LIVING WITH LYNX - LESSONS FROM SWITZERLAND

A report by the Lynx to Scotland project

LYNX TO SCOTLAND

In late April 2024, delegates from the Lynx to Scotland project, including SCOTLAND: The Big Picture and Trees for Life, escorted 13 interested stakeholders with backgrounds in farming, hunting and forestry, together with representatives from the Cairngorms National Park, on a study tour to the Jura region of Switzerland. The aim was to learn more about how Switzerland has managed its Eurasian lynx reintroduction and what lessons might be learned for a possible lynx reintroduction to Scotland.

Why Switzerland?

No country in Europe presents a perfectly analogous situation to the ecological, social and agricultural situation in Scotland, but Switzerland presents an interesting case study for several reasons. Lynx were reintroduced to Switzerland in the 1970s, allowing lessons to be learned from their experience of this process, while the style of livestock husbandry and the abundance of wild prey in Switzerland share more similarities with Scotland than either Norway, where sheep are left for long periods unchecked in woodland, or countries in Eastern Europe, where shepherds often guard flocks day and night.

Switzerland has a nearly identical total area of woodland to Scotland (±13,000km^2 versus ±14,000km^2), albeit condensed within a smaller area, and sustains a much higher human population density (there are 8.7 million Swiss crowded into 41,285km^2 versus 5.5 million Scots spread out over 77,910km^2). But whereas Scotland has eliminated all its terrestrial large carnivores, more than 250 lynx now live in Switzerland (alongside a similar number of wolves), offering an interesting counterpoint to claims that Scotland is too small, too crowded, or lacks enough habitat to support large carnivores. Nonetheless, Switzerland is certainly not some kind of wild utopia for predators. After Norway, Switzerland has been assessed to suffer some of the highest rates of sheep consumption by lynx in Europe. In other words, there is conflict in Switzerland, but it is managed. It therefore provided a particularly useful case study for considering the potential for lynx reintroduction to Scotland.

The Swiss reintroduction story

On 23 April 1971, the Forestry Department and the Swiss Federal Forestry Inspectorate secretly released a pair of Carpathian lynx from southern Czechoslovakia into the Alpine region of Melchtal. This pioneering release was the first reintroduction of the Eurasian lynx to Central and Western Europe, and provides more than 50 years of Swiss experience to look back on and learn from.

These first two lynx bred successfully, but the male was poached in autumn 1974, the female died, and the orphaned kittens did not survive. A second release in 1972 in the north-western Alps proved more successful, helped by unofficial releases in the same area, and young lynx were observed as early as 1975 as lynx began to spread.

In the Jura, the reintroduction process also began with a single breeding pair, released at Creux-du-Van in 1972. Back then, there was little awareness of what was needed to build up a viable population, nor was much thought given to the long-term consequences of a small founder population and resulting inbreeding, but these releases were bolstered by unofficial releases in the nearby Vallée de Joux. As a result, this nascent population started to slowly expand into the northern Jura in the late 1980s.

KORA's report on 50 years of the lynx in Switzerland notes that these initial releases 'were driven by men and women of action who wanted to make their vision a reality without worrying too much about political correctness.' However, one of the things they stressed that they have learnt over the years was that they should have done a proper public consultation ahead of these releases. KORA staff also recommend maintaining a public database of livestock losses, in the interests of transparency and trust-building.

Why the Swiss Jura?

Lynx were reintroduced to both the Alps and the Jura Mountain ranges in Switzerland. However, since the return of lynx and – especially – wolves, livestock in the Alps are increasingly secured at night and then escorted by shepherds during the day. By contrast, in the Swiss Jura, sheep are still either left unsupervised in small, fenced paddocks within the wooded landscape or, occasionally, accompanied by livestock guardian dogs. With the active shepherding tradition having lapsed in Scotland, we sought a situation where sheep were not guarded around the clock, such as is common in Eastern Europe, and the situation in the Swiss Jura thus appeared to offer a more useful comparison to Scotland. A further similarity is that both the Swiss Jura and Scotland offer lynx an abundant supply of wild prey, with the availability of medium-sized ungulates believed to be a key factor influencing the risk of livestock depredation, and this was something we wanted to learn more about.

