

Research into possible Woodchester wild cat finds no cat DNA on deer

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This picture shows Dr Allaby examining the deer carcass discovered at National Trust's Woodchester Park. (c) Rick Minter

Extensive DNA tests by experts at the University of Warwick on two deer carcasses found in Gloucestershire have not found any indication of a big cat presence.

The National Trust asked the University to test a [roe deer](#) carcass found near Woodchester Park, Gloucestershire in early January after examination of the wounds led to speculation that it may have been killed by a big cat.

Comprehensive [DNA tests](#) have found fox DNA on the Woodchester carcass and what is expected to be fox DNA on the second deer carcass

found a few miles away.

Dr Robin Allaby, Associate Professor at the School of Life Sciences at the University of Warwick, said:

"We did not detect cat DNA on either deer carcass. Other than deer, by far the strongest genetic signal we found on the Woodchester Park carcass was from a fox. That fox DNA was found on the ribs, legs and fur plucking sites from the Woodchester deer carcass."

"On the second deer carcass we found canid DNA . A more detailed analysis is underway to pin down the canid species but our expectation is that that will also be fox DNA."

Dr Robin Allaby took 45 samples in total, from the wounds of the deer carcasses with the aim of testing specifically for DNA from the saliva of any canid (for instance dog or fox) or felid (cat) species which had killed, or scavenged from the deer. He used those samples to carry out 450 PCRs (the [polymerase chain reaction](#) is a standard scientific technique to amplify the target [DNA](#)), and almost 600 sequence reactions. The team searched for two gene targets each of deer and canid, but over 30 different cat gene targets.

David Armstrong, Head Ranger for the National Trust in Gloucestershire said: "The story of the investigation of the dead deer has really sparked off local curiosity with a lot of people coming out to Woodchester Park to explore. People love a mystery like this and although we haven't found a [wild cat](#), many of our visitors clearly believe there might be something interesting living quietly hidden in Woodchester."

Rick Minter, author of a new book on big cats reported in Britain, said:

"There has been speculation of breeding amongst feral big cats in the

UK. We are no closer to indicating that with these results, but lessons have been learnt from Warwick University's valuable input to this exercise. The strong media interest suggests an appetite to look into this subject further, and recent community surveys in Gloucestershire have indicated a strong desire for big cat evidence to be researched carefully."

"We should not be complacent about possible big cats in the UK, but considering these animals living secretly in our landscape can fire people's imaginations and help us consider all of the wild nature around us. Our outdoors can still hold surprises maybe."

Big cats will do their utmost to avoid contact with people but anyone who does see a [big cat](#) in the wild is advised to stay composed and back away from the animal.

Provided by University of Warwick

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