

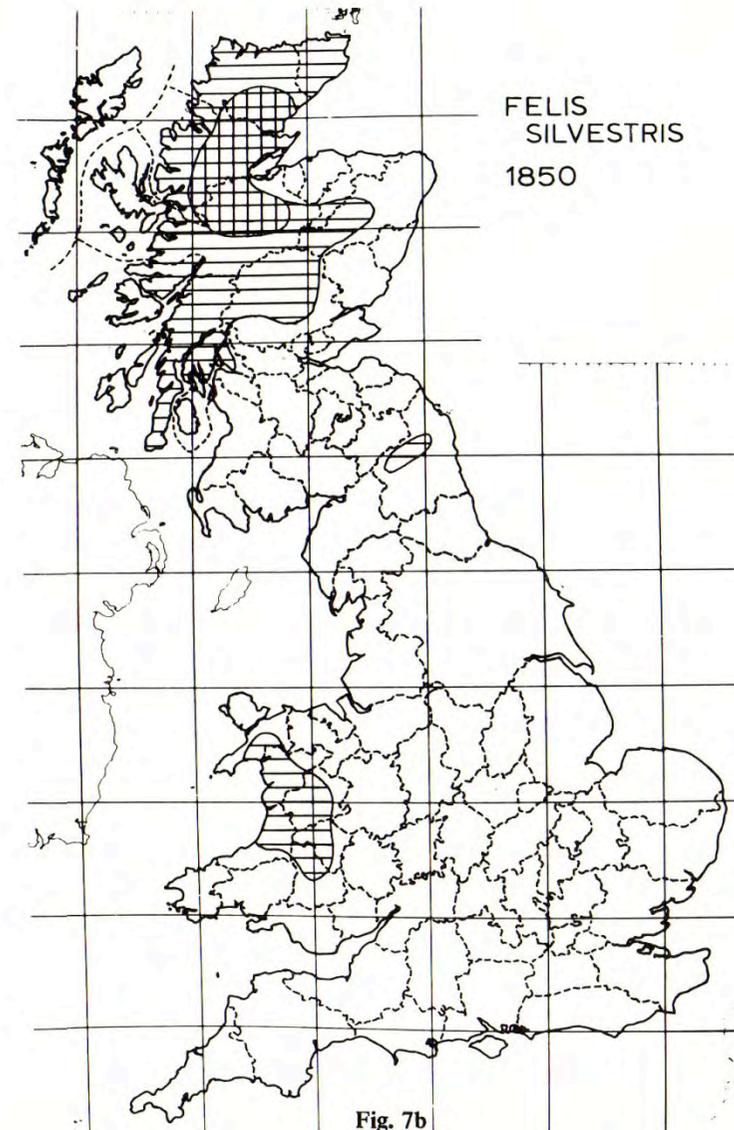
The Cairngorms Wildcat Project

Saving the Highland Tiger



The decline of the wildcat

- Once found throughout Britain, including some large offshore islands.
- Hunting and habitat loss led to decline in southern England before 1800. After this, restricted to uplands in north and north west.
- Development of sporting estates in mid-19th century sped up decline. Extinct in England & Wales by 1860.

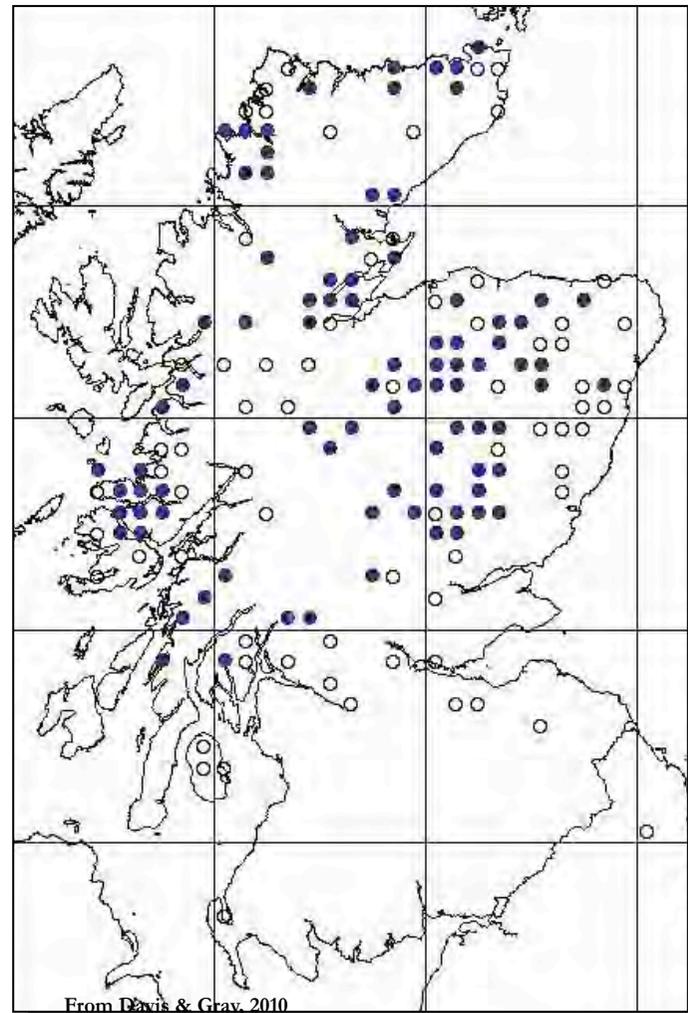


On the brink of extinction

- Habitat loss (4% woodland cover in 1900).
- Persecution.
- Saved by World War I: fewer gamekeepers and more woodland.



