

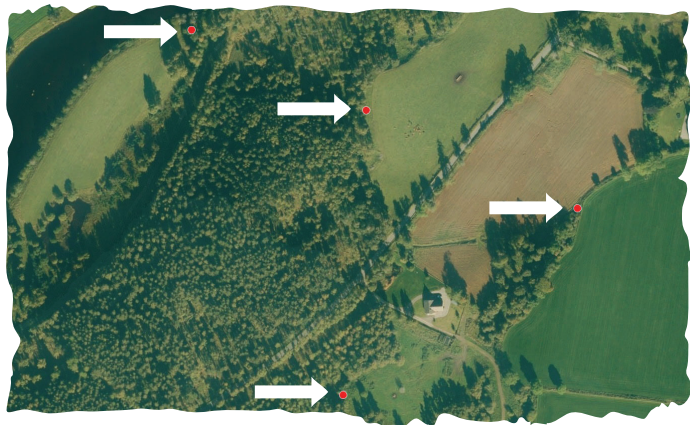


**SCOTTISH
WILDCAT
ACTION**



GUIDE TO CAMERA TRAPPING
**SCOTTISH
WILDCATS**

This leaflet contains general guidance for SWA volunteers and members of the public on siting and setting up trail cameras to survey for Scottish wildcats. Further information is available on our website. Good luck!



Examples of potential trail camera locations

When?

Winter (Nov-Mar) is the best time to detect wildcats, although they can still be found outwith of this time.

For how long?

Ideally 8 weeks, but at least 3 weeks.

STEP 1: SELECTING A LOCATION USING AERIAL MAPS

Before going into the field look at aerial maps and OS maps (available on Bing maps) of your target survey area. Try and site a camera with the aim that, even if the particular cat isn't attracted by the baits and lures, it'll happen to walk past at some point.

Look for:

- 1 Edges between open habitat (such as unmanaged grassland) and cover habitat (such as woodland or scrub).
- 2 Linear features that cats might walk along such as tracks, fences, walls, rivers/burns, gulleys, woodland belts or lines of scrub, and habitat edges.
- 3 Bottlenecks and habitat bridges such as a narrow strip of cover habitat between two separate woodland patches.

If you have more than 1 camera, try to space them at least 1km apart.

Avoid:

- Wet ground and open moorland with little cover, especially where there is deep heather.

Tips:

- Cats are unlikely to be found in the centre of dense forestry blocks, but they may use the edges, especially next to good prey habitat.
- Clear-fell is good prey habitat, and wind-throw provides good shelter.
- Ruins, rocky cairns, or woodland patches are good habitat targets in an otherwise open landscape.

STOP!

Please make sure you have the permission of the landowner before siting trail cameras.

STEP 2: SELECTING A LOCATION (MICRO-SITING) ON THE GROUND

Once on the ground, look for field signs of cats, and other smaller features that act as bottlenecks for cat movement, including the following:

- 1 Cat scats (be aware that misidentification is easy).
- 2 Cat tracks.
- 3 Animal trails, especially junctions of trails.
- 4 Holes in otherwise animal-proof fencing.
- 5 Posts or trees to secure a camera to. Ideally, these should stand straight with respect to the ground slope.
- 6 An even ground surface.

Tips:

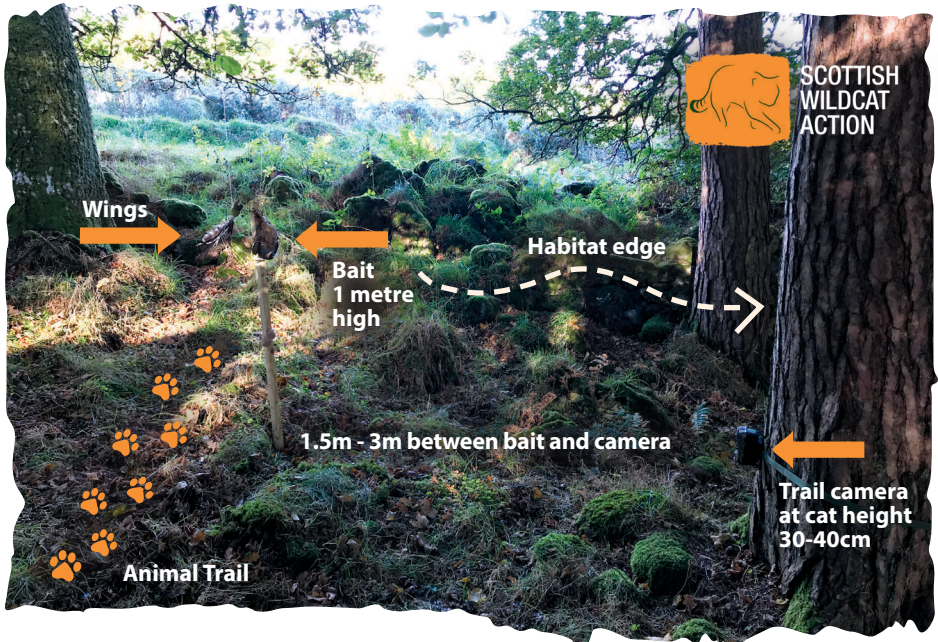
- Old ruins, rocky cairns, hollow trees, brash piles wind-throw, and empty rabbit

warrens or badger setts/fox dens can be potential wildcat den sites. But don't place a camera right next to a den site as this is illegal unless you have a licence from SNH.

