

Status and recent research on the European Wildcat in Austria and Europe

ReCo

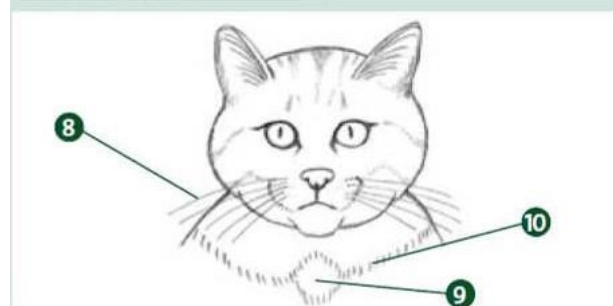
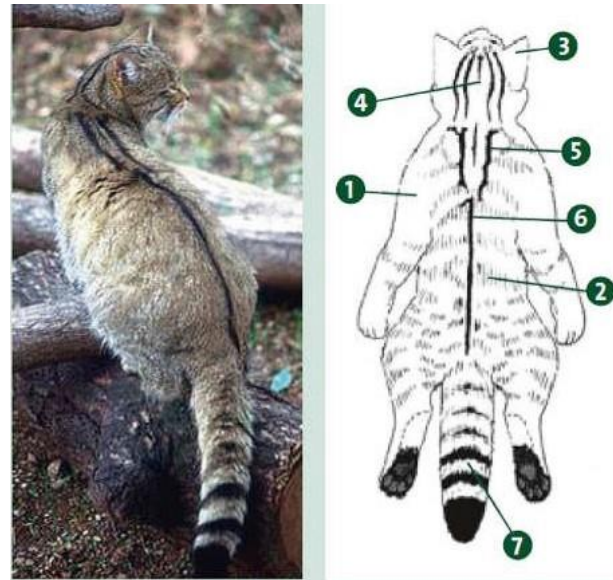




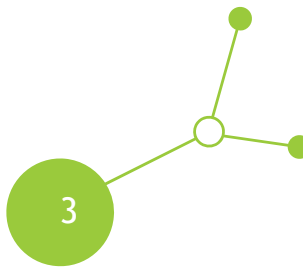
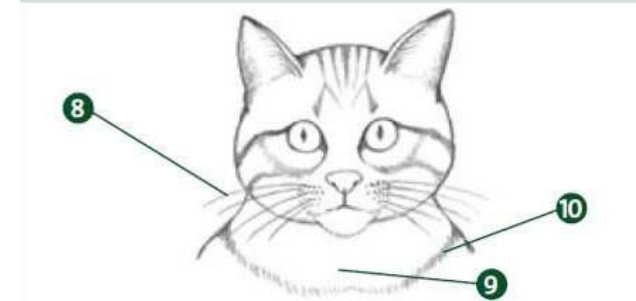
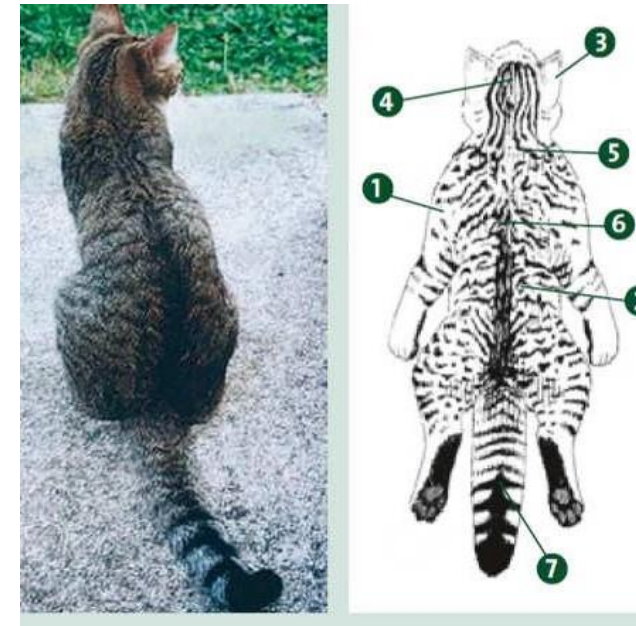
European Wildcat

- European species (*Felis silvestris*)
-> Domestic cat (*Felis catus*) is the domesticated offspring of the African Wildcat (*Felis lybica*)
- Homeranges between 100 - 300 hectares (females) and 500 -1500 hectares (males)
- Indicator species for connected landscapes
- Flag ship species for conservation measures