Wildcats in modern Scotland



The Cairngorms National Park is a special place that needs special care...

- The Cairngorms National Park is considered a stronghold for the Scottish Wildcat.
- Like the Park itself, the wildcat is a very special species, being our last native cat and therefore needs special care.



- VisitorScotland Information Centre
- Ranger base
- Long distance footpath
- National cycle route
- National Park Boundary
- Trunk road
- A road
- B road
- Minor road
- Railway/station
- Steam railway
- Woodland
- Height in metres



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Diet

Prey items in 546 wildcat faeces
Glen Tanar, 1975-78:

Rabbits & hares	92%
Rodents & shrews	18%
Grass	9%
Gamebirds	7%
Small birds	3%
Unidentified bird	3%

Social organisation

Adult males:

- Exclude other adult males from home ranges.
- Completely overlap with 2 or 3 adult females.

Adult females:

- Exclude other adult females from home ranges.
- Tolerate juveniles.



Home range

Average home range size:

- Males: 4.6 km²
- Females: 1.8 km²
- Much bigger territories in western Highlands due to less abundant prey.



Threats to the Scottish wildcat

- **Continued interbreeding with domestic cats seen as the biggest threat.**
- **Wildcat population has recently been estimated to be as low as only 400 'pure' wildcats – real risk of extinction!**
- **Risk of diseases which could be spread from domestic cat population (and vice versa).**
- **Wildcats being killed during otherwise legal predator control activities.**

The Cairngorms Wildcat Project

- Awareness raising.
- Responsible cat ownership.
- Feral cat population control.
- Wildcat-friendly predator control.
- Monitoring.

Awareness Raising



The website features a green header with the Highland Tiger logo and the tagline 'SAVING THE FORGOTTEN CAT...'. A navigation menu includes links for HOME, ABOUT, NEWS, CAIRNGORMS WILDCATS, CAT FACTS, SCIENCE, WHERE TO SEE, SUPPORTERS, HOW TO HELP, and CONTACT. The main content area is divided into several sections: a large image of a wildcat with the text '© Peter Cairns'; a 'HIGHLAND TIGER NEWS' section with a date of 28 May 2010 and a link to find out more; a 'SUPPORTERS' section listing the Cairngorms and Collinwood Hill Forestry Commission Scotland and the Royal Society of Edinburgh; a 'JOIN OUR MAILING LIST' section with a text input field and a 'subscribe' button; and a footer with four buttons: 'Cairngorms Wildcat Project', 'Wildcat blog', 'What our supporters are saying', and 'How you can help'.

The Facebook page has a blue header with the 'facebook' logo and a login field. A 'Sign Up' button is visible. The page name is 'Highland Tiger' with a 'Like' button. Navigation tabs for 'Wall', 'Info', 'Photos', 'Discussions', 'Boxes', and 'Notes' are present. The main content area shows a post from 'Highland Tiger + others' with a photo of a wildcat. The post text reads: 'Highland Tiger is a unique conservation initiative to address the demise of Britain's rarest mammal, the Scottish wildcat.' Below the post is an 'Information' section stating it was founded in 2009 and a list of 1,352 people who like the page, including Shaun Owen, Deborah Saines, Bilal Chohan, Fay Holmes, Robert Helinc, and Valeri Zema. A second post is partially visible at the bottom, mentioning 'Cairngorms Big BioBuzz Day'.

Domestic Cats in the Countryside



- 10 million domestic cats in UK.
- Valued as both a pet and a mouser.
- Estimated to kill >100 million small mammals and birds each year in UK, including game.
- Capable of interbreeding with wildcats.
- Capable of spreading fatal diseases to wildcats.
- By defecating on feed, infected kittens can spread toxoplasmosis to sheep, resulting in ewes becoming barren or aborting.

Neutering...

- Prevents further interbreeding with wildcats.
- Reduces the number of unwanted cats and limits population growth & spread.
- Prevents development of tumours of testicles, ovaries and uterus.
- Reduces likelihood of roaming and risk of being shot or run over.
- Reduces fighting and therefore injury and disease.
- Reduces wailing and spraying.

