

Scottish Wildcat

On my living-room wall I have a painting of a wildcat by John Holmes of which I am extremely fond. It depicts a snarling, spitting animal, teeth bared and back arched: a taut coiled spring ready to unleash some unknown fury.

1)

However, the physical differences are tangible. The wildcat is a much larger animal, weighing in some cases up to seven kilos, the same as a typical male fox. The coat pattern is superficially similar to a domestic tabby cat but it is all stripes and no spots. The tail is thicker and blunter, with three to five black rings. The animal has an altogether heavier look.

The Scottish wildcat was originally distinguished as a separate subspecies in 1912, but it is now generally recognised that there is little difference between the Scottish and other European populations. According to an excellent report on the wildcat printed in 1991, the animals originally occurred in a variety of habitats throughout Europe.

2)

It was during the nineteenth century, with the establishment of many estates used by

landowners for hunting, that the wildcat became a nuisance and its rapid decline really began; 198 wildcats were killed in three years in the area of Glengarry, for example. However, things were later to improve for the species.

3)

The future is by no means secure, though, and recent evidence suggests that the wildcat is particularly vulnerable to local eradication, especially in the remoter parts of northern and western Scotland. This is a cause for real concern, given that the animals in these areas have less contact with domestic cats and are therefore purer.

4)

Part of the problem stems from the fact that the accepted physical description of the species originates from the selective nature of the examination process by the British Natural History Museum at the start of the century, and this has been used as the type-definition for the animal ever since. Animals that did not conform to that large blunt-tailed 'tabby' description were discarded as not being wildcats. In other words, an artificial collection of specimens was built up, exhibiting the features considered typical of the wildcat.

The current research aims to resolve this potential problem. It is attempting to find out whether there are any physical features which characterise the so-called wild-living cats.

5)

But what of his lifestyle? Wildcat kittens are usually born in May/June in a secluded den, secreted in a gap amongst boulders. Another favourite location is in the roots of a tree.

6)

Rabbits are a favourite prey, and some of the best areas to see wildcats are at rabbit warrens close to the forest and moorland edge. Mice, small birds and even insects also form a large part of the diet, and the animal may occasionally take young deer.

The wildcat is one of the Scottish Highlands' most exciting animals. Catch a glimpse of one and the memory will linger forever.

A. The recruitment of men to the armed forces during the conflict in Europe from 1914 to 1918 meant there was very little persecution, since gamekeepers went off to fight. As the number of gamekeepers decreased, the wildcat began to increase its range, recolonising many of its former haunts. Extinction was narrowly averted.

B. The wildcat waits for a while in rapt concentration, ears twitching and eyes watching, seeing everything and hearing everything, trying to detect the tell-tale movement of a vole or a mouse. But there is nothing, and in another leap he disappears into the gloom.

C. The results, which are expected shortly, will be fascinating. But anyone who has seen a wildcat will be in little doubt that there is indeed a unique and distinctive animal living in the Scottish Highlands, whatever his background.

D. They probably used deciduous and coniferous woodland for shelter, particularly in winter, and hunted over more open areas such as forest edge, open woodland, thickets and scrub, grassy areas and marsh. The wildcat was probably driven into more mountainous areas by a combination of deforestation and persecution.

E. As the animals emerge, their curiosity is aroused by every movement and rustle in the vegetation. Later they will accompany their mother on hunting trips, learning quickly, and soon become adept hunters themselves.

F. This is what makes many people think that the wildcat is a species in its own right. Research currently being undertaken by Scottish Natural Heritage is investigating whether the wildcat really is distinct from its home-living cousin, or whether it is nothing more than a wild-living form of the domestic cat.

G. It is a typical image most folk have of the beast, but it is very much a false one, for the wildcat is little more than a bigger version of the domestic cat, and probably shows his anger as often.

Part 7, the Gapped Text, focuses on how texts are structured. Here are some tips to follow when attempting the Gapped Text task:

- Read the whole text first before you attempt to answer any questions. This will give you an idea of the overall structure.
- Read the paragraphs to get a general idea of the topic of each one.
- Look out for cohesive devices that help link ideas. These could be things like time phrases, cause and effect or contrasting linking words and expressions, pronouns or synonyms that refer forwards or backwards in the text.
- Make sure any paragraph you chose fits both with what comes before and after. You will often find one that flows logically from the preceding paragraph but which does not fit coherently with the following paragraph.
- As you work through the task, be prepared to change your opinion on an earlier choice. If you don't do this and your original choice is wrong, you are limiting the choice of remaining paragraphs.
- Don't simply choose a paragraph because it contains a similar word or words to the paragraph before or after. You will need to match paragraphs based on the development of ideas or opinions.