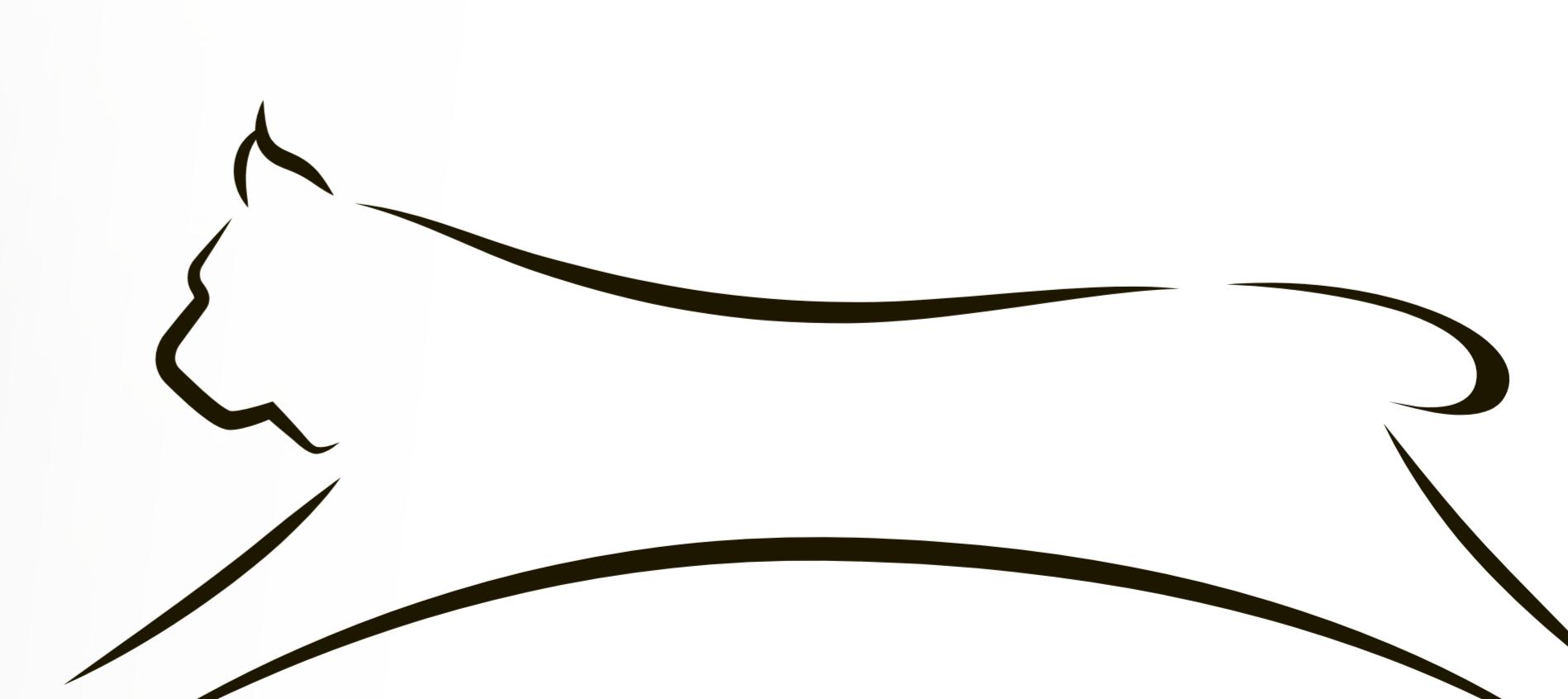


Above: The skull of a male lynx found in a limestone cave in Sutherland in the Scottish Highlands.



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Why reintroduce lynx?

Lynx once lived in Scotland, but human activities drove them to extinction, so a growing number of people feel a duty to restore this missing species.

Scotland has become one of the most wildlife-depleted countries in the world. Reintroducing lynx would support our international commitments to restore nature, and bring a range of benefits.

What are the ecological benefits?

As top predators, lynx influence the behaviour and numbers of their prey, creating healthier, more dynamic ecosystems. Their return could help restore many missing connections in Scotland's tattered food webs.



Could lynx help to control deer?

High deer numbers prevent woodlands from regenerating, stalling progress towards climate and biodiversity goals.

The National Lynx Discussion found that lynx could play a role in reducing deer impacts, but only by complementing – not replacing – human management.

How might lynx affect other wildlife?

To help us understand how lynx might affect wildlife in Scotland, we can look at their impact elsewhere.

In Scandinavia, lynx have reduced fox numbers, allowing a rise in capercaillie, mountain hare and black grouse populations, with similar effects possible in Scotland.

Lynx also increase the supply of large carcasses – currently scarce in Scotland – recycling key nutrients and providing food for many other species.



How would people and communities benefit?

Lynx would make Scotland's landscapes feel wilder, while also attracting visitors and boosting local economies.