- 1) Basic colour ochre yellow like dry grass
- 2) Tint washed out, low contrast
- 3) Tip of ear grey like the rest of the ear
- 4) Four longer and one shorter dark stripe in the neck
- 5) Two clearly visible parallel dark stripes on the shoulders
- 6) On the rear back a dark, narrow stripe
- 7) Tail appears somewhat shorter, 2-3 separate rings on the tail, blunt tail end
- 8) Whiskers completely white
- 9) Often a small white spot
- 10) Neck ring only vaguely visible at the front



- 1) Base colour silver-grey
- 2) Tint relatively rich in contrast
- 3) Tip of ears dark
- 4) Head usually shows more than 5 stripes which are not so clearly separated
- 5) No clearly visible stripes on the shoulders
- 6) Several short, branched dark stripes on the rear back
- 7) Rings on the tail mostly connected, end of tail usually more pointed
- 8) Colour of the whiskers varies
- 9) Very rarely a small white throat patch
- 10) Neck ring clearly visible in front





Biology and habitat

Main habitats:

- **Forest** (deciduous and mixed forests with a rich structure, up to 2,250 m altitude)
- preference for structurally rich forests with a high proportion of tree hollows, piles of dead wood at ground level and rejuvenation patches, as well as wind-thrown areas

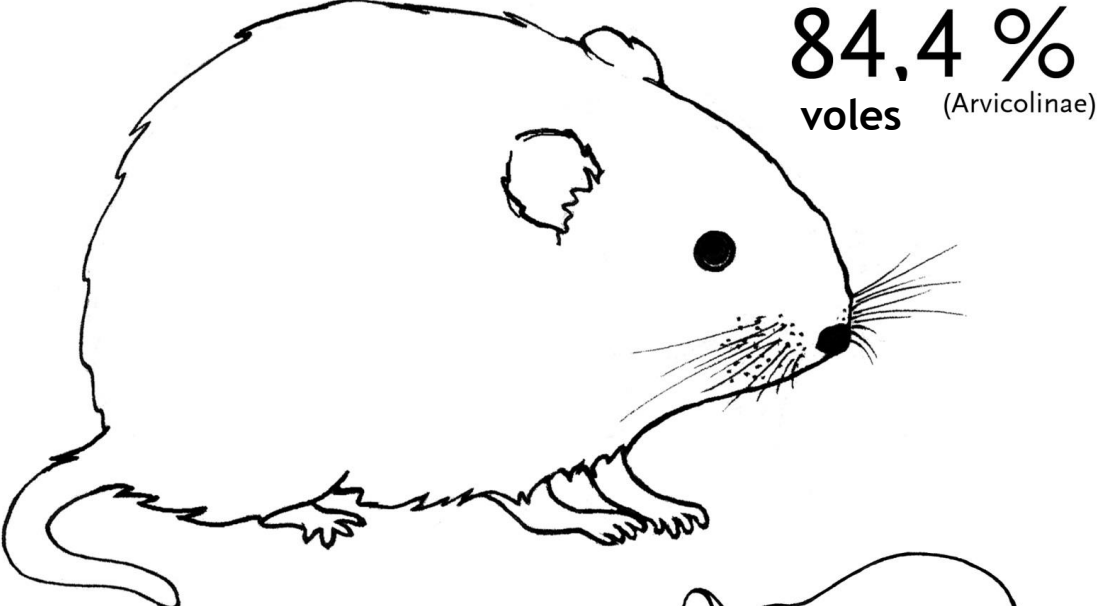
Less proirised habitats

- Shrubland, Grassland, Wetlands (inland), Rocky areas (eg. inland cliffs, mountain peaks)

Biology and habitat



Food sources



84,4 %
voles (Arvicolinae)



11,1 %
mice (Murinae)



1,8 %
shrews (Soricinae)



2,7 %
other

PIECHOCKI 1990 & MEINING 2007

Endangerment and protection status - Austria



Historical development:

- Eradication in the 19th century, return in recent decades
- possibility of an epidemic



Endangerment and protection status - Austria



Regionally extinct or lost (†)

