



Feral cat trapping in Ardnamurchan in old crofts and farms over the past two years has revealed a large but localised feral cat population which shows some hybridisation but does contain cats with cat diseases. There is an on-going threat to wildcats from disease and hybridisation as well as the factors above which we need to address before we lose wildcats altogether. Wild living cats have a high prevalence of endoparasites and are prone to feline diseases such as FIV (the equivalent of cat "AIDS" which can be passed on by domestic and feral cats to wildcats).

The WH objective is to survey the area in two phases. Phase 1 will use camera trapping to inform us of the whereabouts of cats in the area and this will target the areas of wildcats without undue disturbance. Phase 2 will collect blood samples during cage trapping from what we believe to be wildcats based on pelage characteristics so we can examine genetic information of wildcats and closely related animals, including hybrids. The information gathered is vital to inform future wildcat conservation and to determine wildcats from hybrids and assess disease in the population. Wildcat trapping requires a research licence from Scottish Natural Heritage as they are a protected and endangered species. The WH project team consisting of a Project Manager and two assistants will supervise the research and analysis. To minimise stress to animals caught we have a rigorous trapping protocol which must be adhered to. This includes minimising the time trapped in cages and a strict treatment protocol. Our colleagues at Edinburgh University have a Home Office licence to take blood from wildcats and all wildcats will be microchipped and then released. We intend, with our colleagues, to prove a relationship between wildcat genetics and pelage.

The WH project aims to cover the Ardnamurchan peninsula by targeted cage trapping over a 5-6 month from October to February each year, thus avoiding the breeding season. In this way we will systematically survey the area for cats and learn a great deal about wildcats, feral cats and the interactions between them. In addition, we will be able to work out a population estimate for the area which will inform future wildcat conservation. In addition we will continue to trap feral cats and control cat disease which may be passed onto wildcats by other cats.

The Scottish Wildcat Association will oversee the project with a board of trustees and advisors to inform the WH team. The SWA and its team of advisors includes the majority of wildcat specialists and knowledge in the UK.

If you would like any further information regarding Scottish Wildcats and the Wildcat Haven project please contact Adrian Davis on 07761673231.