

## **Activity Report of 2021 and 2022, 'Felis' Association**

### **Foundation**

Felis was founded on 20.08.2021. Five founding members were assembled back then and one additional member was recruited later in the year. All six members work 100% on a voluntary basis and do not receive any wages or compensation. A project leader is defined for each of the Felis projects, and the members work in close coordination with each other and with the time available to them.

### **Funding**

Sophie and Manuel Baumgartner donated 65,000 CHF from their private savings to Felis in the founding year, so that the association can start and carry out projects in the first 2-3 years without intensive fundraising (in terms of time and resources). This allows Felis to gain important experience, optimize processes, as well as learn insights for the future. The aim is to prove that Felis is capable of carrying out projects efficiently, with a solid structure and measurable success. Also, at the moment, almost 100% of all donations flow into the project work (a fraction of the money is used for different fees). A fundraising concept will be designed and launched in 2023 and 2024 so that Felis will be able to increase its commitment to the projects long term and possibly take on new projects. One possible fundraising strategy for this could be foundation fundraising, which Felis is testing for its Brazil project at the end of 2022 and beginning of 2023. Other channels such as donations from private individuals, membership fees, company contributions, etc. are also being carefully examined.

### **Purpose of the association**

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

### **Activity 2021**

In 2021, after its foundation in August, Felis focused mainly on finding and developing suitable projects. It was important that the project partners were reliable and motivated to ensure a long-term collaboration. It was also important to set up a website ([projectfelis.org](http://projectfelis.org)) and to define the mission, vision and values of Felis together. As the members were aware early on of the importance of researching wild cats for their long-term conservation, Felis bought 80 Browning camera traps before the end of 2021, which will be used for future projects.

### **Activity 2022**

#### **First project**

Felis' first project, which was one of the main motivations for founding the association in the first place, was in the Jigme Dorji National Park in **Bhutan**. More than 9 wild cat species live in the park. The project partner there, a ranger in the national park, had many ideas, the right motivation and also wanted to study wildcats. Felis sent him 10 camera traps as a leap of faith. Unfortunately, Felis' contact person was transferred to another National Park and thus the discussions about the project had to be conducted anew with the successors. It became clearer and clearer in the further discussions that it is not easy to start a project in Bhutan. To this day it is not clear whether the help offered is big enough to be accepted by the authorities in Bhutan. There is still the possibility that the support will be refused

because the administrative effort on the part of Bhutan is not worth it (project sums below 50'000\$ are often refused). Felis agreed with the park to limit itself to a camera trap study for the time being, which the rangers would carry out at their own time and costs - and Felis would provide the material. Felis then sent 2 camera traps with new lithium batteries to test them in the environment there. In 2023, Felis will decide how to proceed with the project in Bhutan. One thing is clear though, the members of Felis have learnt a lot from this experience and now know that working with national parks can take a long time, there are some administrative hurdles and projects should if possible not be dependent on individuals.

### **Second project**

The second Felis project is in **Switzerland** because it is important to the association that local people are sensitized about the native wildcats and other wildlife and also because Felis wants to be noticed in Switzerland. The members have decided to build a mammal observation hide for this reason (the first in Switzerland). The intent is to raise awareness among visitors by providing important information on the Eurasian lynx (*lynx lynx*) and the European wildcat (*felis silvestris*) on the one hand, and on the other hand to offer them the opportunity to observe wild animals without causing any disturbance. For this purpose, Felis bought an old, suitable military trailer (second-hand) at the beginning of 2022, which will be converted by the members, the project partner and other helpers. 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 area for months with 10 camera traps. The Eurasian lynx, the European wildcat as well as many other mammal species have been identified. We will probably still be working on the reconstruction in 2023 and 2024 before the hide will be ready to be used.

### **Third project and expansion of the association's purpose**

In the meantime, after only 1.5 years of association activity, the purpose of Felis has been extended. The association has successfully organized and carried out the first international **mammalwatching** meeting in Spain on 30.09.2022-5.10.2022. The idea for organizing this meeting was born before the foundation of 'Felis', but could only be realized in 2022 due to the pandemic. It involved discussions with the most important people in the community on how to make mammalwatching more sustainable and how mammalwatchers can contribute to conservation. Besides the discussions, the aim was also to develop concrete measures on how the meeting participants can help the community to contribute to conservation and practice this hobby in a more sustainable way. Felis believes that raising awareness among the mammalwatching community and making it better has great potential to contribute a lot to nature conservation and should be pursued as an association purpose. This is also because all members of 'Felis' are passionate mammalwatchers themselves and have come together through this passion in the first place. Felis is now known to the most important actors in the community and can thus work better on positively influencing the community. Two reports have been written on this and can be found on the Felis website.