Mid 20th century last Austrian population vanished

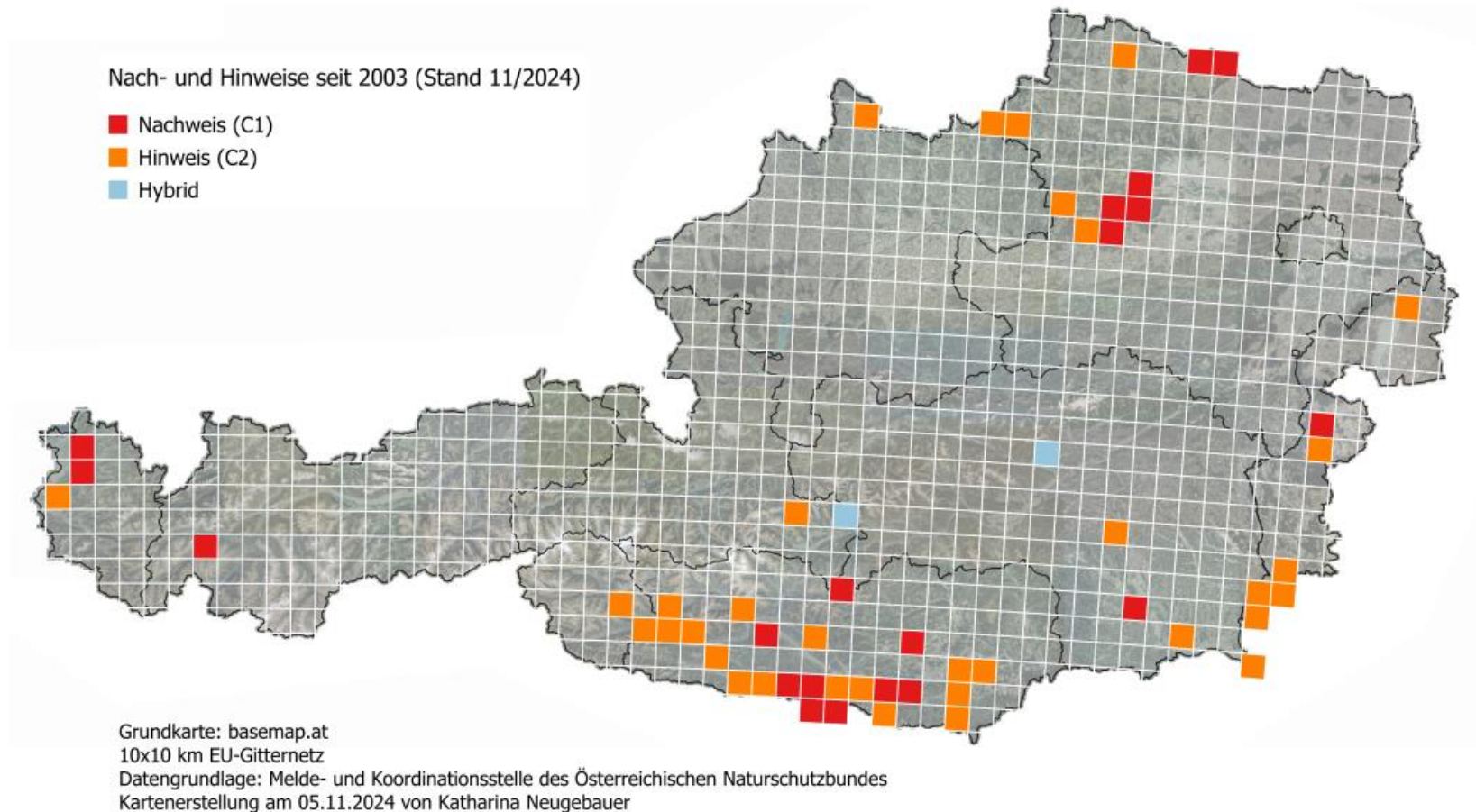
Between the 1950ies and the early 2000s there have only been sporadic sightings, which have been classified as immigrants

