



My Big Cat Year – **European Wildcat** in Belgium and the Netherlands 23/10/26 to 30/10/26

As I needed to be in the Netherlands for a week, it provided me with a good opportunity to try to observe the **European Wildcat**. A species I had seen before but not yet in My Big Cat Year. The Ardennes in Belgium is the closest place to have a chance for a pure (free of hybridization) European Wildcat ...

On the 22nd of October I returned from Brazil and the next flight was the 30th of October to Chile in search of the **Kodkod**, **Pampas Cat** and **Andean Mountain Cat**. Those 8 days in the Netherlands were very welcome. As always, it was great to see Bea and the kids again. Also, as we sold the house of my mother who passed away in March, my brothers, our families, and I spent a Saturday at our mother's house to clean it up, put everything in boxes and divide the necessary items. An emotional but unavoidable process.

In addition, I could catch up with friends, had a few appointments, went with Bea to her mother in Lochem, visited my favourite hockey club HC den Bosch and watched the men's and women's top teams, attend the regular Rotary meeting, the Annual General Meeting (ALV) of HC Den Bosch and the General Assembly meeting of the Brabants Landschap.

I would also use those 8 days to try to observe the **European Wildcat**. A species I had seen before but not yet during My Big Cat Year. Two years ago, I had already contacted the **Zoogdierbescherming Nederland** to see if they could help me out with finding this cat in Limburg, the most southern province in the Netherlands. They were extremely helpful and put me in contact with **Rene Janssen**, the local specialist and researcher regarding the **European Wildcat**.

Rene gave me a few suggestions for routes in Limburg where it would be possible to observe it. However, he also explained that hybridisation is a problem in the Netherlands, less so in Belgium. So, to ensure I would be able for certain to have a chance to observe a truly pure **European Wildcat**, he advised me to contact **Jorn van den Bogaert** in the **Ardennes** in **Belgium**.

And that's what I did. I made an appointment with Jorn for Monday the 26th of October. We would go out from 16:30 to 18:30 for the possibility of an observation in the twilight and from 20:00 to 22:00 as a backup in case we missed it during the earlier hours. From Den Bosch I made my way in 2.5 hours to the **Ardennes**, the **largest forested area in Belgium** and much bigger and wilder than anything we have in the Netherlands.





My Big Cat Year – European Wildcat in Belgium and the Netherlands 23/10/26 to 30/10/26

Jorn is a former forestry ranger but nowadays he is fully focused on guiding in both the Ardennes and abroad. He also has a great nature place in the Ardennes of 5.5 hectares where he has accommodation and a photo hide to rent. He knows the area extremely well and is a **very experienced wildlife guide**.

Regarding the **European Wildcat**, the chances are good and he sees them regularly but it is not guaranteed. It also happens that he misses them on his excursions, as it should be, as that is nature. His websites are [natuurgidsardennen](http://natuurgidsardennen.be) and lehurlementduloup.be (BNB).

As soon as I arrived, we got into Jorn's Jeep and we scanned a few fields where he sees them once in a while. We both had thermals and Jorn is extremely efficient with it. The fields were empty, except for a **European Hare** which showed up on the thermal. For a moment Jorn thought it could be a **European Wildcat** as its ears show little heat. When it presses itself down in the grass, as Hares and Wildcats often do, it is always good to double check it. This one was unfortunately a hare!

We moved on and we went to a good **vantage point** in the **forest on top of a hill**. From there, we had a good view on several fields, some stretching as far as a few hundred meters towards the edge of the forest. We scanned the fields with the thermal and binoculars and Jorn suddenly said, **'I have got a heat signal!'** From the excitement of the tone in his voice, I noted this may be something. He said it's left from a bale of hay in a field at the right side of our view, about 100 meters away. I had problems locating it as I didn't look left enough with my binoculars. As it moved away quickly into the grassy section at the edge of the forest, I missed a lot. **Jorn said it was one as he clearly noticed its white throat of the cat ...**



Jorn was disappointed for me as he really wished for me to have it in the bag. You never know if you are going to see it again. I said no worries, let's wait, it may come out again and start hunting. And within a few minutes it came out indeed and Jorn was on it again. **Now I could clearly see it in my binoculars!!** Wow, a **European Wildcat** in Belgium!!





My Big Cat Year – **European Wildcat** in Belgium and the Netherlands 23/10/26 to 30/10/26

Happy with my 24th cat for the year and 26th in life! We watched it for over 30 minutes until it got dark. We got great views, saw it hunting and carrying prey (probably a mouse or rat) and it even moved along barbed wire closer to us, to a distance of about 50 to 75 meters enabling me to get a few photos and videos. From the left side of the forest a group of **Red Deer** moved over the fields towards the Wildcat. At one stage, they were so close, I took a photo with both mammals into one shot. Nice!





My Big Cat Year – European Wildcat in Belgium and the Netherlands 23/10/26 to 30/10/26



Really happy with this great observation, we made our way back to the car and decided to drive towards the photo hide to see what was happening there. As soon as we arrived, we noticed some **Red Deer**, including a big stag, in front of the hide. Also present was a **Roe Deer**. To my big surprise, suddenly a **raccoon** turned up. Jorn explained to me they are regular

visitors as there is always some food in front of the hide. We could approach the **Raccoon** very close and noticed two other **raccoons** were nearing too. What a great place this hide, it is at the edge of a huge forest (you can walk in there for 8kms straight without passing a road), so it is **teeming with wildlife**.



We drove back to Jorn's place and chatted about the place, the **different Wildcat species in the world** and some nice observations we both had in the past. What a nice guy and a great





My Big Cat Year – **European Wildcat** in Belgium and the Netherlands 23/10/26 to 30/10/26

place, very likely I will visit it again!



[Zoogdierbescherming Nederland](#) also put me in contact with **Leo Linnartz**. He is an **authority in the Netherlands about the European Wildcat** and the 28th of October, I went to Zeist to interview him. I will post our talk and interview later on in this blog but here you can already read about [Leo and the European Wildcat in the Netherlands](#).

Many thanks to [Zoogdierbescherming Nederland](#), **Marjet Heins**, **Leo Linnartz**, **Rene Janssen** and **Jorn van den Bogaert** for the help with regard to the **European Wildcat**!





My Big Cat Year – **European Wildcat** in Belgium and the Netherlands 23/10/26 to 30/10/26



Coming Friday, I will leave for Chile, Western Sahara, Uganda and I will finish around the 20th of December in the United States. What a year it has been so far! Enjoyed it tremendously but I am also looking forward to ending it and starting up a more regular life, together with Bea, the kids, friends and family.

The Big Cat Year is not just about spotting wild cats. It is also about habitat and wildlife conservation. The aim is to support a project/organization in every country visited. With regard to the Netherlands, we have made a contribution towards [Zoogdierbescherming Nederland](#). Read here more about the [different projects we supported](#).

Would you like to contribute to supporting these important projects and/or organizations in the world with regard to conservation and protection of nature and wildlife, please have a look at the [funding page](#). All help is appreciated! Big and small, it all counts. You can already help by buying the projects a coffee; <https://buymeacoffee.com/mybigcatyear>