Differences between Switzerland and Scotland

Switzerland has a much higher human population density than Scotland. Switzerland is a federation of smaller semi-autonomous regions known as cantons, with the canton of Jura covering ±840km^2 and home to 74,000 people (a population density of 88 people per km^2 compared to the Scottish Highlands with its average of just 9 people per km^2, or even Scotland as a whole, which supports 72 people per km^2). Switzerland has slightly less woodland area in total compared to Scotland, although a higher proportion of the country is wooded. The canton of Jura is 44% forested, meaning it has a much higher proportion of woodland than Scotland's average of just under 20%.

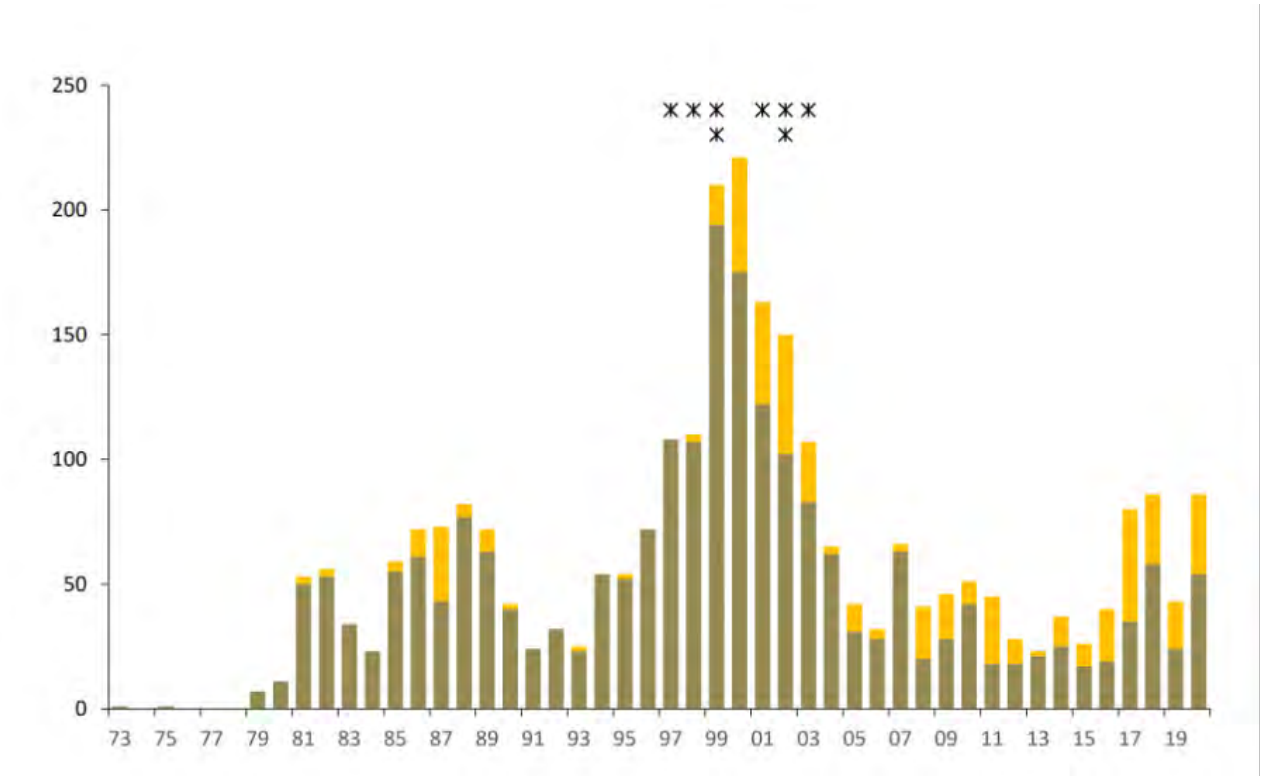
Furthermore, Switzerland, like most countries in Europe, is home to fewer sheep than Scotland. In the Swiss Jura, sheep densities are a little under 5 per km^2 and nationwide Switzerland supports ±400,000 sheep at a density of just under 10 sheep per km^2. In Scotland, the national flock is estimated at over 6.8 million head, with densities of over 120 sheep per km^2 in many places. Sheep densities are at their lowest in the Highlands, but still average around 30 sheep per km^2 in Argyll, 17 sheep per km^2 in Inverness-shire, 15 sheep per km^2 in Ross and Cromarty, and 12 sheep per km^2 in Sutherland (according to the latest APHA survey). Sheep and livestock are also mostly kept indoors over winter in Switzerland, only grazing outside (when they are most vulnerable to predators) through the summer months. By comparison, Scottish sheep are typically grazed outside all year round and in some cases even lamb on the hill.