Hardly any research activity in Austria

Since 2007 research intensified

Endangerment and protection status - Austria

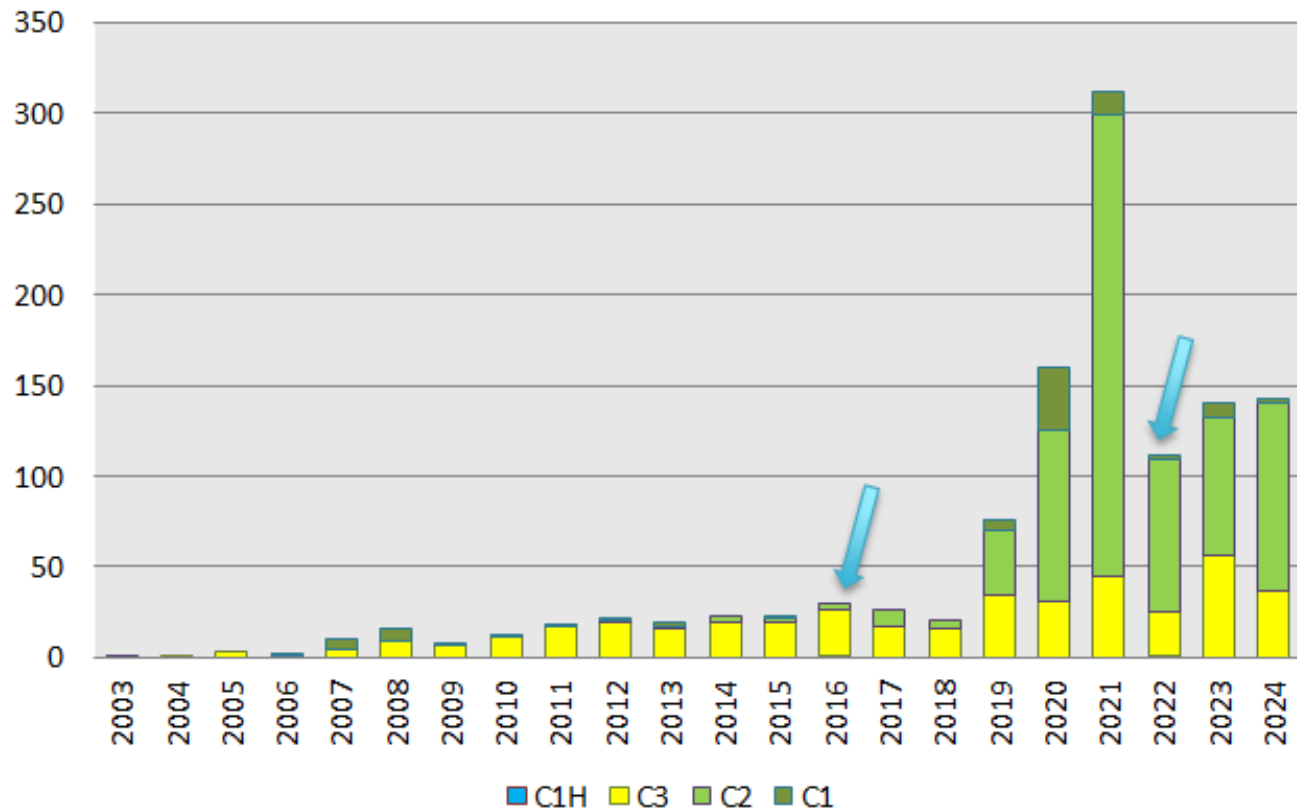
Die Europäische Wildkatze (*Felis silvestris*) in Österreich



Current population and distribution: Main occurrences in Lower Austria, Styria, Carinthia Burgenland

Endangerment and protection status - Austria

Evidence of European Wildcat since 2003



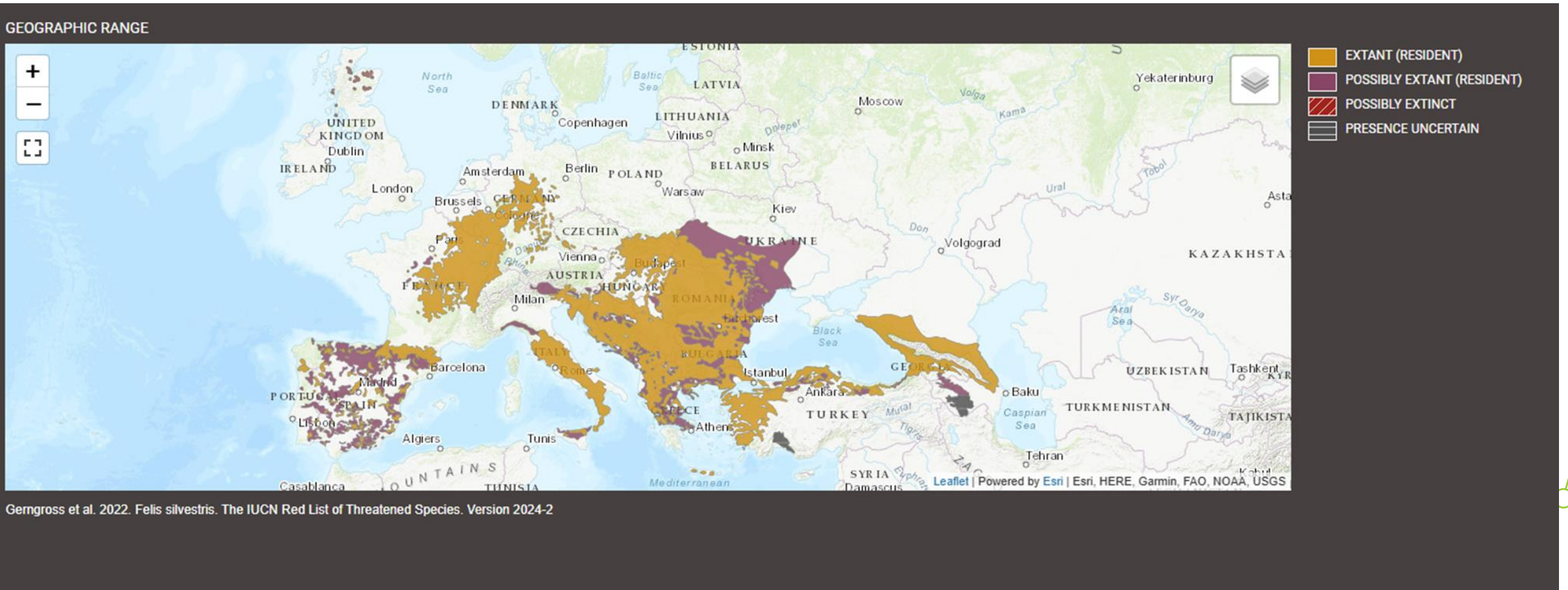
Hinweise insgesamt:		1257 (Stand Nov. 2024)		
Hinweise	gesamt	Vor 2003	Ab 2003	
C1	99	10	89	
C2	682	9	673	
C3	431	16	415	
C1H	2	0	2	
Anzahl eingestufte Meldungen	1214	35	1179	