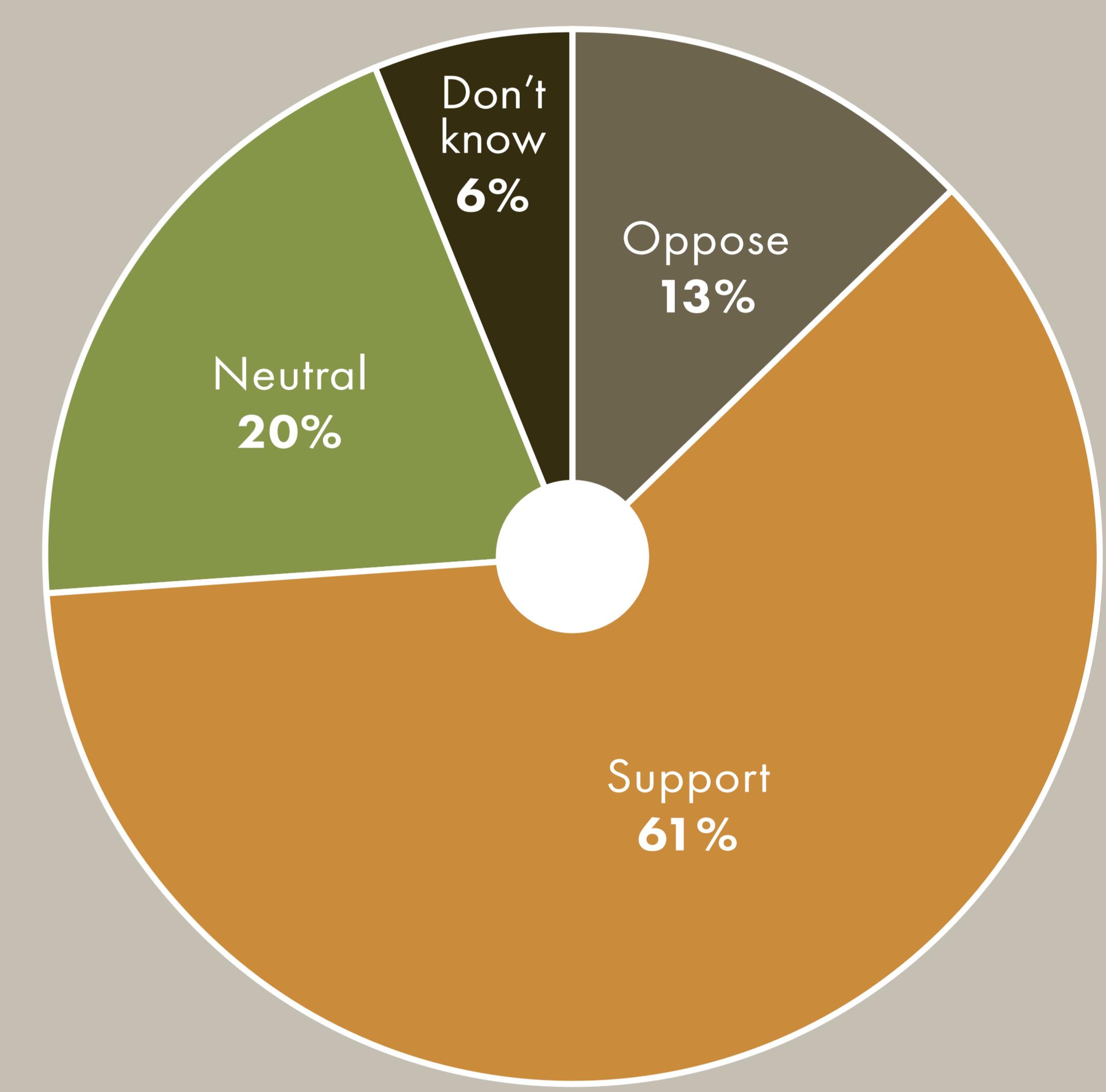
Although lynx are hard to see, this doesn't seem to reduce their appeal – a bit like Nessie, who is estimated to generate over £41 million for Scotland annually. In the area around Germany's Harz National Park, lynx attract between £7.5 and £12.5 million in tourist spending each year.

How do people feel about lynx?

Recent surveys suggest a growing majority of the Scottish public want lynx to be reintroduced.

Elsewhere in Europe, 72% of Norwegians and over 74% of Swiss respondents said they like living with lynx. As one German visitor to Harz said: 'Knowing that these animals are there and may be watching me is a great feeling.'