Learning from KORA

Dr Fridolin Zimmerman and his colleague Dr Kristina Vogt, two employees of KORA – an in-state foundation responsible for carnivore ecology and wildlife management within Switzerland – together with a group of local officials, wildlife rangers and hunters, met us at the regional headquarters of the Swiss wildlife service at Saint Ursanne, where a wide-ranging discussion took place.

We learned about the history of livestock losses in Switzerland, where the greatest conflicts occurred in the Alps around the turn of the century, reaching a peak in 2000 when a total of 221 livestock were recorded lost to lynx. This led to formalised support for the prevention of losses, compensation for damages and a policy for the removal of 'problem lynx'.

Livestock losses in the Alps subsequently declined and then stabilised at between 20 and 40 animals per year. Losses in the Jura have generally been lower than in the Alps, but in the last 15 years, the proportion of attacks in the Jura has increased. Fewer protection measures were put in place here than in the Alps and the availability of wild prey has varied. Since 2017, the number of livestock lost to lynx attacks in both regions has again increased slightly as lynx numbers have increased, but losses remain far below the level recorded in 2000, likely thanks to a combination of improved protection measures alongside an increasing chamois population and relatively stable roe deer population.



Confirmed livestock losses (mostly sheep) in the Swiss Alps (olive green bars) and Swiss Jura regions (yellow bars) compensated with payments to farmers between 1973 and 2020. Crosses represent lynx that were legally shot during the period of highest losses (data from KORA Report Nr. 99e. 50 years of lynx presence in Switzerland. 2022)

We thus learned that livestock losses in Switzerland have varied over time, linked to the availability of wild prey as well as changes in herding practices. In the central Alps, for a while after lynx were first released, both lynx numbers and the number of roe deer being shot increased, but then, between 1976 and 1981, the number of roe deer being shot each year declined dramatically, from 494 to 148. In the following years, woodland regeneration increased but as the roe deer population fell, attacks on livestock increased. After a few years, an equilibrium was

re-established, but in the late 1990s, a similar phenomenon reoccurred: there was an increase in lynx density, a decline in roe deer populations and an increase in attacks on livestock.

Dr Vogt explained that the changes in deer density weren't all linked to lynx predation but were additionally influenced by changing winter weather and varying pressure from hunters. In the 1990s, a series of mild winters led to a significant increase in the local roe deer population, which supported an increase in lynx density. However, this increase in roe deer also worried foresters, leading the federal authority to seek reductions in roe deer densities. In 1994, a record 1,065 roe deer were shot, but by 1999 this number had fallen to 117. After a very harsh winter in 1999/2000, the roe deer population collapsed completely. As their preferred prey declined, the lynx turned to other prey such as chamois and sheep, but then lynx numbers also declined, accelerated by reaction to the growing conflict with livestock. Seven lynx were shot after it was established that they had repeatedly killed livestock, six were translocated to eastern Switzerland and many more were killed illegally.