Endangerment and protection status - Europe

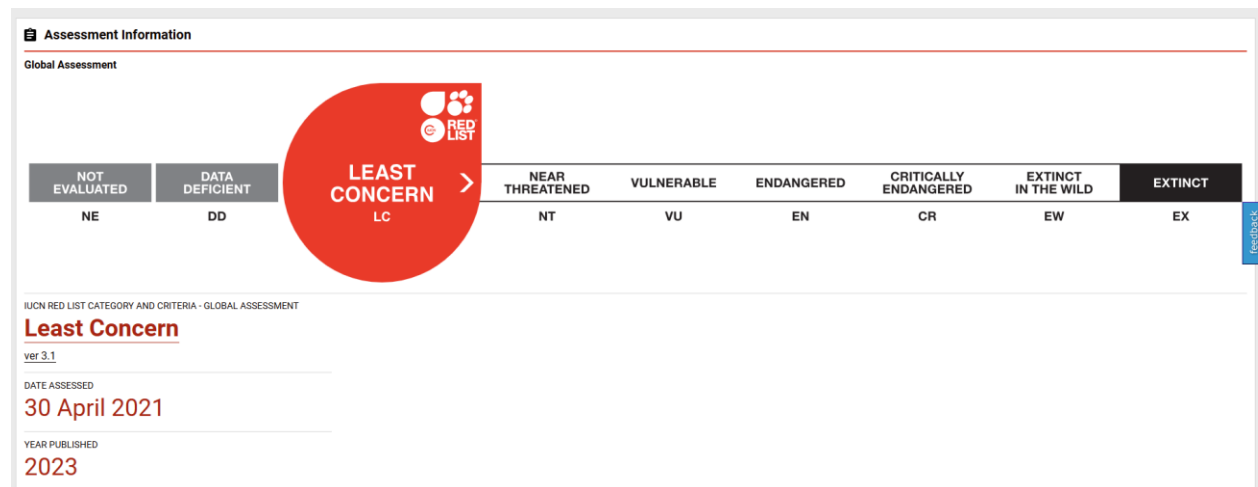
Regional differences:

Western Europe: Stable populations in Germany (Hunsrück, Eifel), France, Spain, Scotland, Czech Republic and Slovakia

Greater risks due to habitat loss and hybridisation in eastern Europe



Endangerment and protection status - Europe



Status

IUCN-category: „Least Concern“,
but regionally endangered

Main threats:

- Loss of habitat and habitat connectivity
- traffic
- hybridisation

Endangerment and protection status - Europe

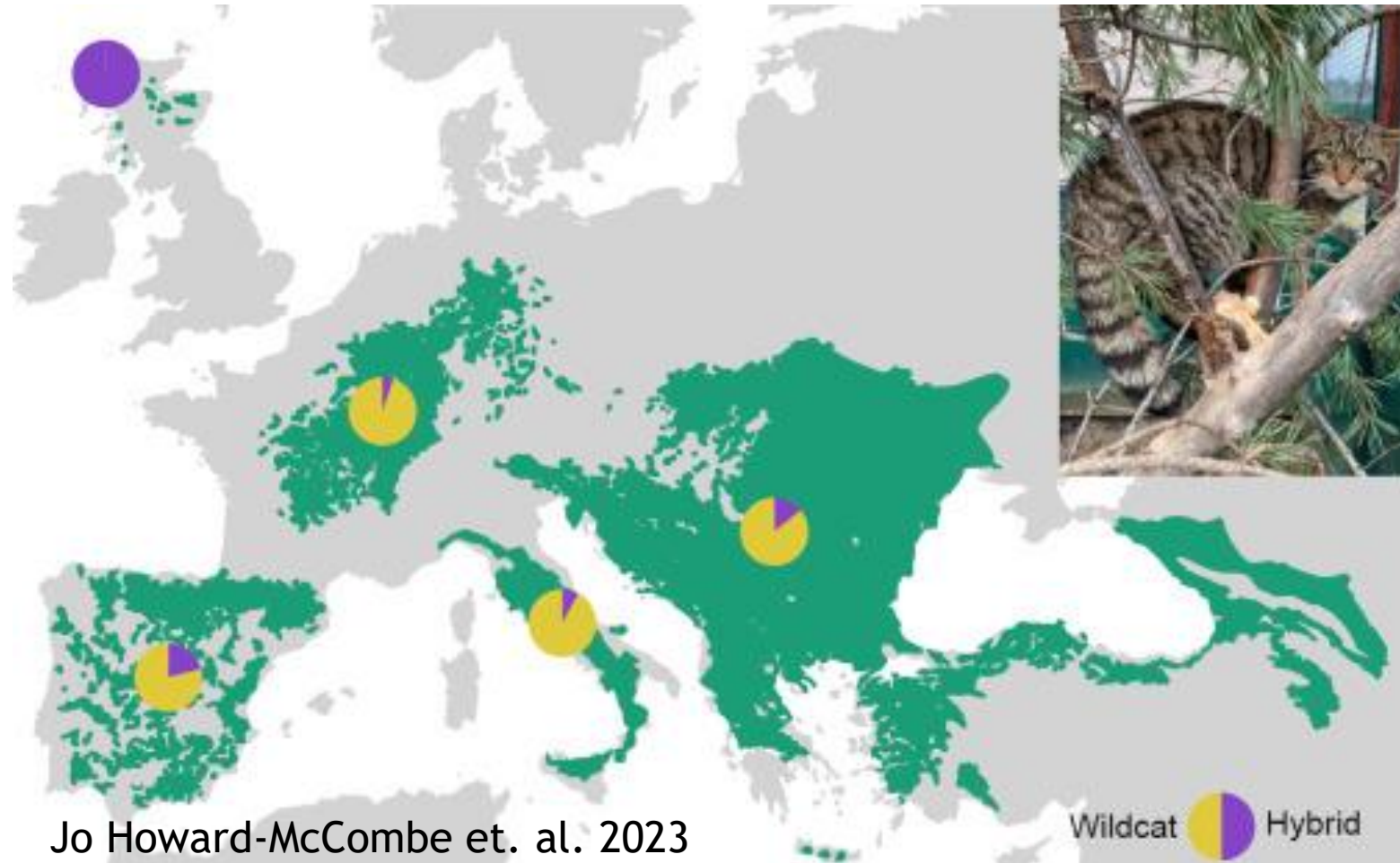


Main threats:

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Endangerment and protection status - Europe



Jo Howard-McCombe et. al. 2023

Main threats:

- hybridisation

Endangerment and protection status - Europe



J. Lanzski

Main threats:

- hybridisation

Endangerment and protection status - Europe



Main threats:

