# Lynx – major report on cross-sector discussions outlines key issues and recommendations for Scotland

**Friday 23 May, 2025**

A major new 100-page report provides the most detailed analysis yet of what a lynx reintroduction project in Scotland would need to do to ensure lynx and people could coexist.

It outlines conclusions and recommendations agreed by a nine-month national discussion involving a diverse, cross-sector range of 53 stakeholders including farmer and landowner organisations, gamekeepers, foresters, tourism operators and conservationists.

The National Lynx Discussion, held between May and November last year and organised by the Lynx to Scotland partnership, was independently facilitated by an expert from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Conservation Planning Specialist Group.

Steve Micklewright, chief executive of Trees for Life and member of the stakeholder group, said: “We met 12 times for over 50 hours in total. Deep and extensive discussions allowed us to learn lessons from lynx reintroductions in Europe, assess possible impacts if lynx are returned to Scotland, and recommend key actions to avoid or manage potential problems.

“While not everyone who took part supports the return of lynx, we now have a clear understanding of what needs to be put in place if a reintroduction is to happen. The Lynx to Scotland partnership must now work out if and how the recommendations can be delivered, and take that out to local consultation when we have clear proposals.”

Together the group worked through barriers and concerns identified in a previous social feasibility study into lynx reintroduction, including around sheep farming, as well as concerns about possible impacts on forestry operations and lowland deer. Conclusions were agreed by consensus, without committing to support for a reintroduction.

The stakeholders concluded there is plenty of suitable woodland and natural prey for a viable population of lynx to be established in the Highlands. They identified positive economic benefits, mainly through eco-tourism, and agreed that some endangered wildlife might benefit due to lynx taking smaller predators, especially foxes.

They concluded lynx would take sheep in Scotland, could take game birds such as pheasants, and might affect forestry operations due to lynx having protected species status. The most likely and challenging impacts could be to sheep farming, and this was a major topic of discussion throughout the process.

Lynx should not be thought of as a ‘silver bullet’ to provide natural deer control, but could complement other methods of managing deer numbers. Upland red deer stalking interests should be little affected.

Reintroduction could offer wellbeing benefits by returning a sense of wildness to the landscape, and hope for tackling the nature and climate emergencies.

Stakeholder group member Andrew Bauer, who has experience of species reintroduction policy in Scotland, said: “Our recommendations aim to address the fact that we agreed there could be negative impacts on some rural livelihoods if lynx were reintroduced without proper checks and balances to prevent problems or manage them.”

The group agreed it would be crucial to collaborate with all stakeholders throughout any reintroduction project, especially local communities.

Recommendations on sheep predation include payments for losses and coexistence, and a funded rapid response system so that any farmers experiencing sheep predation could be assisted to prevent it from recurring if possible.

Game birds are unlikely to be the preferred food of lynx, but there could be possible localised impacts, the group concluded. Any project should have the funding and resources to assist gamekeepers in deterring lynx from taking game birds if it occurred.

Jamie Copsey of the IUCN Conservation Planning Specialist Group, who facilitated the National Lynx

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Discussion, said: “I carry out these sorts of discussions throughout the world, and we make progress by focusing on facts and evidence, and listening to and respecting differing viewpoints, values and concerns. That approach has been central to this initiative.”

Elusive and charismatic, the labrador-sized, forest-dwelling lynx mainly preys on deer and poses no threat to humans.

Lynx are recovering across Europe with the help of successful, well-planned reintroductions. Scotland – where hunting and habitat loss drove lynx to extinction in the Middle Ages – remains one of the few countries of the cat’s former range from which it is still missing.

Any lynx reintroduction would require Scottish Government approval, following ecological assessments and a full public consultation.

Lynx to Scotland is a partnership between Trees for Life, SCOTLAND: The Big Picture and The Lifescape Project. The new report – ‘Scotland’s national lynx discussion: Stakeholder views on key topics related to a potential reintroduction of the Eurasian lynx to the Scottish Highlands’ – is available at www.scotlandbigpicture.com/lynx-to-scotland.

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