

## **Activity Report 2025 – Project Felis**

### **Association Structure**

The Association Felis consists of six founding members as well as one additional member who joined in 2023. All members are entirely volunteer-based and receive no compensation or reimbursement of any kind. A project lead is designated for each project; members collaborate closely with one another, adapting their involvement to their individually available time.

### **Funding**

The projects are — with the exception of the Brazil and Hide projects — continuing to be funded through donations from founding members Sophie and Manuel Baumgartner. Two thirds of the Brazil project could be successfully implemented thanks to foundation grants secured by the association. For the upcoming project years of the India project, co-funding through foundation grants is planned. In addition, individual donations from private persons have also been received.

### **Association Purpose**

At the time of its founding, the association's purpose was defined as follows: The association aims to promote awareness and protection of wild cats, particularly small and lesser-known wild cat species. The association seeks to enhance national parks and other areas of high importance for wild cats (better equipment, camera traps for population studies, capacity building, ecotourism development, etc.). Wild cats are particularly well-suited as ambassadors and thereby also benefit other species. An area can be considered healthy when wild cats — as apex predators — are thriving.

### **Activities in 2025**

#### **Hide Project in Switzerland**

With the Hide Project, Association Felis pursues two goals: raising awareness among the local population about native wild cats, and increasing the association's visibility within Switzerland. To this end, a former military trailer is being converted into an observation hide, allowing wildlife to be observed without disturbance. The project partner, a farmer in the Jura region, will use the hide in the future as a complement to his existing accommodation offering.

Prior to the conversion, Felis surveyed the surrounding area for two years using ten camera traps. In addition to lynx and wildcat, stoat and numerous other mammal species were recorded.

The conversion is progressing step by step and is being carried out exclusively by association members through their own labour: windows were installed in 2023, flooring was laid and further planning was finalised in 2024, and in 2025 the interior was clad with wood. Completion of the furnishings and WC facilities is planned for 2026. The conversion is expected to occupy the entire year of 2026, with the hide anticipated to open for use in 2027.

#### **Mammalwatching Community**

Association Felis continues to be actively engaged in the international mammal-watching community ("Mammalwatcher") and advocates for making mammal watching more sustainable and more closely linked to nature conservation. In this context, Felis organised two online meetings each in 2023 and 2024, and one further meeting in 2025. Various measures have been initiated and concrete results have been achieved.

#### **Brazil Project**

In the Emas National Park in Brazil, Felis aims to reach over 1,000 pupils from schools in the surrounding region through children's books, raising awareness of the local flora and fauna. This proven method of environmental education through children's books forms the heart of the project.

The project is being implemented across three books: the first was written and printed in 2023, the second followed in 2024 alongside intensive environmental education work on the ground. In 2025, the necessary funding was secured to complete the project. Since then, environmental education activities have continued alongside the development of the third and final book. As the author wishes to ensure that all three books are thematically aligned and together convey a coherent overall picture, this final volume required particularly intensive research.

Collaboration with the local partners — whom two of the founding members know personally — has been exceptionally positive. The partners are highly committed and results-oriented, and the project outcomes to date have exceeded Felis's expectations. A planned joint meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss visions and ideas for future collaboration following the conclusion of the environmental education project.

### **India Project**

Since 2022, Felis has been running the project "Forgotten Cats of North East India" in collaboration with the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI). The focus is on involving the village population of Shergaon in northeastern India in the establishment of a local protected area. The aim is to develop alternative sources of income while simultaneously ensuring the long-term conservation of the area.

The project is structured around two main areas: the first focuses on promoting sustainable ecotourism, including capacity building among community members — for example in mammal watching. The second encompasses scientific research on wild cats using camera traps, as well as an investigation into local community attitudes towards wildlife, with the goal of strengthening perceived benefits relative to potential conflicts.

In March 2023, founding members Sophie and Manuel Baumgartner visited the project site and successfully transported 30 camera traps to the project location. The devices were equipped with rechargeable batteries and chargers to enable long-term research in the project forest. Coordination between the local partners and the WTI took some time and was successfully concluded at the end of 2023, allowing the project to gain significant momentum in 2024.

A field study was launched in collaboration with the WTI. The camera traps have already captured footage of rare and remarkable animal species. The data gathered will feed into a contribution for a renowned scientific journal and provide valuable foundations for the future protection of the region. In 2025, the camera trap survey and the scientific article were completed, and a social survey was additionally conducted to better understand the living realities and needs of the project population — an important prerequisite for the long-term effectiveness of the project's measures.

For 2026, Felis plans to approach foundations specifically for financial support, in order to advance the project further and sustainably secure the successes achieved to date.

### **Patagonia Project**

Since 2023, Felis has been supporting the work of Argentine biologist and scientist Mauro Lucherini, who researches small wild cat species in Patagonia. The association initially provided him with 10 camera traps, thereby making a direct contribution to field research.

In the same year, founding member Ruben Vernieuwe visited the project on-site to provide additional support to Mauro and to gain insights into the practical conduct of such surveys as well as the regional particularities. Such visits are of fundamental importance to Felis: the association places great value on having at least one team member personally visit and assess every project site. Various criteria inform this assessment — including the significance and relevance of the area, the evaluation of project partners, and the potential for mammal-watching ecotourism.

In 2024, additional camera traps were brought to Argentina to expand research capacity on the ground. In parallel, Felis is working on securing additional funding through Belgian foundations to support the project in the long term.

### **Member Contributions**

As Felis does not operate a formal time-tracking system, the following figures are based on members' own estimates. The survey found that individual members contributed between 150 and 400 hours of voluntary work during the founding years 2022 and 2023 — over a period of approximately one and a half years. In total, this amounts to an estimated 1,500 hours of voluntary engagement for the association. No equivalent survey was conducted for 2024 and 2025.

Felis extends its sincere thanks to all members for this extraordinary dedication.

### **Summary of Activities 2021–2025**

Looking back over the years 2021 to 2025, Felis has already set a great deal in motion and achieved much — all the more remarkable given that every member contributes their efforts entirely on a voluntary basis, alongside employment, education, and family commitments. All projects have been successfully launched, and the necessary funding for their continuation has always been secured.

Even during periods of high workload, when a great deal had to be managed simultaneously, the association has never taken its members' commitment for granted. Felis wishes to express here its explicit appreciation and gratitude — for every single hour poured into the association with such dedication and passion.