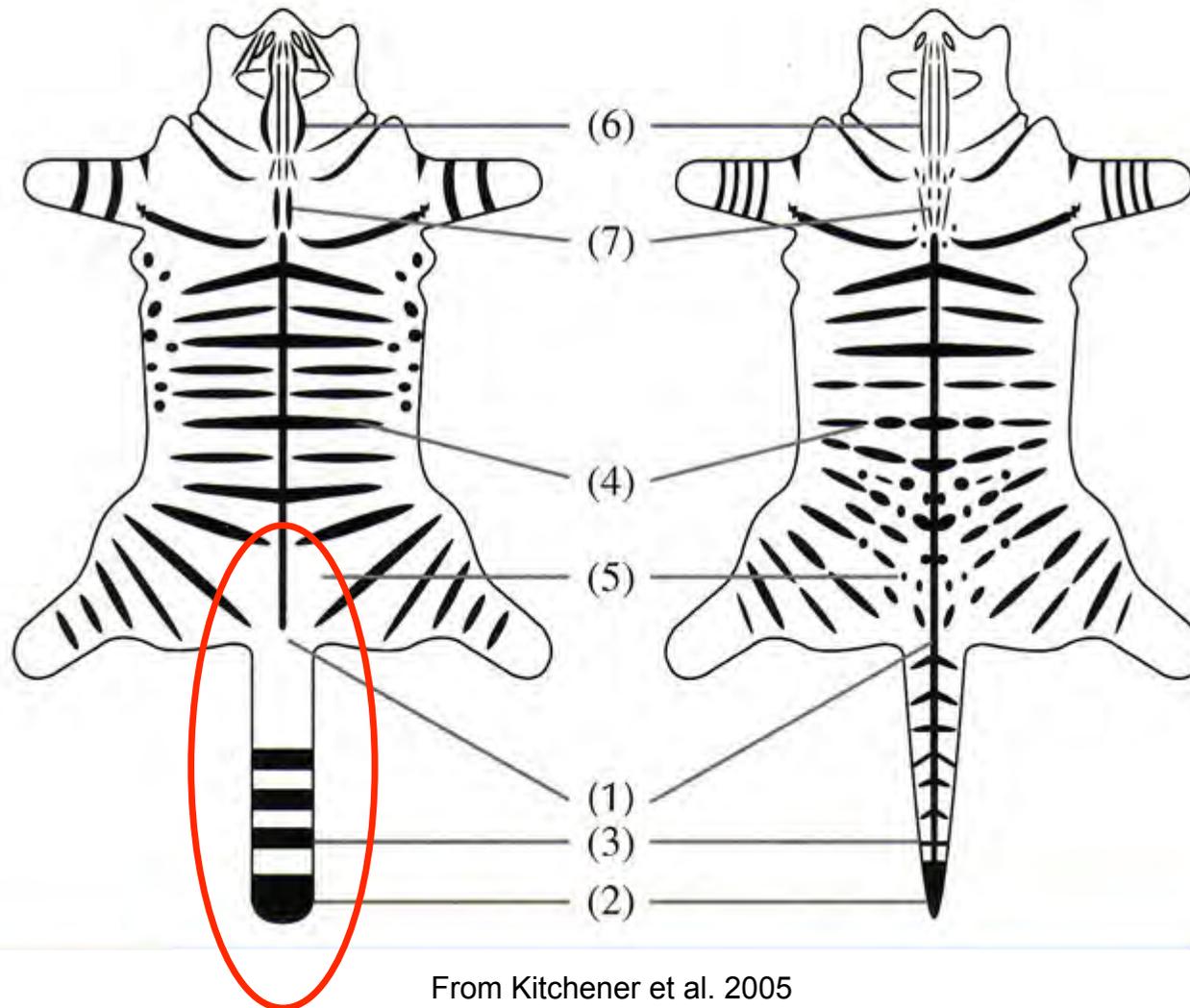
Feral cat neutering...

- Working with Cats Protection on a coordinated programme across the National Park.
- Vets act as unofficial ambassadors for the project when making farm visits.
- Trained volunteers cage-trap cats and take them to local vet.
- Feral cats are tested for disease and euthanised if positive for certain conditions.
- If tested negative, they are neutered and returned.

Telling wildcats and domestic cats apart

Scottish wildcat

Free-ranging tabby cat



From Kitchener et al. 2005

Working with estates

- Adopt a precautionary approach to feral cat control.
- Practical definition of a wildcat for field conditions.
 1. Tabby markings.
 2. No white feet.
 3. Thick, ringed, blunt-ended tail.
 4. No stripe down the tail.
- Help monitor wildcat and feral cat occurrences.

The Cairngorms National Park is a place to enjoy and get involved....

Conclusions:

- The wildcat is an icon for the people of the Cairngorms National Park, and Scotland as a whole.
- The Scottish wildcat faces a real risk of extinction.
- Efforts to save it will only succeed if **everyone** mucks in and pulls together!
- People can help by reporting wildcat sightings; reporting the occurrences of feral cats; being a responsible cat owner; and spreading the word!