Scottish stakeholders joined local officials, wildlife rangers and hunters for a presentation by Dr Fridolin Zimmermann and Dr Kritstina Vogt at the Swiss Wildlife Service at Saint Ursanne, followed by a frank and wide-ranging discussion on coexistence with lynx.

The lesson seemed to be that lynx and deer populations require dynamic management, whereby deer densities are kept high enough that lynx are not forced to switch their attention to sheep, but not so high that they inhibit woodland regeneration.

Conflict management

Swiss policy is to manage the impact of lynx rather than to try to limit their numbers. Indeed, official policy is to try and maintain lynx numbers above a minimum of 1.5 per 100km^2. Provisions exist for the removal of problem animals, but for this measure to be adopted, a conflict threshold must be exceeded, and further strict criteria must be met.

A lynx can only be removed in Switzerland if at least 15 sheep are confirmed to have been killed by lynx (albeit potentially in fewer than 15 attacks) in less than 12 months within a 5km radius or, if separate sheep depredation events fall outside of that radius, if at least 15 fatal attacks can be linked to the identity of a specific lynx (normally by camera trap photographs set up at carcasses). Furthermore, if there have been attacks by lynx the previous year, this threshold is reduced to 12 sheep.

In addition, before a lynx can be removed (captured or shot), three key criteria must be met:

1. Authorities must be satisfied that removal is the only option and no other solution exists (e.g. implementation of further mitigation measures).

2. The lynx's removal must not threaten the health or viability of the national lynx population.

3. Reasonable attempts must have been made to secure livestock from attack.

Notably, the second criterion would prevent any lynx removal from a small population, such as would exist in the early stages of a reintroduction. The third criterion prompted some debate about what constituted 'reasonable' in the context of protection efforts. Dr Zimmerman explained that some cantons have evaluated all sheep pastures to decide what makes sense in each case. Indeed, some pastures are classed as 'unprotectable' and are thus exempt from the requirement that livestock is kept securely.

Since the first authorisation to shoot a lynx was granted in 1997, only 13 further authorisations have been issued, the last of which was issued in 2003. With one exception, all these lynx were adults. In 50% of cases, after lynx were removed, no further damage was reported from that location the following year, suggesting the removed lynx was the problem, but in the other 50% of cases, attacks continued, suggesting that a complex mix of local factors was contributing to that location being a conflict hotspot.

We heard that individual lynx may start attacking livestock more frequently due to a scarcity of wild prey or due to an individual handicap (e.g. disease or injury), or that factors specific to the location of a pasture may increase the likelihood of attacks. The most vulnerable livestock are those on pastures surrounded by forests or interspersed with many shrubs, in areas where abundant wild prey inevitably attract lynx. In these hotspots, the removal of individual lynx causing damage may be of little use, as these individuals will probably be replaced by a new individual that causes damages again. In such circumstances, only herd protection measures offer a long-term solution. Accordingly, we were told that investment in prevention measures is best aimed at these conflict hotspots.

Compensation payments

Compensation is only paid in Switzerland when a lynx is confirmed as the responsible predator and a carcass is recovered (we learned that this is getting harder in the Alps due to the growing presence of vultures). Payments are scaled to fairly reflect, as far as possible, the value of livestock lost, taking into account age, sex, breeding potential etc. with some negotiation possible and every case judged independently.

Further compensation may be available if livestock must be moved in response to a lynx, and conservation payments are available to help fund preventative measures. Some cantons also pay out for 'probable losses', paying 50% of an animal's value where there is good reason to suspect a lynx's involvement. Annual losses only amount to 12-50 sheep in the Jura, with compensation payments averaging around 5-6,000CHF (approx. £5000) for all lynx losses, while total wild boar compensation payments cost as much as one hundred times more, ranging from 300,000-500,000CHF.

