

Friday, March 24, 2006 – village Bituše

On the fourth day, we went on a survey into the beech forest that stretches above the village Bituše, near the border watchtower (Fig. 6). Tracking conditions were bad because of the dense fog and wet and deep snow. Only fox and hare tracks and some badger and marten tracks were present in this area.

On our way back, we visited the red deer reserve (Bačilište), located in the beech forest near the resort Bunec. Here we came upon to a lot of red deer tracks and scat.

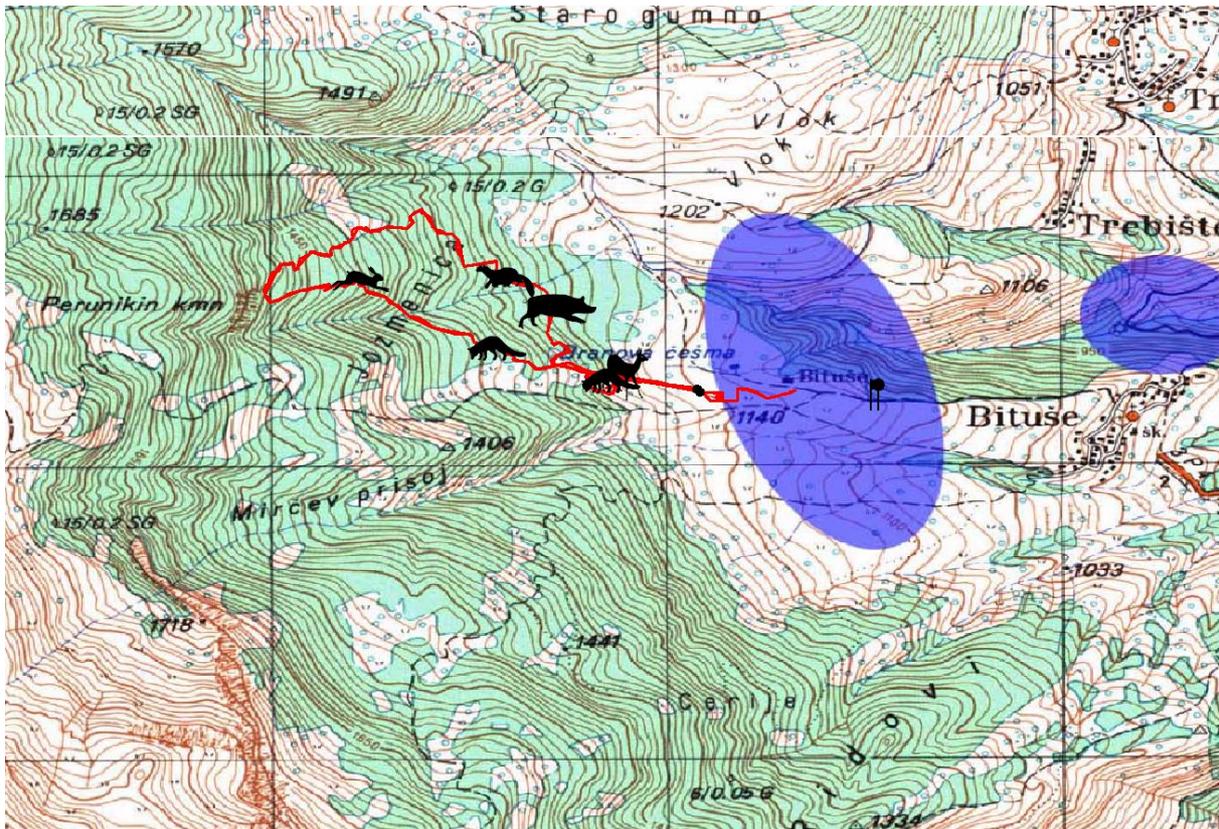


Fig. 6: Transect (red line) and tracks (symbol of the species) encountered on March, 24. The blue patches indicate locations of less recent (>10 years old) lynx observations. Not all hare tracks have been recorded.

Saturday, March 25, 2006 – between the dam and Kičinica (Kičinicka Češma)

According to our previous experience, on the last day of our survey we decided to go on a short trip into the mixed fir and beech forest, located near the Mavrovo Lake dam. We followed the forest trail, and in the first part of the trail we didn't encounter any significant tracks (Fig. 7). Following the trail occurred to be very important that day. After 1 km of walk in the forest on steep terrain, we finally found tracks, which made our hearts swell. After looking at them carefully, taking measurements and following them for a while, we were certain that those tracks belonged to a lynx. We noticed that there were even tracks from two different individuals which often walked one after the other, leaving just one trail, but which also separated from time to time leaving two separate trails before joining again. One individual left slightly smaller footprints than the other. We started to protocol for documenting the tracks: filling in the track survey form (see Appendix), measuring different parameters of the tracks, photographing the site etc. We used plaster to make casts of the lynx footprint. After all this activities, we separated in two groups for back- and forward tracking, respectively. The back-trackers finally lost the tracks in the Radika River bed, while the forward trackers could follow them for a long time, first going uphill, before turning down, crossing the forest trail again and going further downwards. While tracking we succeeded to find some hairs that could potentially belong to lynx and urine places. Whether the two individuals were an adult female with a young or an adult male and female, we could not say because in this season both cases are actually possible. Besides the lynx tracks, we found hare and some roe deer tracks.

