

Lynx could return to Scotland – but not through unwelcome illegal releases

Thursday 9 January, 2025

Lynx to Scotland, a three-charity partnership working to restore lynx to the Scottish Highlands, welcomes the humane capture of two lynx illegally released in the Cairngorms National Park.

Peter Cairns, Executive Director of SCOTLAND: The Big Picture, one of the charities involved, said: "It's excellent news that experts from the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) were able to humanely trap the lynx so rapidly, and that the lynx are safe.

"The Lynx to Scotland Project is working to secure the return of Lynx to the Scottish Highlands, but irresponsible and illegal releases such as this are simply counter-productive."

The native Eurasian lynx was made extinct in Scotland through hunting and habitat loss more than 500 years ago. Lynx are 'keystone species' which play a vital role in maintaining healthy living systems, and biodiversity is negatively affected by their absence.

Lynx are shy and elusive woodland hunters and pose no danger to people. They have successfully returned to European countries such as Germany, France and Switzerland.

Research suggests the Highlands has the habitat to sustainably support around 400 lynx.

"The Lynx to Scotland project is working towards a carefully planned reintroduction of lynx that respects the views of farmers and other stakeholders – so that Scotland would once again benefit from having lynx in the natural environment," said Steve Micklewright, Chief Executive of Trees for Life.

"Scotland is one of a handful of European countries still lacking a large terrestrial mammal predator. If we are serious about tackling the nature and climate emergencies, we need lynx back. A lynx reintroduction would require Scottish Government approval, with habitat assessments and full public consultation."

Scotland has more woodland deer than any other European country, and the absence of predators such as lynx leaves the country's forests diminished and overgrazed by too many deer.

By preying on roe deer – their preferred prey – and invasive sika deer, lynx could reduce browsing pressure on regenerating woodlands, helping to expand and enrich the country's forests.

Lynx would be high-profile ambassadors for nature recovery, attracting valuable tourism revenue for rural communities.

Currently, a cross-sector range of stakeholders are engaging in discussions about the possibility of a responsibly managed and fully resourced legal reintroduction of lynx.

There is growing public and political support for a managed lynx reintroduction with polls showing widespread backing. In April 2023, lynx reintroduction was discussed in the Scottish Parliament for the first time.

The Lynx to Scotland partners are SCOTLAND: The Big Picture, Trees for Life and The Lifescape Project. For more information, see www.scotlandbigpicture.com/lynx-to-scotland.

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