

HOW TO IDENTIFY A SCOTTISH WILDCAT

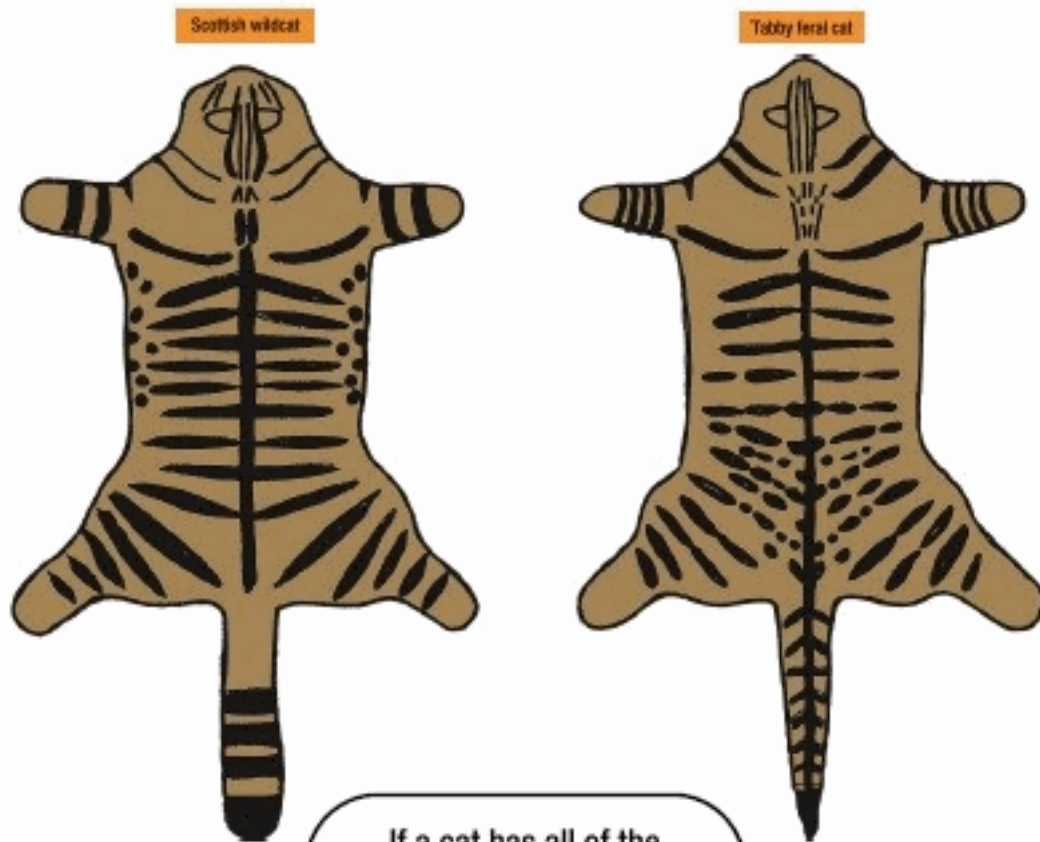
There are three ways to identify a Scottish wildcat: a pelage score, a genetic test and behaviour.

Pelage score

Dr Andrew Kitchener from our partner organisation, **National Museums Scotland**, analysed over 200 cat skins in the museums collection. From his research, he developed a way to score a cat, based on its appearance (pelage). This helps us to tell the difference between a Scottish wildcat, a tabby domestic cat and a hybrid of the two. Each characteristic is given a score: 1 (domestic cat), 2 (hybrid) and 3 (Scottish wildcat). The full diagnosis can be found [here](#).

How we use this: The pelage score will continue to be used by the museum to identify specimens, which will improve our knowledge of this rare species. Having a good understanding of the key characteristics also helps our staff and volunteers working with trail cameras. These are motion-sensitive cameras used to monitor cats living in the wild and the pelage score helps to identify what cats are out there. This also helps gamekeepers and wildcat enthusiasts to identify cats they see in the wild.

Wildcat Identification



If a cat has all of the following, assume it is a wildcat:

- Tabby markings
- No white feet
- Thick, ringed, blunt tail
- No stripe down the tail



Genetic test

Dr Helen Senn from our partner organisation, the [Royal Zoological Society of Scotland](#), has developed a genetic test to help identify Scottish wildcats from hybrids (when wildcats have interbred with domestic cats). It uses a sample of 35 nuclear DNA markers and 1 mitochondrial marker to identify the extent of hybridism (purity), and is based on one of the more powerful (83 SNP) tests currently available, developed in Switzerland. It has the advantage of generating data that can be compared to datasets for wildcats across Europe.

How we use this: Blood and hair samples are analysed by the [WildGenes](#) Laboratory at Edinburgh Zoo. By combining the genetic test with the pelage score, the scientists assess whether a cat should be used for the conservation breeding programme. If it's a high scoring cat, [The Highland Wildlife Park](#) and other land owners will then breed pairs to

create a healthy population of Scottish wildcats for the purpose of later releasing them into the wild. We also bring hair samples to Helen which we collect when conducting monitoring. We position a wooden stake in the ground which is scented with catnip or Valerian to encourage the cat to rub against it. Then we collect the hair samples and take them to the lab for analysis.

Behavioural studies

We know that Scottish wildcats behave differently, even compared with those domestic cats who are living in the wild (ferals).

Dr Roo Campbell, who manages the priority area programme for Scottish Wildcat Action, has conducted new research based on tracking cats using GPS collars to see what they got up to. His findings will be published in 2016. We'll keep you posted on this exciting new development.

Search our FAQs

Search our factsheets - curated by experts working the field.



Latest News

[See all](#)

[Top 10 blunders with camera trapping and how to avoid](#)

26 May 2017

[Getting started with camera traps](#)

28 Apr 2017

Phew, that's another winter done!

21 Apr 2017

Keep tracks on Scottish wildcats

Our email newsletter shares the research and information about wildcat conservation.

Your email address

SIGN UP →

Scottish Wildcat Action on twitter

Scottish Wildcats @SaveOurWildcats

Have you seen a cat in the wild? Report it using the @Mammal_Society app or via ow.ly/DkED30abmwX <https://t.co/MpwXspyWaf>

11h

[Report a sighting](#)

[Wildcat FAQs](#)

[Latest News](#)

[Resources](#)

[Make a donation](#)

[Become a volunteer](#)

[About Us](#)

[Terms and Conditions](#)

[Use of cookies](#)

[Contact Us](#)



**SCOTTISH
WILDCAT
ACTION**



LOTTERY FUNDED
MAOINICHTE LEIS
A' CHRANNCHUR

Scottish Wildcat Action is a partnership project that unites leading experts from over 20 key organisations. It is supported by the Scottish Government and Heritage Lottery Fund.

COPYRIGHT © 2015 SCOTTISH WILDCAT ACTION. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

CREATED BY METADIGITAL