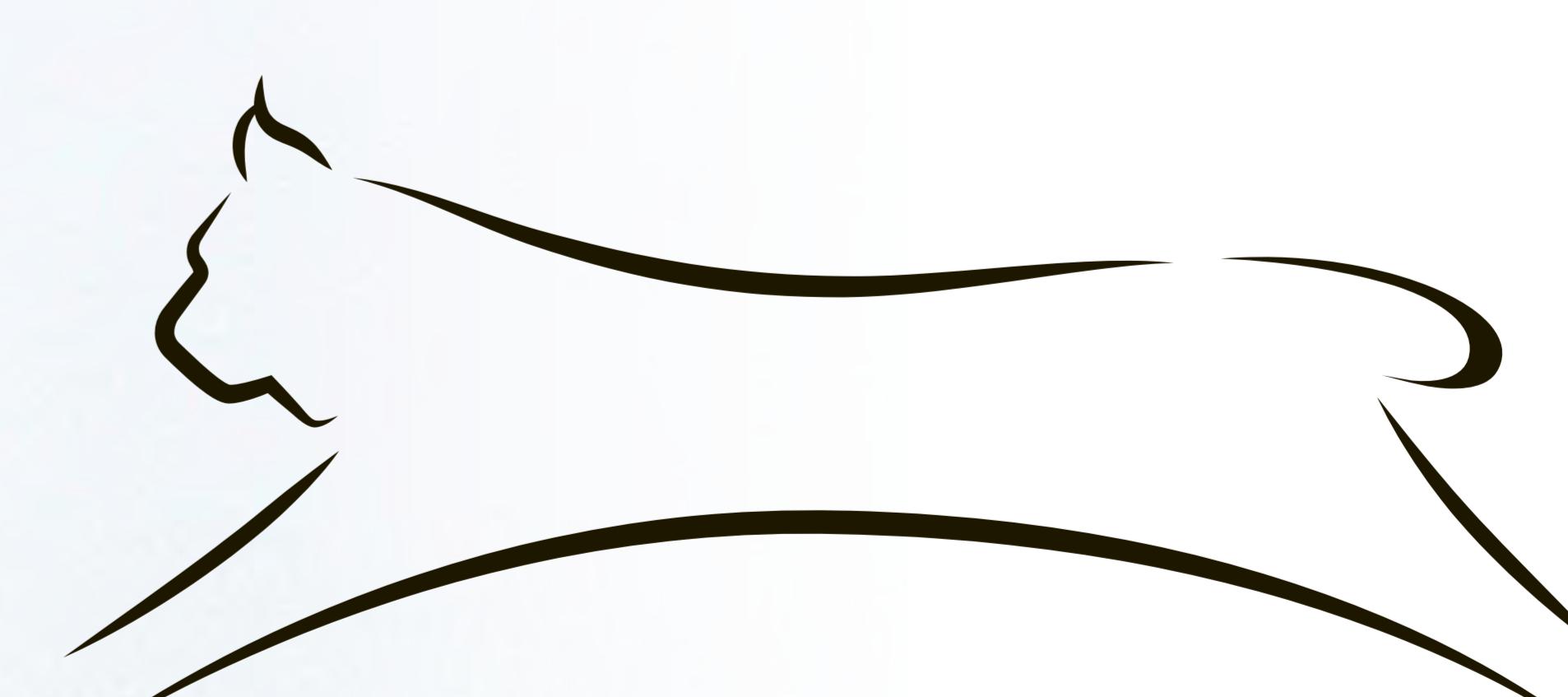
NATIONWIDE SUPPORT FOR SCOTTISH LYNX REINTRODUCTION



An independent survey in 2025 sampled attitudes to lynx reintroduction across Scotland.

“Knowing that these animals are there and may be watching me is a great feeling.”

The National Lynx Discussion concluded that reintroducing lynx could benefit Scotland through ecotourism, sustainable wildlife management, restored natural processes, and the wellbeing gained from wilder landscapes.



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Are there any risks from reintroducing lynx?



Could lynx harm people or their pets?

