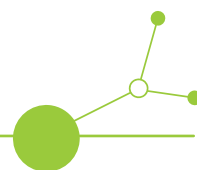


Pilot action fact sheet

ReCo Pilot Region 6

Thayatal/Podyji / European Wildcat (AT, CZ)



5 March 2025





PILOT ACTION - FACT SHEET

Pilot action factsheet for ReCo Pilot Region 6 Thayatal/Podyji

D.2.2.5 Species: European Wildcat

O.2.2 Joint Pilot action 2 "Species" implemented in 2 ReCo pilot regions (partial)

Location, country	Thayatal national park, Austria and Podyjí national park, Czech Republic
Pilot action (PA) title (as indicated in AF + related deliverable number (no.))	D.2.2.5 Implementation Joint Pilot Action 2.2 "Species - European Wild Cat" in 1 pilot region (AT-CZ)
Project Partner (name, no.)	Thayatal National Park, PP7 National Park Podyjí Administration, PP11
PA aim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving living conditions and habitats for NATURA 2000 (priority) species European Wild Cat (<i>Felis silvestris</i>) in pilot region CZ-AT conducted by PP7 & PP11. Act focused on community-based approaches & ecological connectivity along EGB through innovative restoration pilot investments. Restore a degraded wetland and establish a system of three small ponds with varying depths and water regimes to support the highest possible diversity of habitat types. Enhancing habitat diversity and habitat connectivity coupled with improving shelters and food sources availability will support wild cat populations potentially emerging on the Czech side of Thaya valley. Additionally, this initiative improves the connectivity of small water bodies within an otherwise dry and intensively cultivated landscape. It enhances populations of highly specialized and endangered plant and animal species that rely on wetland habitats.
PA concept/summary including technical description	Various measures improve the habitat for wildcats in the region and assist in learning more about the habitat utilisation of these shy forest dwellers. The centrepiece of the measures on the Austrian side is research into wildcats. On the one hand, the wildcats are being studied using decoy research methods and wildlife cameras. On the other hand, a pilot study is carried out in which wildcats are being released for the first time in Austria and their habitat utilisation is being documented using telemetry collars. The pilot study provides the basis for further realisation of similar projects. An external wildcat researcher is responsible for the implementation and the entire process is documented. To improve habitat connectivity, landscape elements are created



	<p>and/or preserved to create corridors and stepping stone biotopes in the surrounding area. This includes the planting of trees in suitable locations (1st location near the National park Centre (48°50'43.6"N 15°51'34.4"E), 2nd location near Zellerndorf (48°40'53.5"N 15°57'42.3"E)), the maintenance of sensitive dry grasslands in the surrounding area (at the outskirts of Retz 48°45'46.7"N 15°56'31.7"E) and the renaturalisation of a small wetland. The services for the maintenance and establishment of landscape elements are supported by external experts who decide on and document the selection of areas on a professional basis.</p> <p>On the Czech side, the JPA focuses on wetland restoration. The site is degraded wetland, overgrown with reed, situated east of village Hnanice (48°48'10.52"N 015°58'32.02"E). Heavy machinery was used to excavate the soil, allowing natural precipitation and groundwater to fill the newly formed depressions. Natural fluctuations in water levels and occasional drying are created, closely aligned with the hydrological regime of the adjacent periodic stream. The ponds have sculpted rims with varying slopes to support the development of diverse habitats, each suited to different species. The JPA respects the site's natural history, where managed wetlands once existed, as this restoration should enhance habitat quality and improve the connectivity of the Daniž stream.</p>
PA timing (start and end date)	<p>2/2025 - 2/2025 (planned)</p> <p>Actual finalization 5/2025 (CZ) and no later than 12/2025 (AT). The substantial delay on the Austrian site is due to the necessary rerun of tendering and subsequent commissioning, paired with prior pausing of work after controller objections. Wildcat study will go on until 2/2026.</p>
Expected solution derived from PA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The AT part of the pilot action creates and/or maintains corridor elements in the surrounding area to improve the migration of species (flagship species wildcat) and increases connectivity. The pilot study provides insight into the release and telemetry of wildcats and provides a manual for further actions and projects in this sense. The official steps are documented and different telemetry transmitters are tested for their functionality in order to gather experience and make recommendations. Research into the wildcats in the region provides important insights into this species, which is extinct or lost in Austria according to the Red List. These findings are also of great value for the future realisation of joint projects in the border region with regard to potential habitat use in the area of our partner Podyjí National Park. • The CZ part of the pilot action enhances the currently unsatisfactory condition of biologically and ecologically valuable water bodies in this part of the Czech Republic. The success of the pilot action is assessed through monitoring of plant and animal species appearing at the restored sites. A detailed, annotated list of species found at the site, with a