Other conflicts

We heard how one or two hunting dogs are wounded by mother lynx every year, but nobody could recall any dogs being killed. A handful of domestic cats are also reportedly killed by lynx, with it suggested that younger, inexperienced lynx may be more likely to approach rural buildings and target domestic cats. Impacts on black grouse are reportedly minimal and it was noted that the Jura also supports a healthy and growing population of wildcats alongside its lynx.

Lynx are also now apparently colonising and breeding on the Swiss plateau (between the Alps and the Jura ranges), adapting to landscapes with less woodland. We heard convincing testimony that lynx are adapting to survive in more human-dominated landscapes, including a female that had established a territory and had kittens near Bern airport. She was rarely seen, hunting deer at night and lying up in woodland copses during the day, and reportedly did no harm to local livestock, but was eventually killed on a road. Most lynx mortality in Switzerland is caused by humans, with traffic accidents the leading known cause (32%). Indeed, as lynx are spreading across Switzerland, more lynx are being killed on roads.

How Swiss farmers feel about lynx

Knowing that lynx have created some conflict with livestock farmers, we had asked to speak to some individuals who have been directly affected, hoping to hear more about their experiences. KORA had therefore arranged a visit to a recent conflict hotspot at Bergerie de Froidevaux, a sheep farm near Soubrey managed by Claudia Raimann and her partner Michel.

Claudia told us a story that illustrated how bold lynx can be, as she described a lynx that had killed one of her lambs, refusing to abandon its kill as she approached it and ignoring her even when she shone a light on it from just a few metres away. This particular lynx also apparently carried a 20kg lamb out of their house and jumped over a 1.1m high fence with the lamb in its jaws. On another occasion, Claudia reported a lynx killed 12 of her animals in one night.

In total, Claudia stated that she had lost more than 20 animals in the previous 10 months. She conceded that some might have been lost to wolves rather than lynx but she was also frustrated that when animals had not been recovered there had been no compensation. This exchange highlighted the difficulty with dealing with black loss and the difference between apparently clear rules and the complicated realities on the ground.

Prior to the recent spate of attacks, they had a long period with no problems but in 2000, a lynx was shot here after it had killed an estimated 50 sheep. Dr Zimmerman acknowledged that they waited too long to act in that case. Asked if they would like to be able to shoot lynx, Claudia admitted: 'Yes. Sometimes. We had to change very much. We have now very, very, very much more work; not just due to the lynx, but the wolf also.' Claudia also later confided that while she is reasonably ambivalent about lynx and feels that 'the lynx is okay if it stays in the forest,' if you asked Michel right now, he would prefer there were no lynx here, saying, 'Why did they bring the lynx here? I don't understand. Nobody asked us.'

Claudia breeds and trains Pyrenean mountain dogs as livestock guardians. Training takes 15 months and includes testing of their response to people. Claudia claims her dogs are totally safe. Asked about dog walkers, Claudia admitted some dogs can be attacked, but Dr Zimmerman felt that people are usually to blame and that education of the public can help. We were told that there is an App in Switzerland that maps where guardian dogs are working so people can plot

Claudia Raimann is not entirely opposed to lynx but wanted us to know that, at times, she and her partner have suffered serious losses from lynx attacks, illustrating the challenges of coexistence.

routes around them and there is a number to ring so people can be guided safely past dogs if necessary. Not all farmers use dogs. Some just use fences, albeit usually electrified. However, with the growing presence of wolves, more people are using dogs to protect their animals.

The next morning, we met Laurent Geslin, a wildlife film-maker and local lynx expert, who took us to Enges in the canton of Neuchatel. Here, we visited a farm where we met Ludovic (a state-employed wildlife warden) and Luka (a farmer who has been keeping sheep since 2006 – notably having begun to keep sheep despite the pre-existing presence of lynx).

