

# INFORMATION SHEET

## What is The Missing Lynx Project?

The Missing Lynx Project is hosting an exhibition which will tour around areas where lynx could potentially live and local towns to start a conversation about lynx. We want to find out what people think and whether this missing animal could be brought back.

The exhibition is a family-friendly day out with audio-visual interactive displays which bring to life the woodlands that lynx could live in and explores what their return could look like. Visitors can discover how our landscapes have changed over the years, how nature has been lost and how restoring missing wildlife could help nature to recover.

The exhibition charts the history and comeback of lynx across Europe whilst providing a range of opportunities to listen and explore people's opinions around bringing lynx back to Britain through questionnaires, interviews, and workshops and focus groups.

## Why am I hearing about this now and how can I be involved?

**We're letting people and interest groups who are local** to the areas where lynx could potentially live **know first**. We're letting these groups know at the same time about the project as the first step in our consultation to explore and listen to local people's opinions.

Look out for more information about the travelling exhibition in your local media, on posters, and at **[missinglynxproject.org.uk](http://missinglynxproject.org.uk)**. The full website, with more information about the project and lynx, will be live during April when the free exhibition starts travelling around the area.

**If you would like to know more, please contact us on [info@missinglynxproject.org.uk](mailto:info@missinglynxproject.org.uk)**

## What are lynx and why is the project called 'the missing lynx'?

Lynx are medium-sized cats with distinctive tufted ears and short tails. Imagine a slim labrador but with golden fur and often black markings. Their big paws allow them to pad silently through their forest home, and even though they are found all over mainland Europe, they are seldom seen and live alone.

During the last Ice Age, much of Britain was covered in ice and connected to Europe by a land bridge used by plants and animals to cross into Britain. As the ice melted, sea levels rose and Britain became separated from Europe. The species that made Britain their home at this time are considered our 'native species' and made up the rich and functioning ecosystems of our island.

As human presence increased, many animals and plants began to decline and along with many other species we lost lynx from our landscapes. The same was happening across Europe, where lynx disappeared from many areas by the middle of the 20th century. It is hard to tell exactly when we lost lynx, the last physical evidence in Britain is from bones dated to about 1,500 years ago. Often as a species declines their numbers dwindle to small, scattered populations. As a species fades, physical evidence becomes harder to find and we are just left with cultural memories expressed in writing, painting, and poems. For lynx we have these written memories right up to the 18th century, but these



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more recent writings are likely to be recollections of a species already lost. We are most likely to have lost lynx sometime in the medieval period (1066 to 1485).

The earliest bones that we have for lynx in Britain are from at least 12,600 years ago. For the many thousands of years that we did have lynx in Britain they were a critical part of our ecosystems. But now all of our top carnivores are missing. Eurasian lynx eat mostly deer but do also eat medium-sized carnivores such as foxes and sometimes small animals such as rabbits. Their presence regulated other animals and had trickle-down benefits such as forest regeneration or providing carcasses for a wide range of scavenging animals, birds and insects to feed on, which they could once again do.

We are in the middle of a nature crisis. In Britain only around 40% of our biodiversity is intact, which makes us one of the worst countries in the world for the quality of our nature (we are in the bottom 10%). One in six species is at risk of extinction. We need healthy ecosystems to store carbon, for clean water, fresh air and food security. Bringing lost wildlife back and rebuilding our ecosystems is a vital part of tackling this nature crisis, and bringing back lynx could be part of this solution.

The lowest point for lynx numbers in Europe was in the 1950s. In response to this, a number of European countries have been bringing back lynx with reintroductions over the last 50 years. These reintroductions have helped lynx recover and play their part in restoring ecosystems. Projects in Europe have a lot of accumulated knowledge that is being shared with The Missing Lynx Project.



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**Germany have been restoring their lynx population over the last 20 years. This image shows the lynx 'Finja' being released in December last year (2023) into the wild in the German state of Baden-Württemberg.**

## Do we know if lynx could live in Britain now?

To test whether lynx could survive we used a similar approach as Germany did about 20 years ago. Lynx had also been lost from Germany and using this approach lynx were successfully brought back. There are now three more reintroduction projects in Germany to boost and connect lynx populations. We worked with European experts to test 'ecological feasibility' - in other words, we tested whether there would be more than a 95% chance of lynx surviving and growing to healthy populations in Britain.

Our research found that if lynx were to be released in Northumberland, they could grow into a healthy population covering north-west Northumberland, the edge of Cumbria and the bordering areas of southern Scotland. This wasn't possible in other areas of England or Wales. Only in this area do we now have the extensive forest habitats that lynx needs. **This new Missing Lynx Project is sharing these results with communities and interest groups local to this area and listening to what people think about the idea of bringing lynx back.**

We checked that researchers working on lynx in Europe agreed with our work:

*'This is so far the most comprehensive feasibility study based on the most advanced modelling techniques and can be considered the ultimate ecological/technical assessment of the potential to reintroduce the Eurasian lynx into Great Britain. It can be considered the state of the art and should – to my opinion – be released as such, not to replace, but rather to support the "human dimension" discussion'.* Dr Urs Breitenmoser Co-chair, IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group (13th June 2023).

## How is the project listening to what local people think?

Peer-reviewed literature, other literature sources and a workshop for species reintroduction experts were used alongside the mapping work to identify stakeholders (interest groups) and plan the approach. A community-based approach with **independent facilitation** will enable local community members and interest groups to develop and design collaborative aspects. There will be opportunity for those interested to visit and learn directly from Europe.

Information about the project and how to be involved is being shared directly with regional interest groups and local communities across the predicted lynx habitat area in March and April 2024.

The website **missinglynxproject.org.uk** will be live from April when the free exhibition starts travelling around the area (with both ticketed slots to guarantee a place and open drop-in times for flexibility). Information on how to attend the free exhibition, complete a questionnaire, or join workshops and focus groups will be available on the project's website during April.



**The predicted growth of a lynx population 5 years after a release into suitable habitat in northwest Northumberland (purple shading). This predicted habitat area has been used to plan the location and extent of social engagement and consultation.**

Whilst The Missing Lynx Project is exploring the ecological, practical, and social feasibility of reintroducing lynx, we would only support bringing lynx back **if local people are prepared to accept the animal back in the landscape**. There are challenges with the reintroduction of any species and communities will have different opinions. There are currently no plans to take this further without community acceptance.

Alongside the exhibition the project will offer different ways to listen to people, including:

- questionnaires (local interest groups and individuals)
- meetings (for organisations and interest groups)
- interviews (local community members)
- workshops (local community members)
- focus groups (specific interest groups)

**The Missing Lynx Project** is a partnership project between the charities: Northumberland Wildlife Trust, The Wildlife Trusts and The Lifescape Project, with a steering group of conservation organisations and institutions.

**If you would like to know more, please contact us on [info@missinglynxproject.org.uk](mailto:info@missinglynxproject.org.uk)**