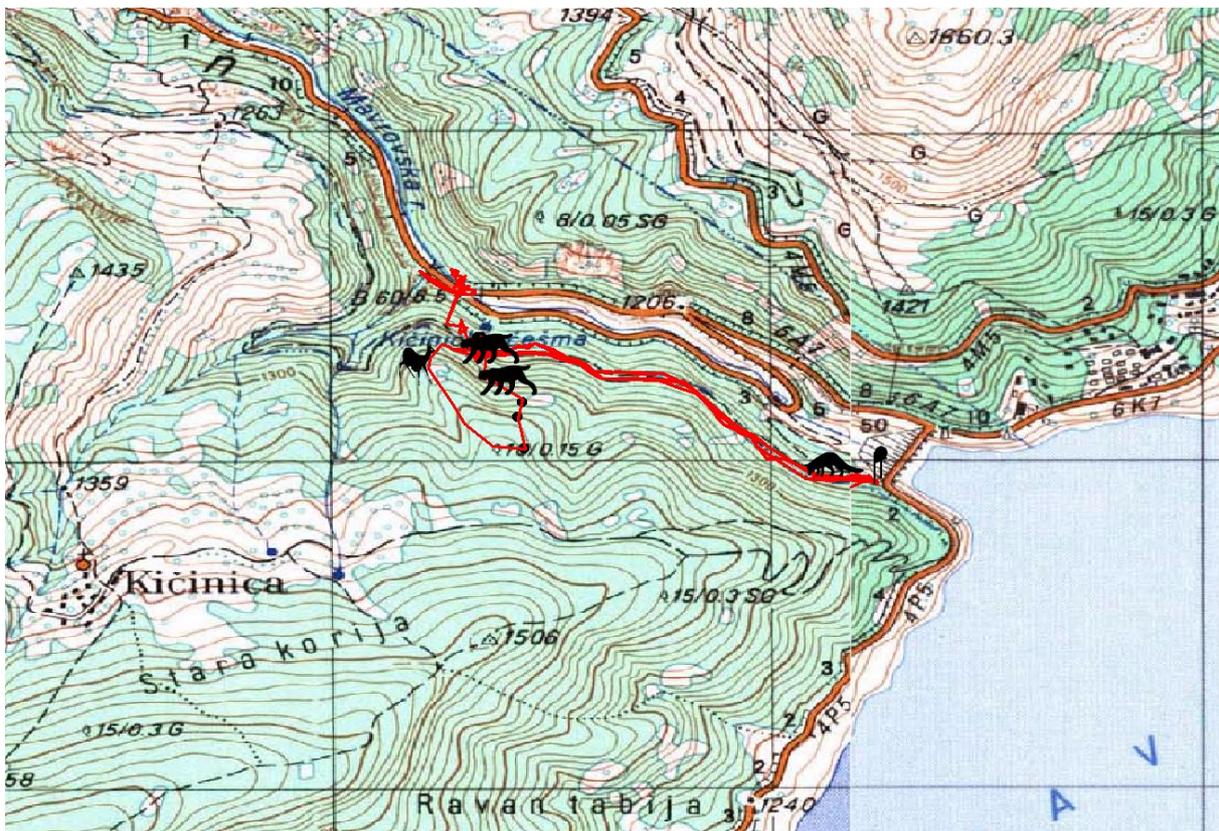


Fig. 7: Transect (red line) and tracks (symbol of the species) encountered on March, 25. From the point where the lynx tracks have been found our trail is branching off in two for back-tracking (down to the valley bottom) and forward tracking (up-hill), respectively.

During our field survey, several results can be point out:

1. We made 5 field trips in various localities in the frame of the National Park Mavrovo;
2. We took photos from all the different tracks and scats we found;
3. We took photos from all habitats we visited;
4. We took some hair for morphological analysis;
5. We used plaster to make casts of lynx footprints; and
6. We took waypoints on the GPS and created transects on a map.

Conclusions

In order to continue to practise and improve the experience gained from the training in Switzerland for the Balkan lynx monitoring programme, KORA together with EURONATUR and representatives from the *Macedonian Ecological Society* (MES) and the *Society for Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania* (PPNEA), organised a field survey in the Mavrovo National Park in Macedonia. The field trip lasted from 20 to 25 March 2006. It was organised in 5 days of tracking surveys to various localities in the area of the National Park. During our stay there, we learned more about:

- Transect routes that can be used in the future;
- The composition of mammal species in the area;
- The conditions of the habitats in the National Park;
- Good sites for camera trapping;
- Possible lynx presence in the area from the contact with the local people;
- Activities taken on by the border police from the Macedonian western border;
- Making plaster casts of track footprints.

We also refreshed and extended our previously gained knowledge on the identification of various mammal tracks, including lynx tracks seen the last day, working with GPS device etc.

Considering the experience gained up to now, we can point to some of the next steps needed:

- Continuation of the field work, in order to have more reliable data about lynx and its prey base;
- Creating a data base for collecting the various data and information;
- Continuation of the cooperation with the border police and other stakeholders;
- Raising awareness in order to create a bigger network in the area.

All the knowledge acquired from the training courses in Switzerland and Macedonia, along with the two workshops organised in Macedonia and Albania, can be applied to build a reliable network for future cooperation. A monitoring programme is not easy to establish. A lot of information, organised in a database, has to be collected in order to establish and manage a recovery programme in the long-term.

Perhaps, finding tracks of a lynx is a small accomplishment, but it is of great importance for young enthusiasts, dedicated for the protection of this wild species.

References

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Appendices

- Track survey form
- Pictures from the Field Survey