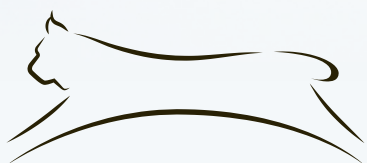


# SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL LYNX DISCUSSION:

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**A summary** of stakeholder views  
on a potential reintroduction of the  
Eurasian lynx to the Scottish Highlands



LYNX TO SCOTLAND

May 2025



## Overview

Between May and November 2024, a cross-sectoral group of 53 institutional representatives were involved in Scotland's National Lynx Discussion process, facilitated by the IUCN SSC Conservation Planning Specialist Group (CPSG). The process was designed to address concerns raised during the Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT)-led multi-stakeholder study (2021 – 2022) and to further assess the social feasibility of a potential Eurasian lynx reintroduction to the Scottish Highlands.

The process focused on stakeholder concerns related to: the availability of sufficient, suitable habitat and prey for lynx; the potential positive and negative impacts of lynx on deer, gamebirds, livestock (with an emphasis on sheep), and other species of concern; and the potential opportunities and associated risks presented by a return of lynx to Scotland. Concerns over the potential implications of a lynx reintroduction on roe deer hunting and on woodland management were raised during the process and two further meetings were subsequently held to consider these topics.

Stakeholders were initially brought together during an in-person, full-day meeting at which they developed and agreed a process for generating recommendation statements for each topic. Stakeholders then participated in twelve online meetings, with each topic preceded by the distribution of pre-meeting briefing notes. The meetings comprised a summary of the initial concern identified by the VWT study; expert presentations reviewing the state of knowledge based on experience from Europe; open, facilitated discussions that critically reviewed this information and its relevance to the Scottish context; and the drafting of concluding thoughts on each topic. Once concluding statements had been agreed and finalised, stakeholders were asked to vote on the statement to assess the level of consensus. If consensus was not reached, statements were edited further until all meeting participants reached a point of agreement.



*Stakeholders discussed eight key topics related to a potential reintroduction of lynx to the Scottish Highlands.*



*Appropriate monitoring of costs and benefits, adaptive management and a fully funded exit strategy would need to be key components of any lynx reintroduction programme.*

Stakeholders reached a point of full agreement or agreement with stated reservations for all eight topics discussed. In addition, stakeholders: identified social and ecological factors to be prioritised in any monitoring efforts attendant to a possible lynx reintroduction programme; critically reviewed options for mitigating potential negative impacts of reintroduced lynx on livestock; and delineated the key components of any potential compensation scheme and adaptive management framework that would need to be in place should a lynx reintroduction be proposed.

Uncertainty regarding the application of European lynx research and lived experiences to the Scottish context was expressed throughout the process, with many stakeholders feeling that Scotland is significantly different from mainland Europe in several ways. Consequently, a clear recommendation from the process was that any lynx reintroduction proposal would need to be carried out as a phased approach with holistic monitoring, open communication, inclusive decision-making, and adaptive response including an exit strategy built in from the outset.

The need for trust-building, transparency, and flexibility were also highlighted as being critical components for the success of any such proposal, along with clarity concerning how long-term, sustainable financial support, including for assisting persons who have sustained loss or damage, will be delivered. The importance of aligning any lynx reintroduction project with the policy landscape was also frequently raised by stakeholders.

Additional work recommended by stakeholders was to collect available data on the scale of gamebird rearing in other countries where the Eurasian lynx occurs, and to investigate the management of any associated conflicts. It was also recommended that population modelling be undertaken to forecast lynx population growth trajectories together with potential implications for predation on other species (especially livestock) under different deer management scenarios.

Stakeholders supported the move next towards a more local level consultation process, involving individual landowners and others who may be directly impacted by a potential reintroduction of lynx to Scotland.



# Stakeholder consensus

Stakeholders reached the following conclusions:

## Habitat and prey

Based on available evidence, there is sufficient quantity and quality of habitat in Scotland to support a viable population of lynx. It was highlighted that this suitability might change over time in response to national policies and initiatives relating to land use and nature restoration.

## Impacts on forestry

Lynx are unlikely to have any direct effect on timber producing forest management. However, any protected status afforded to reintroduced lynx could be a considerable constraint to forestry operations, adding to the restrictions already in place for existing protected species, and threatening the ability of small outfits to remain viable. Regulations should be pragmatic, proportionate and scientifically-founded, more akin to European practice, and discussions should take place with statutory agencies to consider how this could be realised for lynx and other species in Scotland.

## Impacts on deer and hunting

Lynx could help to secure a more natural balance of species within the ecosystem, although they should not be thought of as a 'silver bullet' in relation to deer population control. They are unlikely to replace culling by humans or weather impacts, although they could complement these controls, particularly in locations where deer numbers have already been suppressed.

