



Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) climbing a tree in
Langedrag Nature Park, Norway
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Reintroducing the Eurasian Lynx to Scotland

The Eurasian lynx is a labrador sized feline that was once widespread across Scotland. A secretive and shy animal, lynx live in woodlands where they mainly prey on roe deer. Lynx pose no threat to humans and reintroductions across Europe have seen very little conflict with people, although they may occasionally take sheep.

Lost in the Middle Ages due to persecution and deforestation, evidence shows that Scotland now has enough forest and natural prey for lynx to thrive again. Research suggests that a well-planned, legal lynx reintroduction is now feasible here. [1]

Lynx reintroduction is widely supported in Scotland, with 61% of people supporting or strongly supporting their return. [2] Stakeholders are actively engaged in ensuring any programme to reintroduce them would not damage their livelihoods. Local consultations are currently taking place about returning them to the Scottish Highlands and an application for their reintroduction could be submitted during Session 7 of the Scottish Parliament.

The Eurasian lynx is a missing heartbeat of the Scottish landscape. A resident for millennia until its extinction 500 years ago, this secretive feline is no stranger to our shores. It is the 'Llewen' of ancient Welsh verse, the 'Lioncs' in Gaelic, the tuft-eared figure carved into the Kildonnán Cross Slab of Eigg, the bones found in a Yorkshire cave. Other European countries have welcomed back this charismatic and captivating cat. Can Scotland?

About the Lynx to Scotland Partnership



Lynx to Scotland is a partnership of four environmental charities – Trees for Life, Scotland The Big Picture, The LifeScape Project and Rewilding Britain. The partnership has been working for six years to assess the possibility and practicalities of returning lynx to the Scottish Highlands. During this time the partnership has demonstrated that:

- There is enough woodland and roe deer in the Scottish Highlands to eventually support a population of at least 250 lynx [3]
- Reintroduction projects across Europe have been successful and the methods used can be replicated in Scotland, even in human-dominated landscapes [4]
- There is overwhelming public support in Scotland for lynx reintroduction with polling showing 61% in favour [5]

The partnership is currently undertaking a wide-ranging community consultation about the possibility of reintroduction to the Scottish Highlands. If it is concluded that lynx reintroduction is widely supported and broadly accepted, a licence application will be submitted to the Scottish Government for consideration during this parliamentary session.

About the Missing Lynx Project

The 'Missing Lynx Project' is working to reintroduce lynx to Northumberland. Lynx from any releases in England would also live in the Scottish borders. 'The Missing Lynx Project and Lynx to Scotland have two partners in common and are working closely together to ensure a joined-up approach.

Lynx Reintroduction to the Scottish Highlands

Lynx require connected areas of woodland and enough roe deer to thrive. Extensive scientific modelling has demonstrated that there is enough of both in the Scottish Highlands to support a healthy and sustainable population of lynx. The IUCN Guidelines on Reintroductions state that the factors responsible for a species' extinction should no longer be operating if it is to be considered for reintroduction. [6]

Reintroducing the Eurasian lynx to Scotland aligns us with countries across mainland Europe that have successfully returned lynx to their landscapes. Today, around 10,000 wild lynx coexist with human populations in European landscapes. [7] From the Baltics to the Balkans, forests in Europe are home to the Eurasian lynx, which plays its part both in the local ecosystem and the local economy.

Because lynx are shy, solitary, forest dwellers, they actively avoid humans. European data shows that lynx choose wild deer over domestic livestock. Outside of Norway, where unique, unguarded forest-grazing sheep create an outlier, lynx account for a loss of just 0.003% of the EU's sheep population annually. [8]

Charismatic animals draw in higher-value 'slow tourism', where visitors stay longer and spend more in rural communities. The presence of lynx in the Harz mountains in Germany has brought around €10 million into the local economy each year. [9]

Scotland's commercial forestry sector faces high costs from fencing and browsing damage from deer, involving substantial human effort and financial resources to address. The presence of carnivores in the landscape can help reduce the ecological and economic problems associated with overabundant deer populations. [10] Human deer stalkers will always be needed - but working in tandem with nature-based solutions maximises the benefits, especially in areas where human stalkers struggle to hunt effectively.