- Wildcats may stakeout rabbit warrens, although be careful not to place your camera too close or you will get many pictures of rabbits.

Avoid:

- Areas with intensive badger activity
- Fields with livestock grazing
- Areas with lots of human activity
- Active forestry felling operations
- Heather
- The edge of a river that might flood during winter



See next page for full camera set-up details

STEP 3: SETTING UP THE CAMERA STATION

Once you have found a good location, you need to set up your baited camera station. Ideally, a clear area just off the path or track, preferably with a tree or post to attach the camera and bait/lures.

Trail Camera Setup Checklist

CAMERA

- 1 Full battery power (lithium type best).
- 2 Empty SD card (at least 4GB if possible).
- 3 Correct time: Use GMT not British Summer Time.
- 4 Correct date: use DD/MM/YY (Cameras often default to US format).
- 5 Correct setting: photo only with 0–5 second delay. If possible, set camera to take a burst of 3 images per trigger.

POSITION

- 1 Cat head height (30-40cm) and level with ground.
- 2 1.5-3m away from the trail or bait.
- 3 Oblique angle to path.
- 4 No vegetation in the foreground.
- 5 Face camera away from the sun.



Good example of camera location: habitat edge; hole in fence; correct camera-cat distance; bait high on fence post.

BAIT

- 1 Bait securely tied to a post or tree at least 1m off the ground. We recommend game birds but chicken legs can work.
- 2 Pheasant wing or feathers (weighted with small stick) hanging above bait can act as a visual lure.
- 3 Valerian root (dried) can be placed in hessian pouch and tied at cat head height to provide additional lure.

WHEN CAMERA AND BAIT ARE IN POSITION

- 1 Test camera: if your camera has a 'Test' mode, check that it can detect you moving at the distance/height of a cat.
- 2 Check your view: if possible, review image (e.g. on a digital camera with SD card slot); you should be in lower half of image, with no vegetation in foreground.
- 3 Arm the camera and wait until it has finished counting down.
- 4 Make sure all fastenings are tightly closed and the door seals are clean so water/moisture cannot get in.
- 5 Secure/padlock your camera if necessary.
- 6 Walk IN FRONT of camera and hold up a sheet of paper with the camera number, date, time and location (grid reference).

STEP 4: RE-VISITS AND CHECKS

Return to check the camera station approximately every two weeks, in order to swap the SD card and renew the bait.

- 1 Turn the camera OFF before removing SD cards, or you will corrupt the data.
- 2 Remove SD card and replace with an empty card.
- 3 Check battery and time/date.
- 4 Replace bait, and other lures if necessary.
- 5 Arm the camera and remember to take a photo of yourself with an information sheet as the first image.



STEP 5: DATA

- 1 At home copy your SD card to your computer immediately for back-up, noting location on filename / tags.
- 2 Review all your images to find cats, but do not delete any images (cat or otherwise) collected during the survey.
- 3 If you don't get a clear enough view, for pelage scoring, of a cat that is visiting your camera, re-angle or perhaps relocate the camera on your next visit (if you are able to review images in the field you can do this immediately). Remember, we need to see the whole cat.
- 4 You can also try placing the bait higher up to encourage the cat to stretch up and show off its nape, shoulders, back and dorsal surface of tail (all useful for pelage scoring).
- 5 If you are a volunteer on our priority area survey, your project officer will have explained how to share the data with us.
- 6 If you are participating in our national survey, then please visit <http://bit.ly/2AhdsGG> to upload the cat sightings and images.



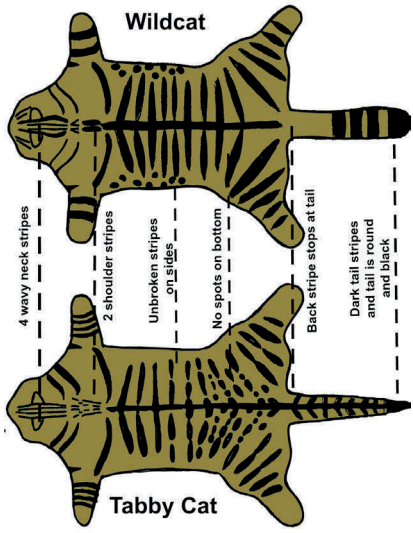
Example of an imperfect cat image due to camera setup. Tail and hindquarters not visible. Solution is to angle or position camera lower or ideally move camera further back.

IDENTIFYING A SCOTTISH WILDCAT

To enable accurate pelage scoring of a potential wildcat we need clear photos of:

- 1 Each side of that animal, showing the flank and rump.
- 2 The back of the head and shoulders.
- 3 The dorsal/back stripe and tail.

A Trouble-Shooting Guide can be found on our website here <http://bit.ly/2AhdS8G>



This is a good image with a clear view of dorsal line and tail

VISIT:

@ScottishWildcatAction
 @SaveOurWildcats
www.scottishwildcataction.org

