

[See all News](#)

Lynx charity sues Government over decision that ‘could wipe out hedgehogs’

Campaigners say wildcats needed to limit deer that are devastating woodlands

[Gift this article free](#)[Add us as preferred source](#)

The Lynx UK Trust claims that without enough of the predators in the wild to maintain a ‘healthy ecosystem’, hedgehogs will be at risk. Credit: Phillip Horwood/PA Wire



Sarah Knapton
Science Editor

Published 13 January 2026 8:07pm GMT

A charity campaigning to bring back lynx to the wild is suing the Government, claiming its failure to take the scheme seriously could wipe out hedgehogs and birds.

The Lynx UK Trust has launched proceedings against Emma Reynolds, the Environment Secretary, and Natural England calling for a judicial review into the decision to not consider a licence for the release of Eurasian lynx.

The charity argues that releasing an apex predator into the wild is the only way to control the soaring numbers of deer which are devastating woodlands and destroying habitats for hedgehogs and other ground-nesting species.

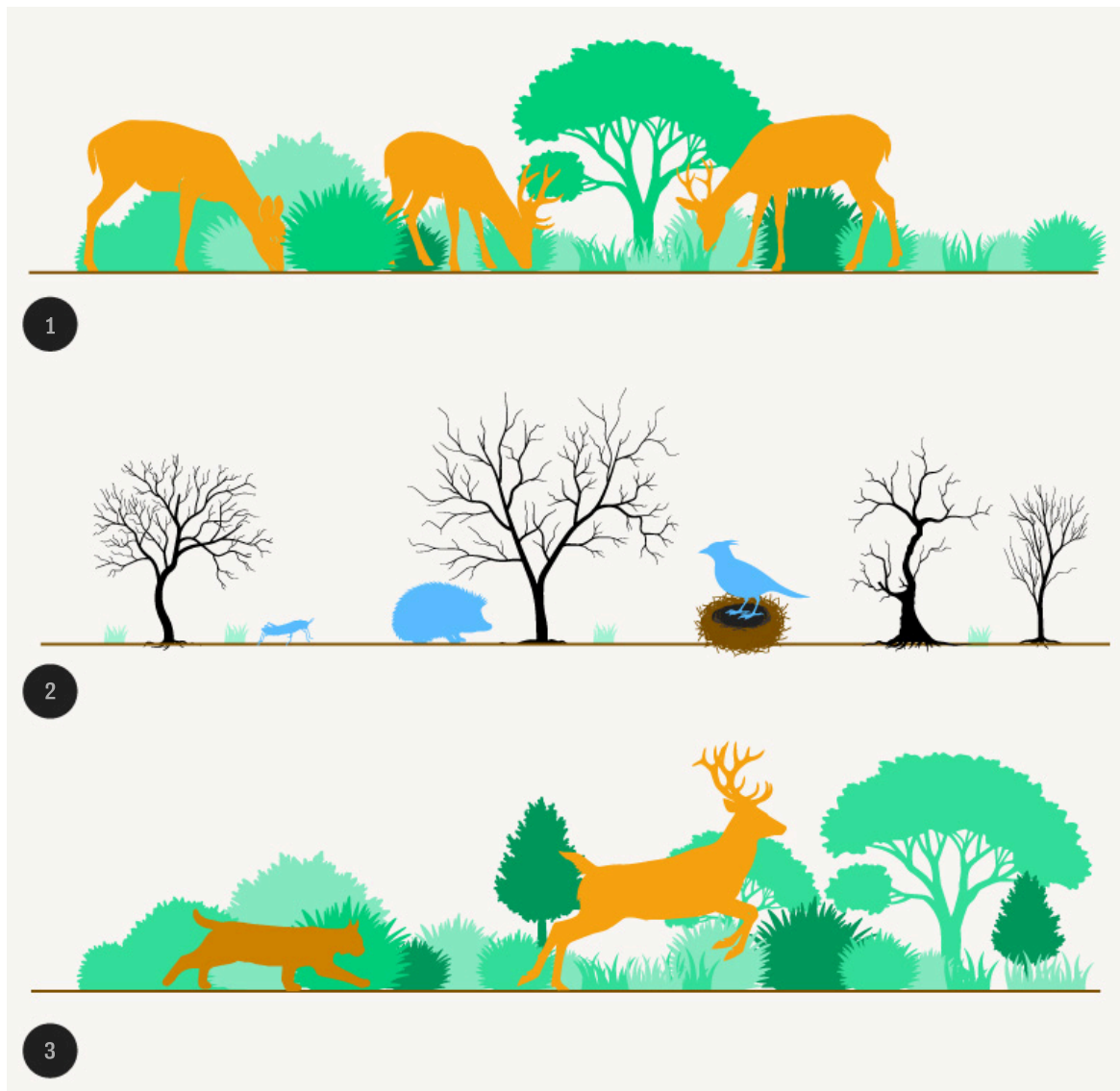
Advertisement

Dr Paul Donoghue, chief scientific adviser for the Lynx UK Trust, said: “UK conservation and government bodies are so paralysed by fear that all they do is watch species go extinct. It’s like ‘Carry on Conservation’. If it wasn’t so serious it would be funny.

“We need lynx immediately and without them all we are going to see is the continuous decline, and probably extinction, of a number of species which are much loved by the general public.

“Hedgehogs are in massive decline because the deer now eat everything on the ground. We should be wading through saplings in the woods but there aren’t any. Show me a seven-year-old oak tree sapling. You can’t.

“If lynx don’t come back, you cannot have a healthy functioning ecosystem. Even things like thrushes, robins, blackbirds, black caps, all require cover and that cover no longer exists.”



1

Too many deer cause the excessive consumption of young trees, shrubs, and plants leading to reduced ground cover in woods

2

Animals like hedgehogs, ground-nesting birds and insects need cover to nest and shelter and cannot survive in denuded areas

3

Lynx would hunt deer, keeping numbers down and allowing woodlands to recover and restore lost habitats for

The Eurasian lynx was once native to the British Isles but the last animal in the country was hunted to extinction for its fur around 700AD.

Lynx are currently listed on the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976, which means they cannot be released unless in a secure enclosure.

But the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 makes provision for rewilding animals and several species, such as beavers, red kits and white-tailed eagles have been brought back.