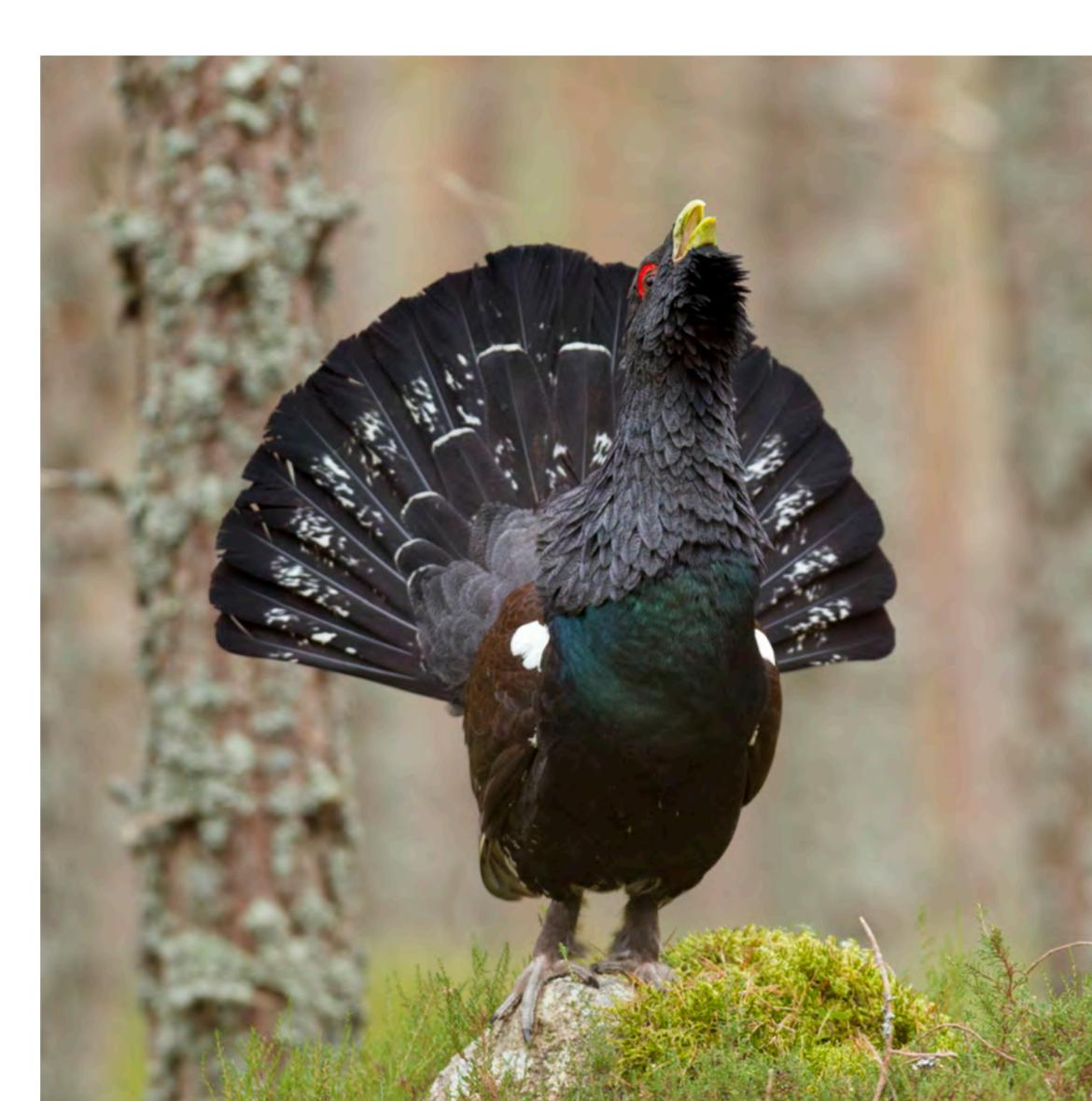
Like foxes, a lynx could kill a domestic cat but, since lynx generally avoid settlements, the risk is very low. Lynx rarely attack dogs, and would usually only do so if they felt threatened. Lynx are not a threat to people.

What are the risks to lynx themselves?

All animals would be health-checked before release and would be released into habitat with enough wild prey. The risks to lynx are therefore minimal.

Are there any threats to native species?

There are no records of Eurasian lynx causing declines in capercaillie or wildcats anywhere. In fact, in parts of Scandinavia, lynx have been credited with increasing numbers of capercaillie, black grouse and mountain hares by preying on foxes that would otherwise hunt them.



Scotland's National Lynx Discussion concluded that there are enough deer across most of Scotland to prevent lynx from needing to hunt smaller prey, and that lynx could potentially benefit threatened species by helping to control fox numbers.

Is there a threat to gamebird shooting?

Red-legged partridges or pheasants could be taken around release pens (where birds are housed before being released for shooting), but lynx would be less likely to cause problems than other native predators, since they would be much rarer.

They are also woodland creatures, and do not hunt on the open hill, so are unlikely to prey on significant numbers of red grouse. Any measures to secure gamebirds against predators like wildcats should also be effective against lynx.

Scotland's National Lynx Discussion concluded that gamebirds are not a significant part of the lynx's diet where deer are available, but that an agreed approach to manage any conflicts would be needed.

How might lynx affect deer stalking?

Lynx are specialist deer hunters, prompting concerns about potential impacts on deer stalking traditions and businesses.

Scotland's National Lynx Discussion concluded that lynx are likely to have minimal impact on traditional red deer stalking. However, because lynx would be a protected species, some deer management within woodlands could face new restrictions, which would need to be carefully managed.

Lynx could also reduce the number of trophy roebucks available, which may affect stalking income. Any such impacts would need careful monitoring.

Would lynx take livestock?

