

SCOTLAND: The Big Picture News Release

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Is Scotland ready for the return of lynx?

An extensive and impartial study to assess people's views about the possible reintroduction of Eurasian lynx to the Scottish Highlands is being launched this month by a new partnership of charities SCOTLAND: The Big Picture, Trees for Life and Vincent Wildlife Trust.

Ecological research has shown that extensive areas of Scotland could support lynx, but the charities say returning the shy and elusive animal is less about science and more about people's willingness to live alongside a species that's become forgotten on these shores.

The year-long Lynx to Scotland consultation will impartially and accurately assess public and stakeholder attitudes around the idea of lynx reintroduction, including in rural communities.

"With a global biodiversity crisis, we have a responsibility to have open and constructive conversations around restoring key native species to the Scottish landscape – and science shows that apex predators like lynx play a vital ecological role in maintaining healthy living systems," said Peter Cairns, Executive Director of SCOTLAND: The Big Picture.

Lynx are now expanding in range and numbers across mainland Europe as hunting laws are enforced and public attitudes to large predators soften. Several successful lynx reintroductions since the 1970s have brought ecological and environmental benefits to countries more densely populated than Scotland, and in areas used for farming, hunting, forestry and tourism.

As a shy and solitary woodland hunter, lynx are rarely glimpsed and attacks on humans are virtually unknown. Research suggests the Highlands has sufficient habitat – and more than enough roe deer, the cat’s preferred prey – to support around 400 wild lynx.

Steve Micklewright, Chief Executive of Trees for Life, said: “Scotland has more woodland deer than any other European country, and their relentless browsing often prevents the expansion and healthy regeneration of our natural woodlands. By preying on roe deer, lynx would restore ecological processes that have been missing for centuries, and provide a free and efficient deer management service.”

Jenny MacPherson, Science and Research Programme Manager with the Vincent Wildlife Trust, which will lead the study, said: “Reintroducing lynx would inevitably bring challenges. Lynx to Scotland will actively include stakeholders representing the full range of perspectives, in order to produce meaningful conclusions about the level of support or tolerance for lynx, and therefore, the likely success of any future reintroduction.”

The Eurasian lynx is native to Britain but was driven to extinction some 500-1000 years ago through hunting and habitat loss.

Lynx to Scotland runs from January 2021 to February 2022 and is not associated with any other previous or current initiatives to restore lynx to Britain

For details, see scotlandbigpicture.com/lynx-to-scotland.

Notes to editors

* The project partners are SCOTLAND: The Big Picture: www.scotlandbigpicture.com; Trees for Life: treesforlife.org.uk; Vincent Wildlife Trust: vwt.org.uk

* For further information, please refer to our Frequently Asked Questions attached, or see www.scotlandbigpicture.com/lynx-to-scotland

* The project funders are WildLand Ltd, the Lund Trust and the Jeremy Collier Foundation.