

## **Balkan Lynx in Captivity**

### *A Statement of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme Partnership*

The Balkan lynx is a critically endangered autochthonous population in the southwest Balkans, mainly in the border areas of Macedonia and Albania. The number of animals in the wild is below 100 and may be far less. The Balkan lynx has been described as an own subspecies *Lynx lynx martinoi*. This classification has never been fully supported by the scientific community, but preliminary analyses demonstrate a clear genetic differentiation of the Balkan lynx from the neighbouring population of the Carpathians, and we recommend that the Balkan lynx should be regarded and conserved as an own taxon.

There are no known Balkan lynx in captivity, whether in public zoos nor in any private collection. Establishing a conservation breeding programme as a genetic backup and a potential source for future reintroductions must be considered for any critically endangered taxon. However, we do not, at this stage of our work, recommend such a move. The Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme is presently assessing the status of the lynx, its ecological and anthropogenic environment and the threats to its survival, and will, together with its partners and the interest groups in the two range countries, develop a conservation strategy. Such a strategy may consider reintroductions using animals bred in captivity, but our present knowledge is not sufficient to come up with such a recommendation now. At the moment, we assume that the remnant population can survive, but must not be weakened by taking away animals for translocations or starting a captive breeding programme. It goes without saying that no permission should be given for capturing any Balkan lynx for a regular zoo exhibit or any collection with the exception of a generally agreed, well-designed and properly managed conservation breeding programme.

We see, however, an urgent need for a rescue station for Balkan lynx. There is always the chance that injured or orphaned animals are found that cannot survive when left alone. Such individuals are of high value and must be saved, either for being released into the wild or as a founding stock for a future conservation breeding programme. We welcome the interest of Skopje Zoo to build a new facility for the Balkan lynx, and we recommend that the international zoo world and the conservation community support this initiative. When designing such a station, we recommend that the following principles are observed:

- The Balkan Lynx Centre should be designed according to recognised standards for this species and must guarantee a professional standard of maintenance and care taking.
- The Centre should not be integrated into the normal exhibit in order to minimise the stress for the animals. We believe that the rescue centre can be used to raise awareness for the conservation of the Balkan lynx and therefore recommend to offer visitors an opportunity to observe the animals, but this should be done in a very discreet way, e.g. through one-way glass windows or video observation.
- Crossbreeding of Balkan lynx with any other lynx subspecies must be avoided. Any breeding of Balkan lynx should, from the very beginning, strictly follow the recommendations for a conservation breeding programme.

We would also welcome the development of a facility in Albania where a lynx can be hosted for at least a short period. The stations in the two countries should closely co-operate.

There are many experts on conservation breeding and lynx care in the conservation community and the zoo world that can provide support when designing such rescue centres.

All partners of the Balkan Recovery Programme are ready to provide further assistance in regard to the design of an *ex situ* part of the Balkan lynx conservation activities.

*The above recommendations were discussed and agreed on the training course for the Balkan Lynx Monitoring in Switzerland, 20 March 2007. The following people were present at this meeting:*

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