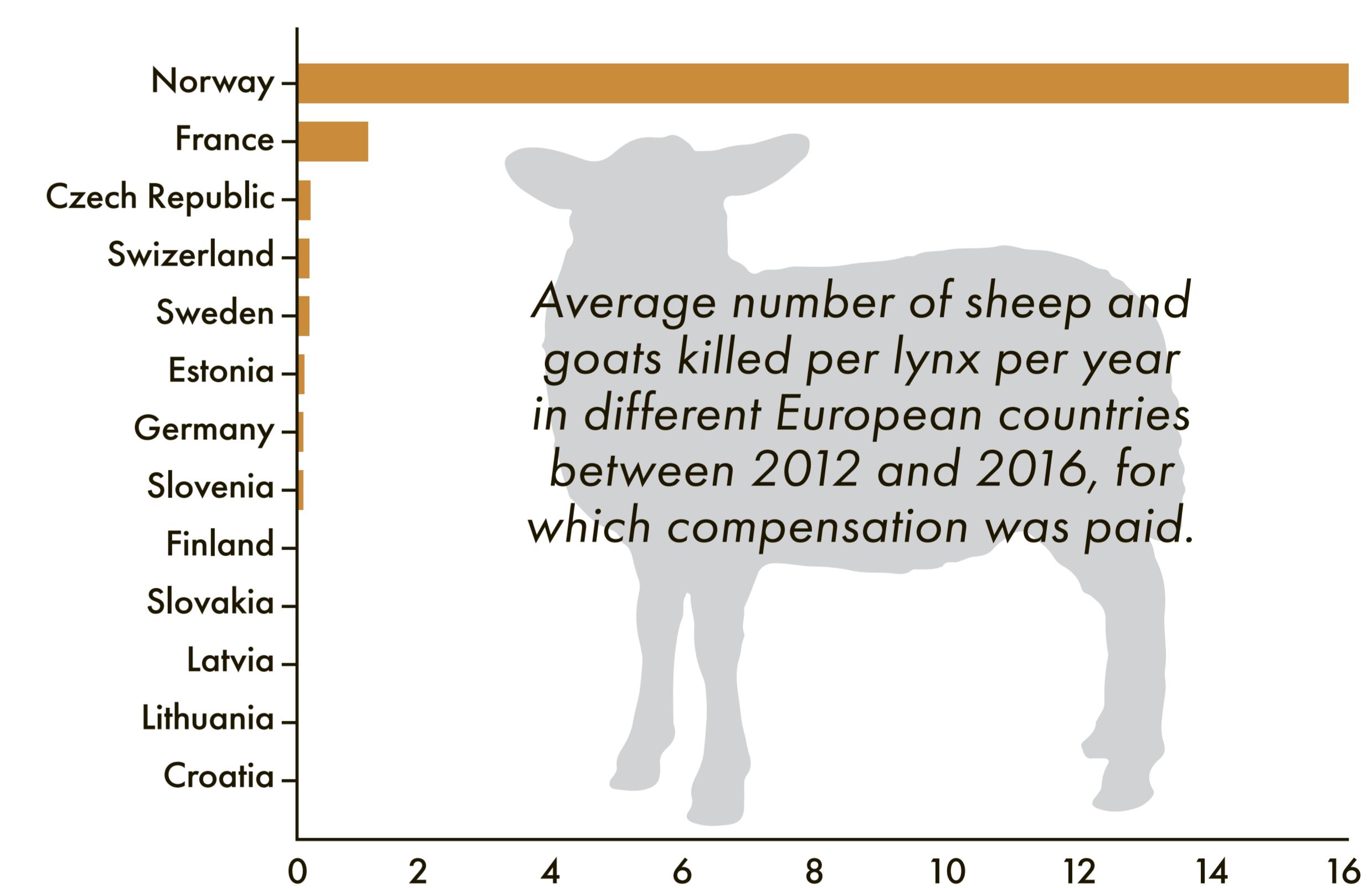
Lynx do kill livestock – most often sheep – but the numbers killed vary greatly between countries.

In most countries, annual sheep losses attributed to lynx are relatively low. Losses in Norway are exceptionally high but these mostly happen when sheep graze in the forest, unprotected. When sheep are fenced into fields or are grazed away from woodland, it's relatively rare for lynx to attack them. Lynx also show a clear preference for hunting deer and sheep predation is even less common where deer are abundant. Scotland supports much higher deer densities than Norway, reducing the risk of attacks on sheep.

Additional information on this topic can be found in the 'Concerns' booklet, available for you to take away.