Luka told us about an attack he had suffered recently when he lost five lambs from within a barn in a single attack. We later visited this barn, located on the edge of a small wood beside several large, open fields. The lynx had to jump over a 1.1m flexi-net to get at the lambs, and there was some discussion that this enclosure encouraged the multiple killing in this case, with Laurent suggesting that if the lambs had been in the open field the lynx would just have taken one.

Luka Gerber, a Neuchatel sheep farmer since 2006, has lost small numbers of lambs to lynx, but was sanguine about these losses in the cases where he has received compensation. A local game warden told us: 'The older generation are perhaps a bit more anti-lynx, but the new generation are more inclined to live and let live.'

This prompted discussion about how much lynx might be willing to hunt in the open, and Laurent said he has seen lynx stalking deer in the open, drawing an analogy with pumas stalking guanacos in Patagonia. Laurent said that the lynx is an ambush predator, but it can use folds in the ground to stalk in the open, or if it is a cloudy or moonless night, it can use darkness to mask its approach. Laurent also said he has seen a lynx walk through a field of goats to hunt deer and that he has a friend who had seen a lynx 'playing' with a sheep, just pushing it without attacking it.

Luka suffered another suspected lynx attack last May when a single lamb was taken. He thought it was a lynx attack but told us that the warden moved the carcass to a nearby fox den and then recorded a fox on the camera trap, so he got no compensation. These were the only two attacks he has experienced since 2006. Luka further admitted he was not overly upset by these losses. He said he would worry more if the lynx had killed especially prized animals, but he was compensated for the five lambs at their 'finishing price' despite them only being a few days old. On the other hand, he said wolves are causing bigger problems and Ludovic revealed the authorities have already exhausted this year's compensation budget just on payments following wolf attacks.

A neighbour appeared and described losing two calves to an unknown predator. She doesn't know if it was a lynx or a wolf or something else, saying the calves may have been too weak to stand or could even have been stillborn, stating at the end: 'We don't see lynx as a problem, but we do worry about wolves.' Her opinion mirrors KORA data from National surveys on the acceptance of large carnivores in Switzerland which indicate very high approval rates for the lynx, ranging from 74 to 84%, with lynx viewed more positively than wolves or bears. Different rules also apply to the conflict with wolves, with a wolf liable to be shot if it kills just a single cow or 6 sheep.

Ludovic has been the warden in Neuchatel for five years. He can recall five or six confirmed lynx attacks during this time on livestock. He says: 'We don't have that many sheep, so the lynx is not a big deal. The older generation are perhaps a bit more anti-lynx, but the new generation are more inclined to live and let live.'

Protection measures

On the final morning, we had a talk from Daniel Mettler, the editor of Carnivore Damage Prevention News magazine and Head of Rural Development at AGRIDEA, an agricultural consulting organisation. Daniel told us that in the 1990s the lynx was the source of most conflict in the

Alps. Then the wolf arrived, and 'within about five years the wolf was the main focus of political discussion' about conflict. Looking back, Daniel said the period of conflict with the lynx served as a period of apprenticeship, in which important networking with stakeholders was developed.

Flock protection against predators currently ranks as the leading concern among sheep farmers in the Alps, with 'scrub encroachment' (woodland regeneration) second. Daniel told us that Switzerland consistently ranks in the top three countries worldwide for the level of agricultural subsidies it provides to its farmers (alongside Norway, which is always top, and Japan). This subsidy determines the level of protection measures that can be employed. Without the subsidies, Daniel believes most of the mountain livestock farmers would have disappeared.

Until the mid 1990s, Swiss sheep grazed unsupervised with no shepherds and little fencing, as is normal on many Scottish hill farms. Now, most shepherds in the Alps accompany their sheep all day with herding dogs and fence them in at night, looking after flocks of 400 to 2000 sheep from June to September. However, it was noted that this is a rather different proposition to shepherding sheep on the hill in Scotland in January. Daniel told us that sheep density is an important factor influencing depredation rates, but notes that even at their peak, losses to lynx have always been relatively low. By contrast, up to 2000 sheep have been lost to wolves in recent years.