Restoring Scotland's native forests is central to our biodiversity and net-zero carbon targets. Currently, native seedlings are heavily suppressed by overgrazing, leaving mature forests unable to self-repopulate. To avoid ambush by lynx, roe and red deer increase their vigilance, spend less time lingering in open forest glades, and alter their grazing paths. This significantly lowers browsing intensity on young trees. [11]

Lynx can also help rebalance ecosystems, causing ripples down the food chain and offering a lifeline to some of Scotland's most threatened species. Long-term ecological studies in Scandinavia show that, by preying on foxes, lynx reduce the predation of ground-nesting birds. This directly boosts the survival rates of vulnerable, ground-nesting forest birds like the critically endangered capercaillie. [12]



Lynx Trail, Dinaric Alps, Bosnia and Herzegovina / *gravgrav*



Lynx signpost, Harz Mountains, Germany / *CC0 Public Domain*

The debate around reintroducing lost species to Scotland is rarely just about the animals themselves and whatever benefits or challenges they present. Deep-rooted conflict about how Scottish landscapes should look, what purpose they serve, and who should own or control the land underlies conversations about the return of the lynx to Scotland. A well-designed, professionally facilitated process that brings together farmers, conservationists, landowners and rural communities will help bridge divides and return agency to rural communities. In the end, this journey will restore both the ecological health of Scotland's landscapes and the connection, agency, and resilience of its people.

Lynx and Rewilding

Rewilding is about working with nature to benefit biodiversity, mitigate against climate change and grow rural economies and livelihoods. Restoring natural processes - such as re-wetting peatlands so they can absorb carbon, re-wiggling rivers to alleviate flood risk, and allowing woodlands to naturally regenerate so nature can thrive - are all ways of rewilding. The return of lynx would bring back the natural relationships between predators and their prey, restoring a vital lost natural process that would help nature thrive.

Evidence shows that rewilding grows rural economies and increases rural jobs, with rewilding sites bolstering jobs by over 400%. [13] This is because nature is so depleted and our natural processes so damaged that human intervention is required for the long-term.

Lynx and Farming

Lynx can and do take sheep. While their preferred prey is deer, especially where sheep graze in or near woodland, lynx may occasionally prey on sheep. [14] Experience from European lynx reintroductions shows that lynx predation of sheep can be effectively managed.

The ongoing local consultation in Scotland is listening to farmers' and crofters' concerns and working to develop management options that they feel are appropriate to the Highlands. This could include:

- Compensation payments to farmers for any sheep lost to lynx predation. This could include both the market value of the sheep and compensation for any stress or loss of bloodlines.
- Adoption of the most effective mitigation where lynx are causing problems. Sonic deterrents, temporary fencing and guardian animals (such as alpacas) have all been shown to deter sheep predation.
- Management of any problem lynx, including lethal control as a last resort.

Lynx and People

Polling in 2025 showed that 61% of Scots support the return of lynx, an increase of 9 percentage points compared to when the poll was last carried out in 2021. The polling showed that a majority of Scots in all regions supported lynx reintroduction, in urban and rural areas. Lynx reintroduction is therefore widely supported.

