

Placement Role Description: Saving Wildcats veterinary and in-situ placement

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. Trap-Neuter Vaccinate-Return work to mitigate hybridisation (interbreeding) and disease transfer is conducted together with Cats Protection. Work to move towards a fair coexistence between wildcats and people is conducted alongside the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust. The project is seeking to build strong collaborations with the farming sector together with Agroecosystems Ltd. Together, the partnership is working to prevent the extinction of Scotland's wildcats by breeding and releasing them into the wild, while tackling threats such as hybridisation with domestic cats.

Please visit the project website for more information: www.savingwildcats.org.uk

What's involved?

The role will be divided between assisting the in-situ (field) conservation team and assisting the project's veterinary team.

In-situ conservation activities may include supporting the team with the monitoring of released wildcats, through:

- GPS-radio tracking
- Live-trapping (including fitting GPS-radio collar), and camera trap monitoring
- Trapping of feral domestic cats as part of the Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return programme
- Data management, including telemetry data and camera trap images

Work with the project's veterinary team may include assisting with:

- Anaesthetising wild-living wildcats for health monitoring and telemetry collaring
- Anaesthetising and neutering feral domestic cats
- Postmortem examinations of wild-living feral domestic cats and wildcat hybrids
- Record keeping and data management

This role is not restricted to normal working hours and will include overnight work. The veterinary team may require support across multiple nights per week, as per the needs of the project. The role may also involve some weekend work, but the successful applicant will only be required to work the equivalent of five days out of a seven-day week.

While fieldwork will include working in adverse winter weather, such as cold, wet, windy conditions, no work is carried out during yellow weather warnings or above, or if there is significant snow cover.

The role will be physically demanding and require a high level of fitness, including the ability to walk long distances over challenging terrain and in all weathers. For example, when assisting in monitoring released wildcats, the team may trek at a faster-than-average pace, over steep inclines, at distances of up to 10km over rough terrain (for example, across forest, moorland, and peatland).

Field anaesthetics will be conducted in a mobile clinic in a small van, necessitating working in a relatively confined space alongside our vet. This work requires the use of head torches for light sources, and thermal layers are recommended for warmth.

Where?

The successful candidate will work alongside the Saving Wildcats team based at the Saving Wildcats offices at the RZSS Highland Wildlife Park near Kincaig (PH21 1NL).

When?

This is a full-time position that will include overnight and weekend working, up to a maximum of 37.5 hours a week. This placement is intended for three to four months (depending on the successful candidate's availability), ideally from the start of October 2026. Shorter term placements may also be considered.

Who with?

All veterinary work will be undertaken under the direction and supervision of the project's veterinary lead, or RZSS's veterinary lead, and the rest of the RZSS veterinary team. All fieldwork will be undertaken alongside the project's in-situ team and coordinated by the field operations manager.

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 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 they face in Scotland. You will gain direct practical experience of tracking wildcats using GPS-radio collars and camera traps, as well as experience in data collection and handling, and live trapping of wildcats and feral domestic cats. The successful candidate will also gain a deeper insight into the complexities involved with in-situ fieldwork and develop an understanding of the role that veterinary professionals play in conservation projects. Furthermore, this role may offer opportunities to gain clinical experience anaesthetising wildcats in the field, which may contribute to your continued professional development (CPD) requirements.

As part of this role, Saving Wildcats will provide full training and ongoing support from the in-situ conservation team and the veterinary team.

Accommodation will also be provided (a private room in a shared hostel located in a town near Highland Wildlife Park), as well as expenses up to £55 per week, and a discount to be used on-site at Highland Wildlife Park for lunch.

However, volunteers are responsible for their own transport to and from the Highland Wildlife Park, or field sites, and therefore a driving license and access to their own vehicle are required for this position as there is no public transport out of hours. Fuel costs are reimbursed by Saving Wildcats for journeys to and from these places of work.

Project vehicles will be provided for volunteers to use from Highland Wildlife Park to/from the field site. Applicants should therefore be comfortable driving a manual vehicle.

Once the successful applicant is offered this 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, waterproofs, warm layers). However, we will consider reasonable requests to provide field kit and equipment for the duration of this position should this be a barrier for anyone wishing to volunteer with us.

What we're looking for:**Essential:**

A Registered Veterinary Nurse (RVN), or qualified veterinary surgeon (MRCVS), with relevant companion animal, exotic or wildlife clinical experience and competency, particularly in monitoring anaesthesia.

Current RCVS UK practicing registration.

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

Willingness to participate in fieldwork in all weather conditions and enthusiasm for working in a small team, including during anti-social hours.

An interest or experience in living and volunteering in the Scottish Highlands or in similar rural and challenging conditions.

A high level of physical fitness, including the ability to walk long distances over challenging terrain and in all weather.

A general positive attitude and adaptability, including happiness to live in a co-shared space.

A responsible attitude to health and safety, be well organised and motivated with the ability to demonstrate initiative.

Applicants 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. A basic disclosure check is also required prior to volunteering, for which the cost will be reimbursed at the start of the placement.

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.

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

Experience radio tracking wildlife and using camera traps.

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

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

Please note that RZSS will not provide professional veterinary indemnity insurance. As the role will be supervised at all times by the RZSS veterinary team, applicants do not need to provide their own but may choose to.

How to apply:

Please send your CV and a cover letter via email to gshooter@rzss.org.uk by the end of Tuesday 8 September 2026. In your cover letter, please explain why you would like to be considered for this experience. Interviews will take place during the week beginning 14 September. Ideally, the position will cover three to four months from the beginning of October 2026. Shorter-term placements may be considered. Please indicate your availability in your application. Please make sure your cover letter is no more than one A4 page. If you have any questions about this experience, please contact gshooter@rzss.org.uk.

This role is subject to standard checks, including the candidate's right to volunteer in the UK and a Basic Disclosure check.

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.