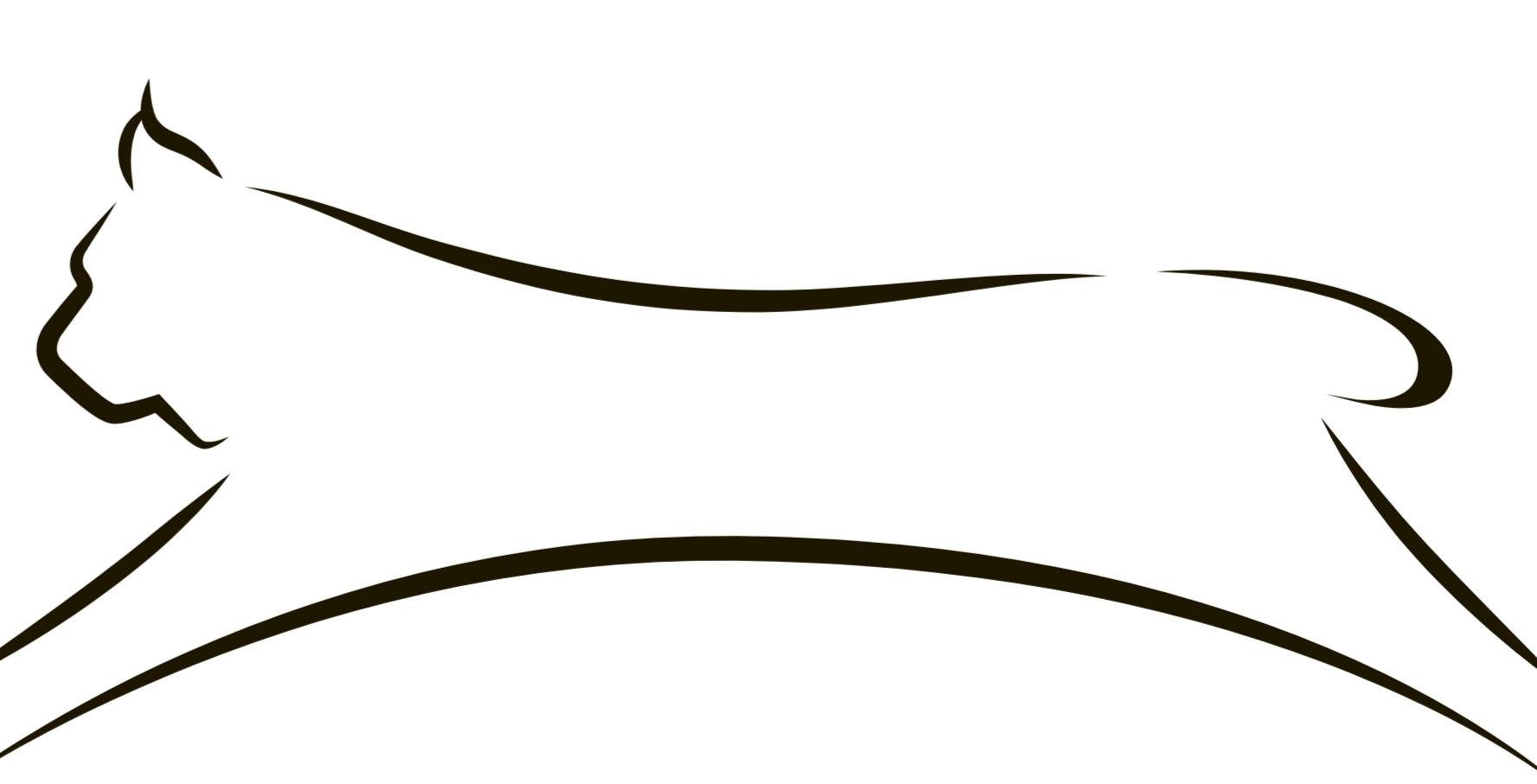
Lynx may take unsecured chickens, but this is unusual. They may also prey on farmed deer, but this can be prevented by electric fencing. Lynx attacks on larger livestock are virtually unheard of.

Scotland's National Lynx Discussion highlighted that, while lynx may only kill small numbers of sheep, the impact on individual farmers could be significant. Managing this would require a transparent and responsive approach, supported by financial support measures developed in collaboration with farmers.