	<p>focus on endangered or highly specialized species, will be compiled and reviewed in consultation with scientific and conservation institutions. The entire restoration process is thoroughly documented, including frequent photography of the site at various stages. The results will be presented on different occasions to scientific community, local stakeholders and the general public.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance and monitoring of our restored pond system are incorporated in the long-term plans of NP Podyjí and will continue after the ReCo project ends. Ponds and wetland systems will be extensively managed to achieve long-term habitat persistence and to avoid an advanced succession. The newly built pools will also be included in the list of permanently monitored areas of wetlands in the Podyjí National Park, which has been carried out annually for more than 15 years.
Preparatory work done so far	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessary permits were acquired • Collars for wildcats were prepared and ordered • Tree plantings, pond creation and dry meadow restoration were planned, including technical drawings of the planned ponds • Pre-action monitoring of focal indicator groups was carried out • Tendering processes were successfully finished and contracts for restoration works established
Permits required for the investment (contract, availability etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application for animal testing to the Lower Austrian provincial government (by the external expert) • Application for the release of two wildcats to the Horn district administrative authority (by the person authorised to hunt) • Decision on the change of land use by Municipality office of Znojmo • Soil analysis necessary for landfill disposal by EMPLA AG spol s.r.o.
PA/Investment progress update (what has been achieved so far/every 6 months, status of implementation and progress)	<p>The pilot initiative began in April 2023. As a first implementation measure, trees were planted near the national park center to enhance connectivity in the immediate vicinity (48°50'43.5"N 15°51'34.6"E). In April 2024, in cooperation with the municipality of Zellerndorf, another piece of land was identified where a total of 400 trees were planted to improve connectivity (48°40'53.5"N 15°57'42.4"E). The restoration of a small wetland had to be postponed because the designated plot was no longer available during the project implementation phase.</p> <p>In February 2024, an external expert was commissioned to conduct dry grassland management in the Retz area to create and maintain stepping-stone biotopes. The first measures took place in the spring of 2024, while additional areas were managed in autumn and winter 2024, and a management plan was developed. Areas managed were the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1, Heiliger Stein Nord: KG Mitterretzbach, GstNr. 298/14



- 2: Heiliger Stein NW, KG Mitterretzbach, GstNr. 298/31
- 3: Heiliger Stein NW, KG Mitterretzbach, GstNr. 298/29
- 4: Heiliger Stein S, KG Mitterretzbach, GstNr. 299/6
- 5+6: Brünner Hoadl, KG Oberretzbach, GstNr. 571/2
- 7, Parapluieberg, KG Obernalb, GstNr. 772/1
- 8; Soldatenfriedhof KG Retz Altstadt, GstNr. 651/4, 646/1, 646/2, 3513
- 9 + 10: Kalvarienberg; KG Retz Altstadt, GstNr. 651/7
- 11-17: Mittelberg: KG Obernalb, Gst Nr. 1016/1, 1016/15, 1016/21, 1016/22, 1016/24, 1016/30, 1016/32
- 18: Kalvarienberg Schrattenthal/Pillersdorf:, KG Schrattenthal, GstNr. 461/1
- 19, 20 + 21: Altenberg Zellerndorf, KG Zellerndorf, GstNr. 2453

A total of approx. 6.1 ha were managed in 2024, of which 0.8 ha are located in the municipality of Retzbach, 4.3 ha in the municipality of Retz, and 1.0 ha in the municipalities of Zellerndorf and Schrattenthal

In March 2023, wildcat research using the lure stick method was commissioned to an external expert. In 2024, three female wildcats were genetically confirmed in the area, and several camera trap images of wildcats were captured. A small sensation was the discovery of a genetic relationship between one of the females and a wildcat population in the Wachau region along the Danube. These findings provided the first basis in autumn 2024 for potential corridor connections between the regions. In the Wachau region, reproduction of wildcats is strongly suspected due to camera trap evidence of kittens. It is the only documentation of reproduction in Austria so far.

In March 2024, an external wildcat researcher was commissioned to conduct a pilot study on wildcat reintroduction in the national park. In the following months, the legal framework for the project was developed, and available wildcats were identified. The selected individuals had to be neither too young nor too old to be suitable for release. Additionally, the expert researched various telemetry collars, ultimately ordering a Swedish transmitter from Followit. The transmitter was delivered to the expert in autumn. At the beginning of 2025, a second transmitter was researched and ordered in January from the German company EOBS. The EOBS transmitter provides acceleration data, which allows insights into wildcat behavior, such as activity patterns. However, its data must be downloaded in the field using a receiver box. In contrast, the Followit transmitter transmits GPS data via the mobile network, eliminating the need for fieldwork.

