

Volunteer Role Description: Saving Wildcats veterinary and in-situ volunteer

Who are we?

Saving Wildcats (#SWAforLife) is a European partnership project dedicated to Scottish wildcat conservation and recovery. We aim to prevent the extinction of wildcats in Scotland by breeding and releasing them into the wild. The project is funded by the EU LIFE programme and led by the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) alongside partner organisations NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Norden's Ark and Consejería de Sostenibilidad, Medio Ambiente y Economía Azul de la Junta de Andalucía, with releases being conducted with the support of Cairngorms Connect. Please visit the project website for more information: www.savingwildcats.org.uk.

What's involved?

The role will have two main components, one assisting the project's veterinary team, and the other assisting the in-situ (field) conservation team.

Work with the project's veterinary team will include anaesthetising wild-living wildcats for health monitoring and telemetry collaring; support with the clinical management of captive wildcats in the project's off-show conservation breeding for release centre at RZSS Highland Wildlife Park; neutering of feral domestic cats; and postmortem examinations of wild-living feral domestic cats and wildcat hybrids.

In-situ conservation activities will include post-release monitoring of released wildcats, through GPS-radio tracking, live-trapping, and camera-trap monitoring; trapping of feral domestic cats as part of the Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return (TNVR) programme and data management including telemetry data and camera trap images.

This role will involve working outside of normal working hours, including overnight.

Fieldwork will include working in adverse winter weather.

This role will require a commitment of 37.5 hours a week, the equivalent of a full-time position. Volunteers may be required to work weekends but will only be required to work the equivalent of five days out of a seven-day week. The role will be physically demanding and require a high level of fitness, and a willingness to walk long distances over challenging terrain and in all weathers.

Where?

The successful candidate will work alongside the Saving Wildcats team based at the Saving Wildcats offices at the RZSS Highland Wildlife Park in Kincaig.

When?

This is a full-time position that will include overnight and weekend working up to a maximum of 37.5 hours week. This position will be available for two to three months (depending on the successful candidate's availability).

Who with?

All veterinary work will be undertaken under the direction of the project's veterinary lead, Dr Alice Bacon, RZSS Veterinary lead Dr Simon Girling, and the rest of the RZSS veterinary team. All fieldwork will be undertaken alongside and coordinated by one of the in-situ project officers.

What will the experience provide?

Volunteering will give you the opportunity to contribute directly towards conservation efforts for the critically endangered wildcat in Scotland, as part of the RZSS Saving Wildcats project team. You will learn about the conservation issues affecting wildcats and the actions being taken to prevent their extinction.

This includes developing an understanding of the field programme that monitors the released wildcats and mitigates the threats facing wildcats in Scotland today. You will gain direct practical experience of tracking mammals using GPS-radio collars, data collection and handling, and live trapping of wildcats and feral domestic cats, as well as an insight into the complexities involved with in-situ field work.

You will also develop an understanding of the role that veterinary professionals play in conservation projects and will likely gain clinical experience with wildcats.

We'll provide you with full training and ongoing support from the in-situ conservation team and the veterinary team.

You will also be provided with accommodation (a private room in a shared hostel located in a town near Highland Wildlife Park), expenses to £50 per week, and a discount to be used on-site at Highland Wildlife Park for lunch.

Vehicles will be provided for volunteers to use from Highland Wildlife Park to/from the field site. You will therefore have to be comfortable driving a manual vehicle as part of your duties. However, you will be responsible for your own transport to and from the Highland Wildlife Park, and therefore a driving license and your own vehicle are required for this position as there is no public transport out of hours. You will be compensated for your fuel costs when driving to and from Highland Wildlife Park.

Should you be successful and offered the position, the Saving Wildcats team will discuss kit requirements necessary for this opportunity. We would expect volunteers to provide most of their own kit and equipment (e.g. walking shoes, backpacks, sun hats). However, we will consider reasonable requests to provide field kit and equipment for the duration of this position should this be a barrier to you volunteering with us.

What we're looking for:

Essential:

A qualified Veterinary Surgeon, or Veterinary Nurse, with relevant companion animal, exotic or wildlife clinical experience and competency, particularly in monitoring anaesthesia.

A strong interest in Scottish wildcat recovery and a desire to learn about the challenges involved in applied conservation and species restoration.

Enthusiasm for working in a small team, including during anti-social hours and in adverse weather.

Fieldwork experience, in the Scottish Highlands or similar remote and challenging conditions.

Desirable, but not essential:

Experience of post-mortem examinations and disease surveillance, and an interest in these aspects of conservation medicine.

A strong interest in conservation medicine and evidence of motivation and enthusiasm to work in this field.

Current RCVS UK practicing registration.

Confidence driving 4x4 vehicles in potentially difficult and challenging winter conditions.

Experience of radio tracking wildlife and using camera traps.

Experience of manual restraint of wildlife species, and of field anaesthesia.

Basic ecology knowledge, including species ID of some native mammal and bird species.

You will have a responsible attitude to health and safety, be well organised and motivated with the ability to demonstrate initiative and work unsupervised. You will need to be at least 18 years of age and will be required to provide two referees who will be contacted with your consent. You will also be required to undergo a basic disclosure check prior to volunteering, which you will be reimbursed for once you have begun volunteering.

Please note that RZSS will not provide professional indemnity insurance. As you will be supervised by Dr Alice Bacon, lead vet for the Saving Wildcats partnership, you do not need to provide your own, but you may choose to.

How to apply:

Please send your CV and a cover letter via email to hparsons@rzss.org.uk by Wednesday 25 September. In your cover letter, please explain why you would like to be considered for this experience and detail your availability. Ideally, the position will start on Monday 14 October and last for a minimum of two months, but we may consider candidates with alternative availability, or candidates who may like to stay longer. Please make sure your cover letter is no more than one A4 page. If you have any questions about this experience, please contact hparsons@rzss.org.uk.

RZSS is committed to being fair, open and inclusive. We believe that RZSS benefits from the involvement of volunteers from diverse cultures, perspectives and experiences. We will not discriminate on the grounds of gender, race, disability, age, religious beliefs, and so on. In some cases, extra support may be given to volunteers (e.g. those with disabilities). We expect our volunteers to adhere to the Guidelines on Equality and Diversity