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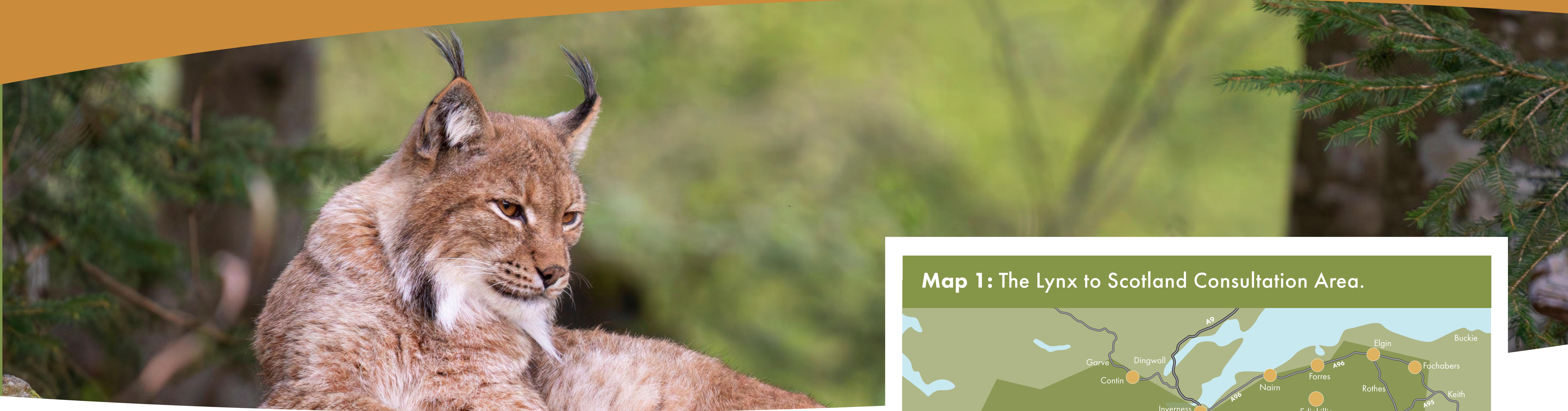
Lynx are not a threat to people.



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What could a lynx reintroduction look like?



How many lynx would be released?

A licensed lynx reintroduction would begin with just a few animals – probably two males and two females. The aim would be to release four more animals each year, until around 20 lynx had been released (enough to create a healthy founder population).

Where would they come from?

Lynx reintroductions can use either wild-caught or captive-bred animals.

Where would they be released?

The Highlands and Moray contain some of the best lynx habitat in Scotland, with extensive areas of woodland and abundant wild prey. **Take a look at Map 1** which shows the extent of our Consultation Area and the woodland habitat network within this. Lynx could be released at one or several sites, in quiet locations, away from major roads.

Where would they go?

Lynx can cross rivers, roads and fields to move between patches of woodland so, over time, they could return across large parts of northern Scotland. There is currently enough habitat and prey in this region to support at least 250 animals – the same number of lynx found in Switzerland. However, population growth and range expansion would be quite slow. **Maps 2 and 3** show the possible distribution of a lynx population five years after a release either to the west or east of Inverness.

The Central Belt is likely to present a barrier to effective lynx dispersal between the Highlands and the South of Scotland.

What would limit the population?

Like other top predators, such as otters or eagles, lynx numbers would be limited by the availability of food and territories (den sites and shelter). Once these became limited, the lynx population would reach a natural balance.

How would they be monitored?

The released lynx would be fitted with tracking collars and monitored long term via an extensive system of cameras. Monitoring would be a key part of the project to track any negative impacts – such as sheep predation – alongside any benefits, like increased tourism revenue and wider biodiversity gains.

How would a lynx reintroduction be funded?

All costs would be met by the Lynx to Scotland project for the initial 5-10 year reintroduction period. After that, management responsibility would pass to the Scottish Government.

Would there be an exit strategy?

Yes. In the unlikely event that negative impacts could not be managed, an exit strategy would see lynx being removed from the landscape. But the intention would be to proactively respond to any issues or conflict to prevent this scenario from occurring.

National stakeholders recommended that if a reintroduction takes place, it should follow a phased release programme with appropriate monitoring, adaptive management and a fully funded exit strategy.

Map 1: The Lynx to Scotland Consultation Area.



Map 2: The possible distribution of a lynx population five years after a release to the west of Inverness.



