

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 and Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return work carried out with the local branch of Cats Protection. 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 in-situ (field) conservation team and the other assisting the project's veterinary team.

In-situ conservation activities will include assisting the project team with post-release monitoring of released wildcats, through:

- GPS-radio tracking,
- live-trapping (including collaring), and camera-trap monitoring;
- trapping of feral domestic cats as part of the TNVR programme
- data management including telemetry data and camera trap images.

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

- anaesthetising wild-living wildcats for health monitoring and telemetry collaring;
- anaesthetising and neutering of feral domestic cats;
- postmortem examinations of wild-living feral domestic cats and wildcat hybrids;
- record keeping and data management.

This role will involve working outside of normal working hours, including overnight. There will be the potential to assist the veterinary team multiple nights per week as per the needs of the project.

Fieldwork will include working in adverse winter weather, such as cold, wet, windy conditions. Fieldwork does not happen during yellow weather warnings or above, or if there is significant snow cover.

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, including ability to walk long distances over challenging terrain and in all weathers. For example, when assisting in monitoring of released wildcats, the team may trek at a faster than average pace, over steep inclines, at distances of up to 10km over rough terrain (forest, moorland, peatland etc.).

Field anaesthetics will be conducted in a mobile clinic in a small van (not able to stand up when inside the van), necessitating working in a relatively confined space alongside our vet. Working in the van requires head torches to be used for light sources, and thermal layers to be worn.

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 position will be available for three to four months (depending on the successful candidate's availability).

Who with?

All veterinary work will be undertaken under the direction and supervision of the project's veterinary lead or the RZSS 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 facing wildcats. You will gain direct practical experience of tracking wildcats using GPS-radio collars and camera traps, 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 anaesthetising wildcats in the field.

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, or field site, 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 these places of work.

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, 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 to you volunteering with us.

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

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

Current RCVS UK practicing registration.

A strong interest in Scottish wildcat recovery 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.

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.

You will have a responsible attitude to health and safety, be well organised and motivated with the ability to demonstrate initiative.

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 you will be supervised by the RZSS veterinary team, 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 the end of Sunday 26 October. In your cover letter, please explain why you would like to be considered for this experience. Interviews will take place during the week beginning 27 October. Ideally, the position will cover four months until mid-March and will start as soon as possible. We may consider candidates with alternative availability, or candidates who may like to stay longer. 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 hparsons@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.