- Loss of habitat and habitat connectivity
- traffic

Current research - methods



Current research - methods

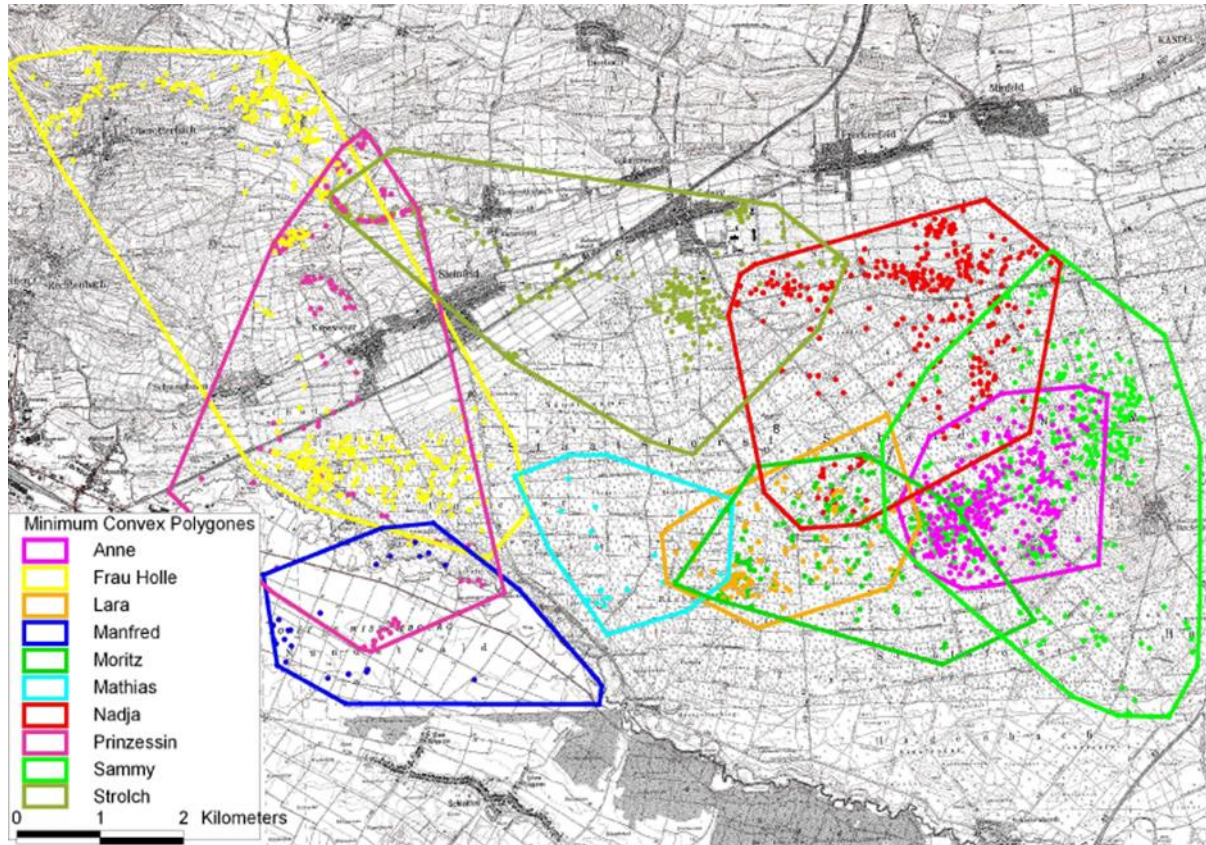
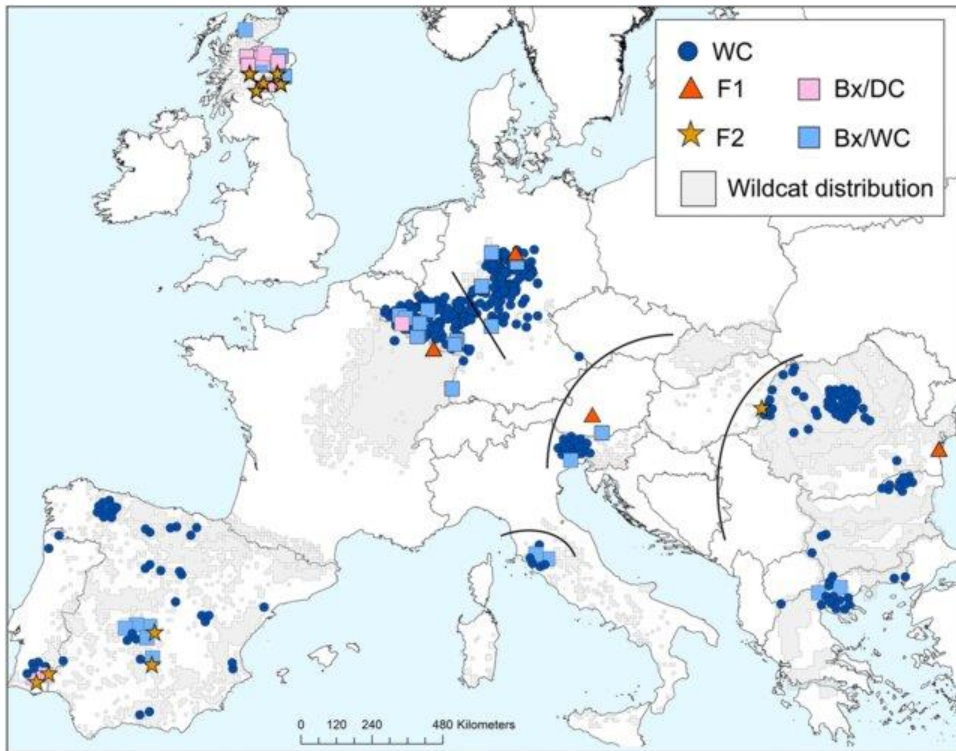


