



17th February 2025

Dear First Minister

Lynx to Scotland – Open Letter

With regard to your statements about lynx and other native species at the recent NFU Scotland conference, we are writing to urge you to go beyond supporting a narrow, negative perspective on species reintroductions, and to acknowledge their wider benefits for nature restoration, climate resilience and economic prosperity.

The Scottish Government led the way in declaring a nature emergency, recognising that “just like climate change, the loss of species and degradation of our natural environment is an existential threat to humanity.” You set out a clear ambition “for Scotland to be Nature Positive by 2030, and to have restored and regenerated biodiversity across the country by 2045¹.”

Scotland is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world². Without well planned and managed species reintroductions, the natural processes they return to our landscape will continue to be absent and it will not be possible to restore and revitalise our nation’s hollowed out biodiversity. This means that your government’s target to regenerate biodiversity will not be met by 2045, if ever.

The role of beavers in helping to mitigate the impacts of climate change on spawning salmon, as well as providing ‘free’ flood resilience, is well evidenced³. The role of white-tailed eagles in supporting rural economies through tourism revenue, is similarly well documented⁴.

Turning to lynx, there is plenty of suitable habitat and natural prey to allow them to thrive in Scotland⁵. Moreover, support for their return is surging with a recent opinion poll showing 61%

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/news/tackling-the-nature-emergency/>

² <https://stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TP26056-SoN-Scotland-summary-report-v5-1.pdf>

³ <https://www.nature.scot/doc/management-framework-benefits-beavers>

⁴ <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-03897>

⁵ <https://www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/services/research/documents/The-potential-for-lynx-reintroduction-in-Scotland.pdf>

of Scots supporting their reintroduction, with only 13% opposed⁶. A previous survey in 2020 showed 52% support⁷.

Work by the Lynx to Scotland Project has evidenced an appetite by stakeholders, including many in the farming sector, to discuss the prospect of lynx reintroduction with an emphasis on collaboration and compromise⁸. Since May 2024, we have convened a cross-sector group of stakeholders, including representatives from the farming sector, to discuss the legitimate concerns about lynx reintroduction and whether they can be overcome. The group has respectfully discussed all aspects and considered all viewpoints and, is close to publishing its recommendations.

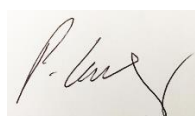
While nobody is pretending that coexistence with wildlife comes without a cost, or that lynx will not take sheep, dismissing the return of lynx out of hand fails to recognise their potential role in restoring ecological balance to our woodlands and the wider societal benefits healthy ecosystems provide.

Other countries, often with more people and fewer resources than our own, manage to coexist with elephants, lions and tigers. Are we so exceptional in Scotland that we cannot manage to live with a medium-sized cat?

Through the new Scottish Biodiversity Strategy⁹ and the proposals for a Natural Environment Bill during this parliament, your government is laying down clear intentions to restore the natural world. Rather than endorsing a false choice between food production and nature restoration, we ask you to show leadership and acknowledge the painstaking work being done to find a resolution to the concerns of stakeholders, so that we can look forward to the possibility of lynx returning and Scotland's nature thriving.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to provide up-to-date information on the work of Lynx to Scotland¹⁰.

Yours sincerely



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⁶ Survation polling - Survation polling - interviews of Scots aged 16+, Fieldwork: 17th – 27th January 2025, Sample size: 2014

⁷ Survation polling - Fieldwork Dates - 28/10/2020 - 03/11/2020, Population Sampled - All residents aged 16+ living in Scotland, Sample Size - 1,071

⁸ Survation polling - interviews of Scots aged 16+, Fieldwork: 17th – 27th January 2025, Sample size: 2014

⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-biodiversity-strategy-2045/>

¹⁰ <https://www.scotlandbigpicture.com/lynx-to-scotland>

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The Lynx to Scotland Partnership

Lynx to Scotland is a three-charity partnership working to return lynx to the Scottish Highlands through a carefully managed reintroduction.