Due to lynx preference for wooded areas in which to hunt, lynx are likely to have minimal impact on deer occupying open terrain, so upland red deer stalking interests should be little affected. However, consideration should be given to the possible effects of lynx presence on practical woodland/roe deer management, especially concerning any local site protections afforded to breeding lynx that might limit normal deer management or forestry activity. It is possible that lynx could have locally significant impacts on roe deer populations and the behaviours of the remaining roe deer, which may impact local businesses that rely on roe deer stalking for their income.

*Lynx could complement human efforts to control deer numbers.*







*Rates of sheep predation vary across Europe but are highest where sheep are grazed in and around woodland.*

### **Impacts on gamebirds**

Whilst the currently available evidence suggests that gamebirds, at a national scale, are unlikely to play a significant role in lynx diet, where lynx and gamebird interests come into contact at the local level, the impacts could be significant. As such, any management framework designed to respond to the potential negative impacts of lynx should be open to application by other sectors too, including gamebird management.

### **Impacts on species of conservation concern**

Based on evidence from mainland Europe, lynx are unlikely to predate species of conservation concern such as capercaillie, black grouse or wildcats to any significant degree due to their preference for deer, which are relatively abundant in Scotland. Lynx may, in fact, have a positive impact on some of these species through predation on 'mesopredators', particularly foxes, and through the provision of carcasses as an additional food source for other species. Such carcasses could also boost nutrient cycling within the ecosystem.

### **Impacts on livestock**

Lynx are likely to predate on sheep, lambs and potentially other small livestock, in at least some circumstances, especially when they are located in or near wooded areas. Scotland's typically stratified sheep-rearing systems mean that predation could also have impacts for the wider sector in addition to the immediate farm affected.

Significant resources would be required to establish an effective management system, and to ensure it was funded long-term from the outset. Any such management framework (including mitigation measures and compensation options) would need to be implemented in a transparent, collaborative, responsive and fair manner in order to build and maintain trust. It would also need to be flexible and to adapt to new information as it arises.

The aim might be to move towards a system of payment for co-existence, whilst recognising that there will always be variations in values and desires and that land managers should not have to compromise their livelihoods to accommodate lynx. Relocation or lethal control would be necessary components of any management framework and lethal control would need to be usable as well as available, with clear and consistent messaging to the public as to the situations under which it would be applied, so that those implementing it did not face any public or political backlash.





*In the Harz mountains in Germany, lynx generate between £7.5M and £12.5M of tourist spend every year.*

## Opportunities

There are potential economic benefits associated with a lynx reintroduction, especially linked to ecotourism, despite the elusive nature of the species. Evidence from Europe suggests that the mere presence of lynx within the landscape can be enough to encourage visitation and significantly grow tourism income.

Additional benefits include enhancements to the ecological and spiritual health of the nation and the restoration of lost ecological processes as well as the additive, if limited, positive impacts lynx might have on deer management.

Scotland's tourism infrastructure is already stretched, though the dispersed nature of lynx means that lynx-related tourism is unlikely to place it under undue further pressure. Should financial benefits emerge through enhanced tourism revenues, then these should be linked with a fair and sound management payment system for farmers and crofters impacted by lynx.

## Learning lessons

There are clear lessons to be learned from previous reintroductions in Scotland, in terms of trust-building, transparency, adaptability, and responsiveness. Being pro-active, collaborative and honest from the outset would be central to the success of any project to reintroduce lynx. Key would be the identification and securing of long-term sustainable funding, free from any constraints imposed by political or social change.

If executed properly, a lynx reintroduction process has the opportunity to set a new bar for reintroductions in Scotland and provide a model for how others should be designed in the future.



[view the full report](#)

# Stakeholders

Participation in the National Lynx Discussion:

Name	Role
Andrew Bauer	Voting member
Association of Deer Management Groups	Voting member
British Association for Shooting and Conservation	Voting member
Cairngorms National Park Authority	Observer and provision of expertise
Confor	Voting member
Forestry and Land Scotland	Observer and provision of expertise
Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust	Voting member
Highland Environment Forum	Voting member
National Farmers Union Scotland	Voting member
National Sheep Association Scotland	Voting member
Ramblers Scotland	Voting member
Rottal Estate	Voting member
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	Voting member
Royal Zoological Society of Scotland	Voting member
Scottish Environment Link	Voting member
Scottish Gamekeepers Association	Voting member
Scottish Land & Estates	Voting member
Scottish Wildlife Trust	Voting member
Trees for Life	Voting member
Wild Scotland	Voting member
Woodland Trust Scotland	Voting member



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