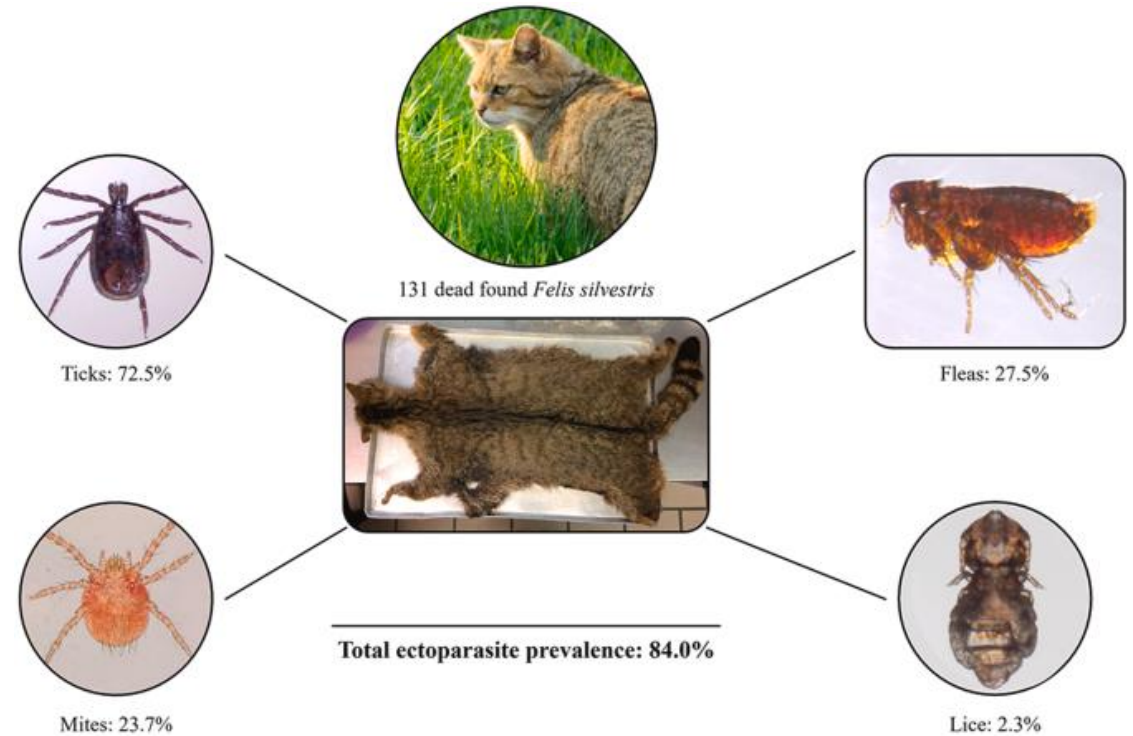
Foto: Malte Götz / Deutsche Wildtier Stiftung



Current research- methods



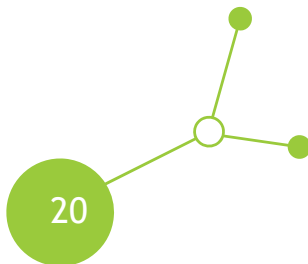
Annika Tiesmeyer et.al.



Katrin Bisterfeld et.al.

Current research and monitoring -projects and links

- Research on potential and establishment of Corridors:
 - > ReCo Restore to Connect (<https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/reco/>)
 - > Wilderness Society (<https://wilderness-society.org/life-wildcat-support/>)
- Telemetric studies:
 - > Deutsche Wildtierstiftung
<https://www.deutschewildtierstiftung.de/aktuelles/artikel/wildkatzentelemetrie-in-der-heide>
- open database:
 - > <https://euromammals.org/eurowildcat/>
- Awareness raising:
 - > <https://www.bund-hessen.de/wildkatze/europaeische-wildkatze/>
 - > <https://wildkatze.online/>
 - > <https://naturschutzbund.at/wildkatze.html>





Conclusion and outlook

Research questions:

- Long-term population development
- Effectiveness of corridors and protected areas

The challenges

- Hybridisation as a genetic threat
- Political support and long-term conservation programmes