### **Fourth project**

In February 2022, we received a call for help from the Emas National Park in **Brazil**. The leading lodge there (where members of Felis have already been in person), which runs ecotourism, was having difficulties continuing its operations because of the pandemic. At the same time, the owner, who is the wife of the director of Emas National Park, had a good idea for a project. She wants to use the proven method of environmental education to reach over 1,000 children from various schools in the area through children's books. She thereby wants to sensitize them to the flora and fauna and thus ensure the long-term support and protection of the national park. Felis agreed to help as the books focus on the mysterious Pampas cat (*Leopardus colocolo*) and the charismatic Maned wolf (*Chrysocyon brachyurus*) and because the area is very valuable for these species. However, as this project would

deplete any financial reserves of Felis, the members decided to focus on a foundation fundraising for this project. For this purpose, a compact funding application was drafted and graphically revised. Other necessary documents also had to be prepared. Various foundations in Switzerland have already been contacted and inquired about. Felis now hopes for a positive response in order to be able to carry out the project from 2023.

### **Fifth project**

In May 2022, discussions were held on a joint project between Felis and the Wildlife Trust of **India** (WTI). This led to Felis committing to collaborate on the 'Forgotten Cats of North East India' project in the Tenzingaon Forest later in the year. The main objective of this project is to involve the local Sherdukpen community in the establishment of a community conservation area for the two forest areas, provide alternative sources of income and ensure 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 wildlife research, such as camera trapping studies for selected species (focused on wild cats) and also on community attitudes towards wildlife (more benefits than harm). This cooperation with WTI is possible for Felis, as the budget for the first year is within a feasible range (approx. 15,000 Euros) and the budget for the further project years is to be obtained through joint fundraising. With this project, the Felis association can also learn a lot, as WTI has been active in India as a strong project partner for over 20 years and has implemented over 40 projects.

### **Sixth project**

At the end of May 2022, Felis was contacted by the biologist and scientist Mauro Lucherini, who is researching small wild cat species in Patagonia in **Argentina**. He lacks the budget for camera traps to expand his research. Felis quickly realized that Mauro is very committed and motivated and promised him up to 10 camera traps to help. In addition, a member of Felis will be heading to Argentina in 2023 to support Mauro there and learn as much as possible about the practice of such research and the specifics there. This is generally important to Felis, that each project location can be seen and assessed once in person by at least one member of the team. Among other things, the meaningfulness, importance of the area, assessment of the project partners and potential for a mammalwatching ecotourism play an essential role.

### **Commitment of the association members**

Since Felis does not require an hourly report for the commitment of the members of the association who worked on a voluntary basis, only an estimate can be made here. For this purpose, all members were asked to give an estimate. This showed that the individual members have done between 150-400 hours of voluntary work in the 1.5 years since the foundation. In total (all six members) this is an estimated 1'500 hours of voluntary work for the association - Felis thanks its members very much for this extraordinary achievement!

### **Summary of activities in 2021 and 2022**

Although Felis has only been in existence for less than 1.5 years and all members are involved in the association on a purely voluntary basis in addition to their profession/studies, a lot has already been started and achieved. The members have already been able to learn a lot, which will help them in the future to carry out the projects even more efficiently, in a more thought-out way and thus in a higher quality. Felis is proud of its motivated, committed and self-critical members, as well as the highly valued project partners and their willingness to work in the areas that are so important for wildcats. Even though there were times when the workload was high and many things had to be done at the

same time, Felis would like to state that the commitment of the association members was never taken for granted and would like to express much appreciation for this!

### **Closing words**

In today's world, which is plagued by negative headlines, it is especially nice to see how individuals can come together in small groups and make a lot of difference. The care, sensitisation and protection of our nature and thus the wild creatures is systemically relevant for the future and should be brought to the attention of more people. Felis is committed to the protection of wild cats and their environment with the means available to the association and its members.