Protection measures against lynx began to be introduced from the late 1990s, initially funded by NGOs but this was 'not a long-term solution'. However, Daniel also reported that farmers are not happy about having to implement increasing amounts of protection measures. Shepherds are sometimes helped by volunteer patrols from NGOs and citizens on national service, with interactions between farmers and these volunteers apparently improving their relationship. NGOs train the volunteers and farmers say when they need them. Sometimes the farmers accommodate them, and at other times they stay in 'mobile homes'.

Daniel also told us that donkeys are not much good as guardians against wolves but worked well against lynx until Switzerland passed a law that they could not be kept alone with sheep and had to have a 'friend'. Unfortunately, once the donkeys have a friend, they have no interest in defending the sheep! However, Daniel also explained that llamas work just as well.

The forester's perspective

While in the canton of Neuchatel, we were also given a talk by Pascal Junod, a local forester based in Boudry. Pascal told us that in the 19th century, clearcuts of Swiss forests caused

Pascal Junod, chief of the Forest Department at Boudry, was evangelical about the benefits that lynx offer to the holistic functioning of complex, healthy forests. Swiss foresters played a central role in the initial reintroduction of lynx in the 1970s.

disastrous floods and so, in 1876, Switzerland introduced the first federal laws concerning forestry. The goals of these laws today state that the spatial extent of forest in Switzerland must be maintained – indeed forests are the most protected land type in Switzerland, with building on woodland prohibited – and the forest must be managed sustainably as an ecosystem, conserving its social, commercial and protective functions. Three key words govern this philosophy: heritage, resource and emotion, with their belief being that: 'The more complex the forest – in terms of mixtures, structures, - the more resistant, productive and multifunctional the forest is in the long run.'

The species mix today is about 71% conifer species and 29% broadleaf, while they also try to maintain 10% of the forest in an entirely natural state and wholly untouched. However, Pascal said that lynx are not concerned about forest type – only whether there is prey available and somewhere to shelter. Management of the forest is also balanced with the production of game animals for hunters. Pascal claimed their woodland supports 15 roe deer per km^2, based on the levels of

browsing pressure they see, but some doubts were expressed about this within our group, given the noticeable shortage of slots or scat. All agreed estimating deer densities is difficult.

The reintroduction of lynx in Switzerland was first proposed by progressive foresters, with Leo Lienert, the forest inspector who first obtained permission to reintroduce the lynx, making a request for the release of red deer (desired by hunters) conditional on the concurrent release of lynx. At that time, deer and chamois populations were increasing very rapidly and threatening the natural recovery of the forest, so the return of the lynx was embraced to restore the natural balance.

Pascal described how there were few roe deer in the region until 1960. Up until that time, the forests were characterised by high levels of natural regeneration. There was then a period when there were lots of roe deer and little regeneration. Then the lynx arrived, and regeneration levels increased again. One of our group queried how this was possible given claims we had heard the previous day that lynx are not currently affecting the shootable harvest numbers of roe deer in the Jura and Pascal said he believed that lynx can change roe deer behaviour.

The hunters' perspective

Across Europe as a whole, the most common source of conflict around lynx arises where hunters resent its impact on ungulate populations, with many hunters preferring super-abundant ungulate populations that they can hunt without competition from natural predators.

While in Switzerland, we visited Creux du Van, the site of the initial release of lynx to the Jura in 1972, where we talked to local warden Ludovic more about his role. We learned that there are concerns about genetic diversity within the Jura's lynx population, and that they would like to add new blood with cats imported from Romania. We also discussed the situation over the border in France and learned that a local hunters' association in the Vosges area had recently organised a petition asking to be allowed to cull more lynx, but only about 400 out of more than 7000 hunters registered in the area had signed it.