A successful lynx reintroduction would depend on building a future that works for everyone. While the ecological and cultural benefits inspire many people, the initiative can only move forward by ensuring those with concerns about lynx reintroduction are supported, heard and protected. Those that feel that their livelihoods could be affected, such as sheep farmers and crofters, need to be listened to and their concerns taken very seriously. Lynx to Scotland has worked for over six years to understand the concerns of stakeholders and listen to their perspectives. This has included:

- An independent analysis of stakeholder and community perceptions and concerns undertaken by the Vincent Wildlife Trust in 2021. [15] The analysis showed that opinions on lynx were not a simple 'for' or 'against', but more complex than that. The analysis identified six barriers and concerns that needed to be considered in detail.
- A national stakeholder discussion in 2024 involving over 50 stakeholders in 50 hours of discussions about the barriers and concerns. [16] Undertaken by an IUCN specialist, there was representation from farmers, gamekeepers, foresters, nature conservationists and tourism operators. A series of recommendations were made to overcome and manage concerns and it was recommended that a regional consultation take place to understand local perspectives.
- A regional consultation started in February 2026. 42 events were held across an area of the Highlands and Moray based on the likely distribution of lynx within five years of a release. 1,640 people attended the events, 1,415 provided feedback through questionnaires and 99 farmers, foresters and other key stakeholders have requested deeper one-to-one discussions. These, along with discussions with organisations that represent stakeholders, are currently taking place.

The partnership has been listening to stakeholders and adapting its approach accordingly.



Delegates visiting a sheep farm in Soubey on a lynx study tour to the Jura, Switzerland, May 2024
/ Mark Hamblin scotlandbigpicture.com

Case study: Reintroduction of lynx to the Palatinate Forest, Germany

The Palatinate Forest is a continuous woodland spanning the border of southwest Germany and northeast France, surrounded by valleys where sheep farming and livestock breeding take place. In 2015, a project began to bring back the Eurasian lynx to this landscape, 250 years after they had been driven to local extinction. The project team involved local communities early on, building connections with local hunters, shepherds and livestock owners that became integral to the project's success.

Starting in 2016, 20 lynx were relocated to the Palatinate Forest. All lynx were monitored closely, including through the use of GPS collars. The project was financed by the EU Life programme and supported by the regional government. This support, which included mitigation and compensation where necessary, has contributed to the return of a low density lynx population across the Palatinate Forest and connected forests. The creation of lynx-focused walking trails has boosted local eco-tourism.

Find out more: https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/featured-projects/life-luchs-pfalzerwald_en

<https://rewildingeurope.com/rew-project/reintroduction-of-lynx-in-the-palatinate-forest-biosphere-reserve/>



Graphic courtesy of the LIFE Programme

Lynx and Scotland

Scotland prides itself on taking the lead on challenging issues. There is undoubtedly widespread support among people in Scotland for lynx to return. While stakeholders and their representative organisations are not necessarily in favour of their return, they are engaging with the partnership and Lynx to Scotland wants them to have an influential role if reintroduction goes ahead.

For many, it is not a matter of 'if' lynx return to Scotland, but 'when'. Will you support an inclusive, equitable lynx reintroduction that maximises the benefits to our nature, communities and economy while minimising and managing any localised impacts?

How you can help

This is a long-term project, but you can help us now to progress the discussion that is so desperately needed. You could:

- Follow the Lynx to Scotland project on social media to stay informed
- Find out more about the project by attending our drop-in event in Holyrood – an invitation will be sent to you when the date is confirmed
- Come and meet the team working on the project – this is especially relevant to MSPs representing Highlands and Moray
- Ask a Parliamentary Question or lodge a motion about the project – please contact us if you are interested in doing this

Whether you currently support or object to the proposed return of lynx, please take the time to find out more about this animal and the Lynx to Scotland partnership. Please contact Steve Micklewright, CEO of Trees for Life, for more information. steve@treesforlife.org.uk

About the Scottish Rewilding Alliance

The Scottish Rewilding Alliance brings together organisations who share one goal: to help nature recover and thrive across Scotland like never before. Together, we are building a sustainable movement for rewilding Scotland.

We believe the best way to do this is by working in partnership with communities, local communities, interest groups, and the government. Our members fight for wilder nature in their local areas as well as across Scotland. We use powerful stories and clear evidence to advocate for policy solutions that support nature's recovery.

References

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