

Could big cats be roaming the UK?

Video transcript for video looking at the tracks and signs of big cats. Presenter, Ben Garrod interviews Rick Minter.

Ben Garrod (BG): “Hi Rick.”

Rick Minter (RM): “Ah, good to see you.”

BG: “You too. Thanks for inviting me along. And what a beautiful location – is this a good place for sighting of big cats?”

RM: “It is, over the years. We’re looking over the Cotswold edge into Gloucestershire, um, back into the Cotswold landscape certainly – particularly along this edge, the scrubby woodland slope.

BG: “Is that what makes this such a good location – the type of habitat here?”

RM: “The type of habitat. It’s stuffed with deer, which the cats would like.”

BG: “You say ‘the cats’ – what species of cats are talking about?”

RM: “There’s three kinds of sightings. There’s a black panther which people often say looks like a stretched Labrador: long tail, high shoulder blades, very cat like. And people think it could be the leopard in its black form, that’s the most scientifically valid candidate.

BG: “Yep.”

RM: “The other type which is mainly reported is a sandy-grey one, similar size and shape but that equates to the mountain lion, which is also called the cougar or the puma.

“And then lesser numbers of sightings of the lynx. Slightly smaller, and with the tufted ears and the short tail.”

BG: “So if we have enough habitat, potentially enough food and maybe even enough animals... why don’t we see them?”

RM: “Well they’re not seen much in their own countries, those types of cats, they’re very stealthy and ambush predators. But you’re much more likely to see the evidence they leave in the field in their territories.

“The first are prints. But very difficult to distinguish from a dog print and you rarely get a perfect print. But it’s good that lots of people look out for it.

“Scrapes are the back paws scraping a scratch pile and then scenting to mark their territory so others may detect it.

“Another type is a dropping, obviously, or sometimes called a scat. A bit bigger than a fox and definitely a wild carnivore scat, not a domestic dog scat.

“And a key interesting one is the scratch marks on trees. We rarely find those but this is an example of one which is a possible, found in Gloucestershire. You can see the striation marks here, which look very suspicious.

BG: “What makes you think it’s cat rather than person?”

RM: “I’ve tried to make these marks with a knife and it’s very difficult to get the sort of parallel. I’m not one hundred percent; I think it’s a very interesting specimen. So there we have it, those are the kinds of signs we’re looking for.

BG: “This is both still a fascinating and tantalising tale, thank you so much for this Rick.”

RM: “OK. All the best.”