

Eurasian Lynx (*Lynx lynx*) Position Statement

Rewilding Britain is a proactive environmental movement whose purpose is to excite and inspire people about the restoration of ecosystems, and where practicable, the reintroduction of missing species. We aspire to bring together individuals and organisations with a common interest in restoring Britain's wildlife and habitats. We seek to support, assist and strengthen a broad range of species-specific and landscape-scale restoration efforts.

Over centuries, Britain has lost many keystone species. This includes most of our important top predators. The animals we lack, such as beavers, boar, lynx, wolves, large tuna, pelicans, cranes and storks, are not just ornaments of the ecosystem - in many cases they have a role as ecosystem engineers and are essential to a proper functioning environment.

We support the re-establishment of Britain's extinct keystone species through legal reintroduction programmes as advised by the use of the IUCN species translocation and reintroduction guidelines. However, we believe that missing species should not be re-established in the UK unless there is widespread consent and support for their restoration, including within rural communities.

Lynx reintroduction in Britain

We support the introduction of lynx at the earliest possible opportunity.

The youngest physical evidence for Eurasian lynx in Britain is a bone found in a Yorkshire cave, that is roughly 1500 years oldⁱ. There is slightly later cultural evidence: such as the apparent mention in the poet Aneurin's 7th-Century account of the Battle of Catraeth (*Y Gododdin*)ⁱⁱ, and the carving on a 9th-Century stone cross on the Isle of Eiggⁱⁱⁱ which supports a more recent interpretation of their presence. It is likely that this species became extinct in Britain due to a combination of habitat and prey loss coupled perhaps with targeted human persecution.

Researchers have been unable to discover any record of lynx attacking people^{iv}. They are likely to be of benefit to some rural industries, as they control both deer and foxes.

Because lynx require woodland for their survival, and are often killed by traffic, presenting a severe threat to the viability of their populations in areas with busy roads, the places in which they could be successfully re-established in Britain are likely to be limited. The two regions where viable populations might be established are considered to be the Scottish Highlands and the Southern Uplands/Kielder Forest^v.

The Lynx UK Trust consultation

Whilst we support the reintroduction of Lynx, we have a number of concerns regarding the Lynx UK Trust consultation.

Firstly, we are concerned that a number of the proposed reintroduction sites are inappropriate. Lynx require extensive areas of woodland in order to establish viable populations. We do not believe Cumbria and Thetford Forest meet the Lynx habitat requirements.

Secondly, we believe further analysis is needed on the potential impacts on livestock. The Eurasian lynx is an ambush predator that lives predominantly in woodland. It is reluctant to cross large areas of open ground. While a study undertaken by the Lynx UK Trust discounts the Norwegian figure of 18,924 sheep kills as being applicable to a potential British impact, and predicts that a more appropriate figure of their average consumption might be 0.4 sheep per lynx per annum^{vi}, Britain has one of the largest national sheep flocks in Europe. In Britain the national sheep flock numbers 22 million^{vii}. Although lynx are ambush hunters, the presence of scattered small woodland and hedgerow systems throughout much of the British landscape means that a realistic interpretation of their impact on sheep farming is difficult to determine.

Finally, if the restoration of Eurasian lynx in Britain is to advance it must involve a process of thorough consultation. This must incorporate the views of landowners and their varied interest groups. It is highly unlikely that without this support that any real political progress will be made. Although the Lynx UK Trusts proposal is both interesting and has raised the public profile of the issue, it is the view of Rewilding Britain that this issue should be pursued over a longer time frame to allow for adequate consultation with those who live and work in the countryside, especially those near to the proposed reintroduction sites. Despite recent press reports suggesting the potential for restoring lynx in Britain in 2016, we do not believe this is a realistic timescale.

ⁱ David A. Hetherington, Tom C. Lord and Roger M. Jacobi, 2006. New evidence for the occurrence of Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) in medieval Britain. *Journal Of Quaternary Science*, Vol. 21, no.1, pp.3–8. doi: 10.1002/jqs.960

ⁱⁱ <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2014/08/bring-back-big-cats-it-time-start-rewilding-britain>

ⁱⁱⁱ David Hetherington, 2010. The Lynx. In *Terry O'Connor and Naomi Sykes, eds. Extinctions and Invasions: a social history of British fauna*. Windgather Press, Oxford.

^{iv} U. Breitenmoser et al, 2000. The Action Plan for the Conservation of the Eurasian Lynx (*Lynx Lynx*) in Europe. Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, France. Nature and Environmental Series No. 112. Cited by David Hetherington et al, 2008. A potential habitat network for the Eurasian lynx *Lynx lynx* in Scotland. *Mammal Review*, Vol. 38, no. 4, pp.285–303.

^v David Hetherington et al, 2008. A potential habitat network for the Eurasian lynx *Lynx lynx* in Scotland. *Mammal Review*, Vol. 38, no. 4, pp285–303.

^{vi} White, C., Convery, I., Eagle, A., O'Donoghue, P., Piper, S., Rowcroft, P., Smith, D., & van Maanen, E. (2015), 'Cost-benefit analysis for the reintroduction of lynx to the UK: Main report', Application for the reintroduction of Lynx to the UK government, AECOM.

^{vii} <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/farming-statistics-livestock-populations-at-1-december-2013-england>