Scottish threatened species thrown a lifeline by the Heritage Lottery Fund

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Today, their fight for survival has been given a helping hand as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) announced funding for two natural heritage projects: the Scottish Dragon Finder, and the Scottish Wildcat Conservation project. The announcement of development funding for the Scottish Wildcat Conservation project coincides with today's launch of the Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Plan by Environment Minister, Paul Wheelhouse.

Colin McLean, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland, said: "This year, the Year of Natural Scotland, brings into focus the natural beauty and biodiversity that surrounds us. It is one of our greatest national assets, attracting visitors from home and abroad and making a valuable contribution to our tourist economy.

"We have some incredible native wildlife in Scotland but our species and habitats are under constant threat. Recent reports such as State of Nature and the Scottish Government's 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity plan highlight the need to act now if we are to protect it. We hope that with the Heritage Lottery Fund support announced today, communities across the country will be inspired and empowered to safeguard the existence of these rare creatures."

Scottish Dragon Finder
The Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded a grant of £422,400 to a project which will directly involve 28,000 people in conserving Scotland's amphibian and reptile species, collectively known as herptiles. There are 10 native herptiles species in Scotland, seven of which feature as priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. These include the great-crested newt, the natterjack toad and the grass snake.

Over four and a half years, the project will involve communities, school children, gardeners and hill walkers in improving fresh-water ponds across 14 local authority areas, identifying and recording the current amphibians and reptile populations and in learning activities to raise awareness of the endangered species and the role they play in the country's biodiversity.

Kathy Wormald, Froglife's CEO added "We are thrilled to be bringing our innovative Dragon Finder project to Scotland. We will be introducing people who have never seen these animals before to the wonders on their doorstep, and encouraging those who spend a lot of time outdoors to let us know when they see amphibians and reptiles through our free app. We'll be hosting some really creative educational activities and hosting trainee placements, alongside work to create and restore habitats across Scotland."

Scottish Wildcat Conservation project
Once numerous across the whole of mainland Britain, the Scottish wildcat is now restricted to northern Scotland and we are in danger of losing it as a distinct species unless action is taken to conserve it.

The HLF has given its initial support to a project which aims to reverse the decline in areas of Tayside, Aberdeenshire and the Highlands by awarding a First Round Pass* of £873,000 including development funding of £29,800.

There is not a reliable estimate of current wildcat numbers, although the evidence points to them being extremely rare. The main threat to its survival is interbreeding with domestic or feral cats as well as the risk of disease. The new

Conservation Action Plan aims to establish at least five wildcat areas as the focus for direct conservation activity. This will include a programme of neutering and vaccinating feral cats and working with land managers to reduce the risks to wildcats from land management activities. There will also be a Scotland-wide awareness raising campaign helping people understand the threats to this iconic native animal and what domestic cat owners can do to help.

Jenny Bryce, Scottish Natural Heritage's Wildlife Ecologist who has been at the forefront of the plan, said: "We are delighted to announce that the Heritage Lottery Fund has agreed to fund the development of this important project which aims to save the Scottish wildcat.

"Conserving wildcats arouses passions in many people, and the HLF's involvement will go a long way to safeguarding this most elusive of our wild mammals. The next stage is to ensure that the project is well-designed and delivers the most benefit for wildcats. This funding will help to ensure this work gets underway."

Notes to editors

• A new action plan to reverse the decline of the Scottish wildcat within six years is being launched today. It will be implemented through a partnership project under the direction of the Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Group, chaired by Scottish Natural Heritage. For further information visit the Scottish Natural Heritage website.

• *A first-round pass means the project meets the Heritage Lottery Fund criteria for funding and the Heritage Lottery Fund believes it has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. However, a first-round pass does not guarantee the applicant will receive a grant although the chances of receiving a grant are high. The second-round application will still be in competition for funding, and no money is set aside at this stage. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals.

• Using money raised through the National Lottery, HLF aims to make a lasting difference for heritage, people and communities across the UK and help build a resilient heritage economy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 3,000 projects with an investment of over £611million across Scotland.

Further information

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