Two wildcats were found for release in the Mautern wildlife park. They were scheduled for release in October 2024 but disappeared from the enclosure before the release could take place. Therefore, new individuals had to be identified. Through intensive research, suitable individuals were found at the French wildlife rescue center Athenas (<https://www.athenas.fr/le-centre/>), which will be large enough for release in early 2025. The wildcats from the rescue center were genetically tested by the Senckenberg Institute. As the results were



	<p>inconclusive, further testing was initiated. Two individuals were confirmed as hybrids, one female and one male were confirmed as wildcats, therefore being suitable for being released in the national park. The pickup date for the wildcats from France is set between March 30 and April 1, 2025. Around March 13, a small enclosure will be built in the wilderness of the national park (48°52'05.6"N 15°50'43.0"E). The two wildcats will be placed in this enclosure and monitored for a week before their release. Data from the collars will be collected for as long as possible to maximize the output of the pilot study. The study is aiming for data acquisition over a period of approximately one year.</p> <p>On the Czech side, all necessary preparatory work has been completed (NP is the landowner of the pilot site). PP11 encountered administrative issues related to the tender announcement for contractor selection, but these were resolved. As a result, we successfully selected a contractor and began the main implementation phase - pond construction - in February 2025. Finalization is foreseen until May 2025.</p>
Stakeholders involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Experts to conduct the measures (Dr. Andreas Kranz, Dr. Gabriele Bassler-Binder, Thomas Einsiedl) • Municipality of Retz, Municipality of Zellerndorf • Hunting committee • Interested public (presentation of PA at various open events) • National Experts of platform wildcat • Representatives of the Municipality Hnanice • Experts from South Moravian Museum in Znojmo • Members of National Park Executive Council • Local vineyards owners
Citizen science approach (if applicable)	Not applicable
Joint cooperation dimension (in partnership)	<p>All preparation and implementation works of this action were realized in close collaboration of both the Czech and Austrian project partner. Habitat improvement measures are cooperatively being implemented on both sides of the border. The measures are discussed at regular intervals at meetings (approx. every 2 months). The project partnership has brought in important expertise from various partners (especially BUND and GAIA) for research into the release of wildcats. During an on-site visit by project partners, the pilot action was evaluated in 12 - 14 November 2024 and the localities were visited. The implementation was rated as positive, as was the involvement of the various stakeholders. Securing the measures in the long term was identified as a challenge.</p> <p>Additionally, we actively share knowledge and expertise with authorities involved in nature conservation, such as the Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic. This exchange of experience and coordinated efforts help ensure a more comprehensive and effective approach to ecosystem restoration.</p>



Personnel involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julian Haider, MSc (project management) • Christian Übl, BSc. (director of National Park Thayatal) • Several employees of the National Park Podyjí Administration • Antonín Reiter - specialist on amphibians from the South Moravian Museum in Znojmo • Jaromír Parolek - project designer • several employees of the contractor AUTODOPRAVA Němec, s.r.o.
Related investment description (incl. no, name)	<p>CC6 - Certified</p> <p>For the purchase and planting of trees near the national park center, €6.907,49 was paid.</p> <p>CC6 - Certification still pending</p> <p>For the purchase and planting of trees for the corridor in Zellerndorf, €1.378,26 is to be paid (not yet invoiced).</p> <p>The remaining costs of the budgeted amount (€11,714.25) will be used for the restoration of the small wetland. Planning for implementation is underway, potential areas have been inspected, an agreement and commitment with the relevant landowner has yet to be reached</p>
Investment budget spent per item (only CC5 equipment)	<p>CC5 -NPTT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JFR 1 R3.3 - Valerian Root - 240€ • JFR 2 R3.4 - Batteries - 64€ • JFR 3 R3.8 - Valerian Root Tincture - 86,5€ • JFR 4 R3.11 - Wildgame Trail Card viewer - 187,64€ • JFR 5 R3.12 - Transcend 32GB SD card - 143,14€ <p>➔ All costs above were not certified by the national controller, clarification is still ongoing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the telemetry transmitter Followit, €3.097 is to be paid (not yet invoiced) <p>NP Podyjí has a 40% flat rate budget. Thus, there is neither spending nor underspending in CC5 and CC6.</p>