Laurent said there will 'always be some hunters who want to shoot more.' However, most hunters in Switzerland have no issue with the lynx. Memorably, the president of the Jura local hunters' association told us, 'The wolf and the lynx are part of nature, so it would be wrong for hunters to resent them.'

Conclusion

All those attending the tour were impressed with the Swiss landscape and the balance between wildlife, hunting, farming and forestry interests observed there, with the general feeling being that lynx present fewer problems than had been imagined. However, reservations remained that comparisons with the Scottish context are challenging. It was observed that there is a lot of frustration in Scotland with the policies and management of recent reintroductions, and that this is influencing attitudes towards a potential lynx reintroduction. Even so, the tour was universally felt to have provided useful insights as the conversation around lynx moves forward.

Comments from attendees:

'After the trip I am less concerned (about the level of livestock depredation). Also very impressed by the tolerance and willingness in Switzerland to live with lynx, and respect opinions on all sides.'

'The Swiss system of conflict management is fair and effective and adequately funded, but the Swiss system is geared towards a much smaller sheep flock than that of Scotland and the value of the Sheep Pedigree sector is considerably higher in Scotland. It's possible that a similar system could work in Scotland, but I don't have confidence in the Scottish Government (or the conservation sector) producing an effective strategy that would have the support of the livestock industry.'

'For hunters, there seems to be no problem, although Swiss hunters seem to hunt very little small game, in contrast to the situation in Scotland.'

'Sheep in Scotland range over much larger areas, in greater numbers, so it might be difficult to prove lynx kills – or find them! It seems unfair that a farmer has to lose 12-15 sheep before lethal control is sanctioned.'

'Before the trip I was worried that any lynx reintroduction would drive a further wedge between land managers and conservationists. I (now) think a Swiss-style reintroduction and conflict management structure could work in Scotland, but it would require modernisation of wildlife conflict management and a change in culture. Employment of local (known and trusted) wildlife wardens is key in Switzerland and offers a big lesson for NatureScot.'

'I do not think lynx are the issue, I think it would be the bureaucracy and the issues with NatureScot. I do not think that White-tailed eagles and beavers are bad but I do think that, NatureScot make it difficult to manage them and are wildly unresponsive. I have been to a great number of events where NatureScot representatives have not showed. It is embarrassing that they do not show face and make communication easy which, one feels, would help solve much fear/ conflict at source.'

'Overall, I think that what I heard has helped to clarify the need for a significant financial commitment from the public sector over many years if lynx were to be reintroduced (in Scotland) successfully. The size of the Scottish sheep flock (400,000 in Switzerland versus 6million in Scotland) and the way it is managed in Scotland (extensive, relatively little shepherding, no guard dogs, not within electric fences at night) mean that the challenge of lynx predation would be greater in Scotland.'

List of attendees

Andrew Barbour – Perthshire sheep farmer and forester
Alastair Dixon – NFUS Least Favoured Areas committee invitee
John Kirk – Sheep farmer and Cairngorms National Park Board Member
Frank Law – Retired estate manager and member of Carrbridge Capercaillie Group
Eleanor Mackintosh – Sheep farmer and Cairngorms National Park Board Member
Ross Macleod – Head of Policy, GWCT Scotland
John Macpherson – Kingussie sheep and cattle farmer
Grant Moir – Chief Executive, Cairngorms National Park Authority
Colin Murdoch – Deer stalker and gamekeeper, Reraig Forest
Ruaridh Ormiston – Farmer and owner of Ormiston Highlands and Highland Horse Fun
Grace Reid – Scottish Region Coordinator, National Sheep Association
Fred Swift – Sheep farmer and Northwoods Rewilding Network partner
Linzi Seivwright – Independent Ecological Consultant and deer management specialist

Lynx to Scotland representatives

Becky Priestley – Trees for Life
Hugh Webster – SCOTLAND: The Big Picture
Mark Hamblin – SCOTLAND: The Big Picture