

# Our Native Wood Cat Project

## Development funding proposal

### Why make ready for our native Wood Cat?

Although wildcats (*Felis silvestris*) were once widespread throughout Britain they are now our rarest mammal. In partnership with Devon Wildlife Trust and with assistance of generous philanthropic donations to the **KEEP IT WILD** trust, we are exploring the opportunity of restoring this elusive and beautiful animal to England.

The Old English name of 'Wood-Cat' harks back to a time when this was a familiar forest beast. Declared vermin by the Elizabethans, they were hunted, without remorse, not only for their warm, soft fur but to protect the inhabitants of the valuable rabbit warrens and in the end, by the Victorian gamekeepers, to protect their pampered pheasants. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only a few scattered individuals remained in the Scottish Highlands.

In Europe, where they have recovered much of their range, research from Germany and Holland indicates that where populations are strong, they can recolonise cultural landscapes which are highly modified by human use. Even where domestic cats occur, hybridisation is low and in it's natural broad-leaved habitat, the Wood Cat always predominates. In parts of England where tapestries remain of forests, large and small, which are linked by intricate systems of hedgerows, European experts believe that they will flourish. It is likely that alongside other recovering carnivores such as the Pine Marten they will prey effectively upon the non-native Grey Squirrel and in so doing help to guarantee healthy forests for the future. Reintroduction is now the only hope for the species' return to Southern Britain as the populations that remain in Scotland are too isolated and poor.

**Phase 1** has been a success. Our four pairs all produced kittens which are doing well in large woodland enclosures where they can develop natural behaviours without interference from people.

### What we want to do next

**Phase 2-** We now need to expand our facilities to maintain this high standard of care for these growing offspring which will be the essential founders of a much larger breeding programme. This will in time, produce the critical mass of individuals required to ensure that when released and widely dispersed throughout favourable landscapes, these wild cats will have a good chance of finding suitable mates. Although the project will begin in what is believed to be the most suitable environment in Devon, there is already great support and enthusiasm for restoring the Wood Cat more widely, from the Scottish borders southward to the far channel coast. We are seeking funds which will enable us to realise the foundations for this dream through the **autumn/winter of 2022**.

### How you can help

We remain committed to providing all the staffing and welfare needs to ensure these cats are kept to the highest possible standard but we need your support.

Each Wood Cat Enclosure costs approximately **£5000** and we need to build **4**

The feeding cost for this project is **£10,000/year** and we would welcome additional support for this.

If you are in a position to support our work please don't hesitate to get in touch, we are happy to arrange a tour.

Donations can be made directly to our trust KEEP IT WILD

**Donations to : KEEP IT WILD Sort code: 08-92-99 Account: 65954625**

For further information on the Wood Cat project please contact:  
[people@keepitwild.uk](mailto:people@keepitwild.uk)

Stay with us and see Wild Cats at  
[www.rewildingcoombehead.co.uk](http://www.rewildingcoombehead.co.uk)

Our trust [www.keepitwild.org.uk](http://www.keepitwild.org.uk)



Max lewis



Wood Cat kitten bred at the Rewilding Coombeshead facility.  
(Photo Philip Jefferies)