

Activity report 2023 'Felis' Association

The organization structure

The Felis Association continues to consist of six founding members and, more recently, one additional member. All members work 100% on a voluntary basis and do not receive any wages or compensation. A project leader is defined for each Felis project and the members work closely together and on the basis of the time available to them.

Financing

With the exception of the Brazil project, the projects continue to be financed by donations from the two founding members, Sophie and Manuel Baumgartner. About half of the Brazil project has been successfully raised thanks to foundation donations received by the association. It is planned to finance the second year of the India project through foundation donations. Financial support from the foundations is also being considered for the Swiss Hide project.

Purpose of the association

At the time of its foundation, the purpose of the organization was defined as follows: The purpose of the association is to promote awareness and protection of wildcats, especially the small and less recognized wildcats. The association aims to enhance national parks and other important areas that are of high importance for wildcats (better equipment, camera traps to study populations, capacity building, ecotourism development, etc.). Wildcats are particularly well suited as ambassadors and thus also help other species. It can be assumed that an area is healthy if wildcats, which are at the top of the food chain, are doing well.

Activity 2023

Hide project in Switzerland

The association wants to sensitise the local population about native wildcats and at the same time be perceived as an association in Switzerland. We want to achieve this by converting a former military trailer into an observation hide. Wild animals should be able to be observed without being disturbed. The project partner, a farmer in the Jura, will use this hide as a supplement to his overnight accommodation and Felis has been investigating the surrounding area with 10 camera traps for two years. Lynx and wildcats as well as many other mammal species have been identified. Windows were installed in 2023. The refurbishment will probably take 2024 and 2025 before the hide can be used.

Mammalwatching community

The association continues to be very active in the mammalwatching community and is committed to making mammal watching more sustainable and contributing to nature conservation. Felis organised two online meetings for this purpose in 2023 and implemented various outcomes.

Brazil project

In Emas National Park in Brazil, over 1,000 children from various schools in the area were to be reached and sensitised to the local flora and fauna using the proven method of environmental education through children's books. The first of three books was written and printed in 2023. The cooperation with our local partners, who know two of the founding members personally, works very well and communication is excellent. The local partners are extremely committed and the impact of the project so far has exceeded our expectations. We hope to receive further funding in 2024 to continue the project.

India project

In 2022, a joint project "Forgotten Cats of North East India" was launched with the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI). The main objective of this project is to involve the inhabitants of a village in north-east India, Shergaon, in the establishment of a protected area. The aim is to develop an alternative source of income and to ensure the conservation of the area. The project will have two aspects: The first aspect will focus on sustainable ecotourism, which will include activities such as capacity building of community members in areas such as mammalwatching. The second aspect will focus on wild cat research, e.g. through camera trap studies and community attitudes towards wildlife (more benefit than harm). The joint project was launched and two founding members, Sophie and Manuel Baumgartner, visited the project in March 2023. 30 camera traps were successfully transported to the project site. These were all equipped with rechargeable batteries and chargers were supplied to enable long-term exploration of the project forest. It took some time to reach a mutual agreement between the local partners and the Wildlife Trust of India. However, this was achieved at the end of 2023 and the project will be able to start properly in 2024. The first camera trap studies will be conducted in 2024.

Patagonia project

In 2023, Felis supported the work of biologist and scientist Mauro Lucherini with 10 camera traps. Mauro is researching small wild cat species in Patagonia, Argentina. A founding member of Felis, Ruben Vernieuwe, visited the project in late 2023 to continue supporting Mauro and to learn as much as possible about the practice of such studies and the special features there. It is generally important to Felis that each project site can be seen and assessed in person by at least one member of the team. Among other things, the usefulness, importance of the area, assessment of the project partners and potential for mammalwatching ecotourism play a key role.

Summary of activities in 2021, 2022 and 2023

Looking back, a lot has already been started and achieved, even though all members work for the association on a purely voluntary basis in addition to their jobs/training. All projects have been started and the necessary funds have been raised to continue them.