

## **Answers to the Written Assembly Questions for answer on 17 March 2011**

[R] signifies that the Member has declared an interest.

[W] signifies that the question was tabled in Welsh.

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- 2 Questions to the Minister for Rural Affairs

***To ask the Minister for Rural Affairs***

**Darren Millar (Clwyd West):** Will the Minister make a statement on the evidence she has gathered with regard to the presence of big cats in the Welsh countryside. (WAQ57293)

***Answer issued on 23 March 2011***

The Welsh Assembly Government investigates reports of sightings of big cats in Wales and alleged attacks by them on livestock. In cases where evidence is provided, my officials carry out site visits. The evidence collected is assessed by staff from the Assembly Government Wildlife Unit and where appropriate the Wildlife Unit can call on the assistance of experts in British and International wildlife as well as research departments in zoos, universities and the Veterinary Laboratories Agency.

By 'evidence' we mean things that are capable of independent verification and might include: carcasses from alleged kills which would be collected for post mortem, video footage or photographic evidence, casts of paw prints and any other signs indicating the possible presence of exotic species such as the presence of scats or scratch/claw marks on trees or posts i.e. hard evidence that can be independently verified. Reports of sightings alone, although often reported in good faith, cannot be independently verified.

All reported sightings, whether evidenced or not, are recorded on a database held by the Wildlife Unit. Our records on big cat sightings date back over 15 years and in that time there have been several hundred unsubstantiated sightings. To date, no evidence has come to light proving the presence of big cats in the Welsh countryside during that time.