The trust was hoping eventually to rewild the animals in Kielder, Northumberland, but the Government has said that the predators present “significant challenges” and there is no evidence to support the release.

Farmers and landowners also fear the wildcats will attack livestock, game and walkers.

In argument, the trust says lynx are vital for controlling deer whose numbers have swollen to more than two million, the highest level in 1,000 years.

Unchecked, the animals strip woodlands of their “understory” – the vital layer of vegetation beneath the main tree canopy, consisting of shrubs, young trees, herbs, ferns, mosses and fungi, which supports wildlife with food, shelter, and breeding grounds.

RECOMMENDED

Patrick Galbraith: There is nothing natural about rewilding

[Read more →](#)

Last year, Tony Juniper, the head of Natural England said he would be “delighted” if lynx were released into the wild and “should be looked at”.

But Dr Donoghue said he got “radio silence” when trying to bring up the matter with Mr Juniper.

“We haven’t got the time to sit back and wait when almost every species in decline and lynx would breathe life into these forests” he added.

“We are in a biodiversity crisis. And the time for action is now. We will take it to the Supreme Court if necessary.”

The application for judicial review has been accepted by the High Court and Natural England and Defra have until the end of January to respond.

How deer are putting hedgehogs at risk

There are six species of deer in Britain, which include the native red deer and roe deer as well as imported species, fallow, muntjac, sika and Chinese water deer.

Traditionally deer would have had natural predators such as lynx wolves and bears but they are now extinct and the animals became a protected species in 1963, allowing their numbers to soar to two million.

Deer damage forest habitats by eating critical seedlings, shrubs, and wildflowers, which prevents forest regeneration and reduces plant diversity, creating open, “park-like” areas dominated by invasive plants or ferns.

This loss of vegetation and ground cover removes food and shelter for animals like hedgehogs or birds like nightingales or blackbirds which nest close to the ground.

Deer can also damage or kill young trees by damaging bark and lower branches.

The From the Editor Newsletter

Wake up to free-thinking comment and the biggest news stories, in your inbox every morning



Sign up



Sarah Knapton
Science Editor

Sarah Knapton is the Science Editor of The Telegraph and has covered all areas of science since 2013.

See more

Published 13 January 2026 8:07pm GMT

More stories