

Call for the wild lynx to make a comeback

By David Lister
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SCIENTISTS have called for Europe's biggest wild cat to be reintroduced to Britain after research indicated that it may still have been prowling the countryside as late as the early medieval period.

David Hetherington, an ecologist at the University of Aber-

deen, said that Britain should consider reintroducing the Eurasian lynx after radiocarbon dating suggested that it became extinct 2,500 years later than thought, and because of human beings, not the climate.

Findings by Dr Hetherington and two other scientists, published in the *Journal of Quaternary Science*, will add to the debate over the possible reintro-

duction of the animal in Scotland, where a landowner has announced plans for the controlled release of a number of species on his estate, which he hopes to turn into a game reserve.

Tests on lynx remains found in Scotland and North Yorkshire contradict the long-held belief that the species died out about 4,000 years ago, when



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The lynx may have become extinct in Britain as late as the early medieval period, scientists say

the climate became cooler and wetter. Instead, they show that the animal was present after the invasion of the Romans. The most likely explanation for

the lynx's disappearance in Britain is that it was either hunted to extinction or lost its territory as farming intensified.

Under the European Union's Habitats Directive, member states are obliged to consider reintroducing species that were killed off by the actions of humans. Dr Hetherington said that much of Scotland had been reforested and could be suitable for lynx.

Tests on lynx bones found in Moughton Fell Fissure Cave, near Settle, Yorkshire Dales, before it was destroyed for quarrying in the late 19th century, show that the animal had lived between AD80 and AD320. Tests on remains from

nearby Kinsey Cave suggest an animal that had lived between AD425 and AD600. A third set of bones, found in Sutherland, Scotland, are from a lynx that died about AD300.

Paul Lister, whose plans to house the animals on his 23,000-acre estate in the Highlands have caused controversy, said that he welcomed anything that would spur debate on the issue. The lynx has been re-established in a number of European countries, including Germany, Switzerland and Austria. Mr Lister said: "It's not we're advocating, but a release of certain of these species in a controlled environment."