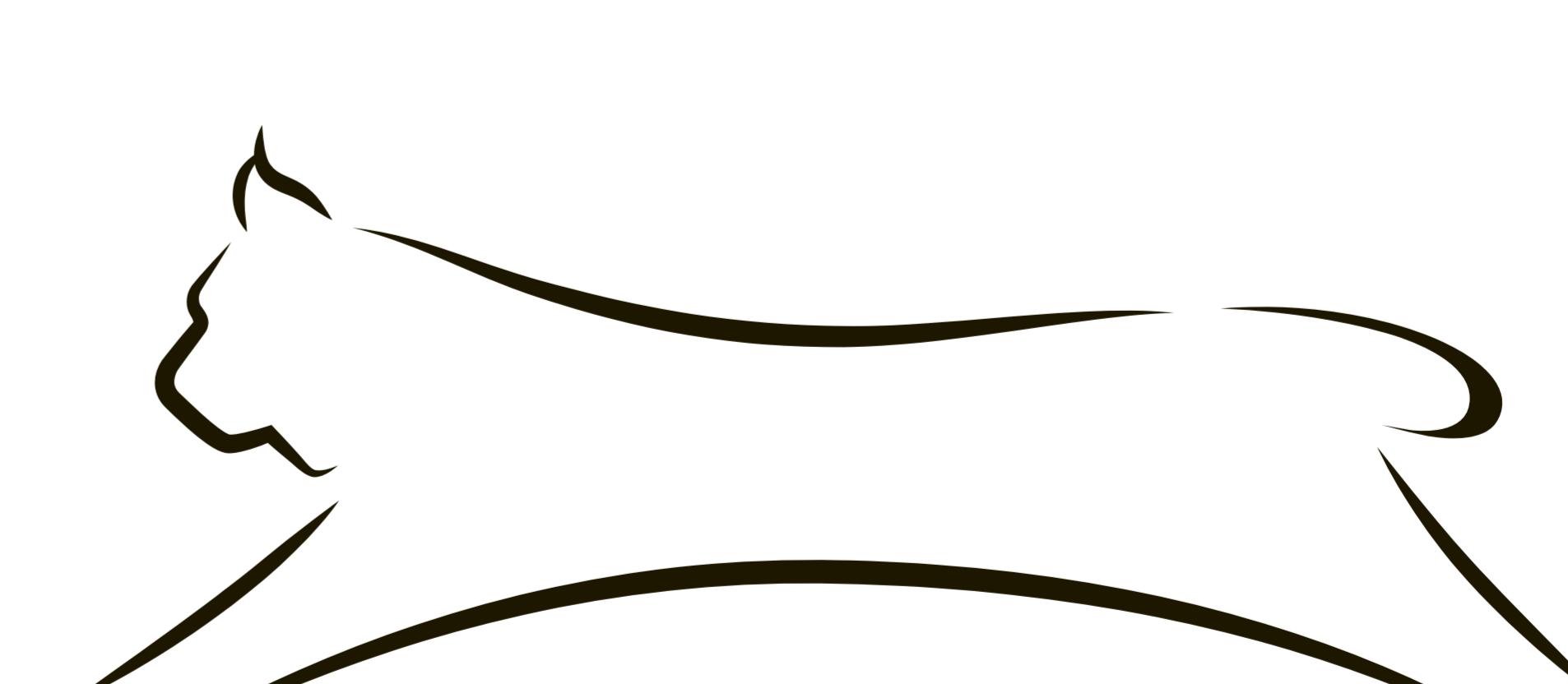
Map 3: The possible distribution of a lynx population five years after a release to the east of Inverness



Maps 2 and 3 show where lynx are likely to be found, using a computer model that tracks the movements and behaviour of individual lynx.

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How can I give my views?

We want to understand your hopes and concerns about a potential lynx reintroduction. So we're inviting you to share your views and to help us design the management frameworks that would minimise the risks and maximise the benefits of a potential lynx reintroduction.

Here's how you can get involved:

1. Questionnaires

Please fill in one of our questionnaires. You can either complete one here and post it in the questionnaire box on the table, or complete it at home and return it to us in one of our prepaid envelopes.



Alternatively, fill in the questionnaire online at lynxtoscotland.org/questionnaire

2. Individual conversations

We would like to hear from anyone who feels they may be significantly impacted by a future lynx reintroduction. We're especially keen to speak with livestock farmers, foresters, gamekeepers, deer stalkers or any other land managers – to learn more about their perspectives and discuss which management measures and models of financial support they feel could work best in Scotland. If you'd like a one-to-one conversation with a member of the Lynx to Scotland project team, **please fill in the Individual Conversations section of the Further Involvement form.**

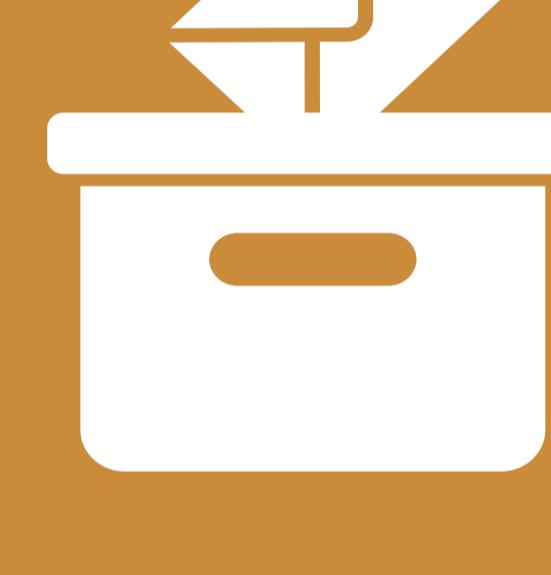


3. Organisational meetings

We want to understand the views of local organisations as well as local residents. If you're a member of an organisation that could be affected positively or negatively by a lynx reintroduction, **please fill in the Organisational Meetings section of the Further Involvement form.**

4. Community discussions

We are keen to provide an opportunity to discuss our findings and next steps with local communities once this consultation has finished. If you would like to be kept up to date in person, online or by post, **please fill in the Community Discussions section on the Further Involvement form.**



Please post your **questionnaire** and **Further Involvement form** in the box on the table.

Thank you for taking the time to visit this exhibition. If you have any questions, a member of our team will be happy to help.



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