

Report on the Field survey

Bistra Mt, Mavrovo National Park, Macedonia

19-20 January 2007



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Introduction

Starting from 1st of July 2006, Macedonian Ecological Society started a joint project on the topic “Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme’ together with Swiss organization KORA, German organization “EURONATUR”, Norwegian organization NINA and Albanian NGO PPNEA, financially supported by MAVVA Foundation - Swiss and Norwegian Research Council. The aim of this project is to assure the conservation of Balkan lynx population, which is identified as the most threatened population of Eurasian lynx in Europe (Von Arx et al. 2004).

From 20-25 March 2006, young researches from MES and PPNEA, together with expert from KORA conducted a survey in NP Mavrovo, which is considered as stronghold of the Balkan lynx population. The goal of the survey was to carry out transects in the possible lynx habitats and to find tracks, scats and other indications of large mammals’ presence, especially lynx.

According to our experience from the pervious field trip in NP Mavrovo and the results of the questionnaires conducted in the villages in the Park, from 19th to 20th January 2007 members of Macedonian lynx group did a two-day field survey on Bistra Mt, in the forest that stretches above the village Sence. The forest is predominantly consisted of fir trees, although beech and juniper trees can be found. On some places, the terrain is rocky, steep and inaccessible, making it good habitat for chamois. The aim of the survey, which is foreseen as routine activity within the project, was to carry out some transects in the forest, to select a good sites for setting camera-traps and to find any sign of lynx and other large mammals’ species in the area.

Survey activities

We did the field survey in the forest that stretches above village Sence on Bistra Mt in two days. Each day we visited different part of the mountain, guided by two of the local people who have seen different species of animals and animal tracks, including lynx.

The first day we visited the northern part of the mountain right above the village (Photo 1).



▪ **Photo 1.** View on the northern part of Bistra Mt, right above the village Sence

The terrain was rocky, steep and difficult for walking, with many fir, beech and juniper trees. Snow conditions were bad, so there were only snow remnants above 1500 m asl., on places where the sun does not shine.



▪ **Photo 2.** Chamois scat



▪ **Photo 3.** Chamois tracks

Along the transect we found many chamois scats (Photo 2), less hare and wild boar scats and possibly wolf scat. Most of the tracks encountered were from chamois (Photo 3) and wild boar. We saw some tracks suspicious for us, possibly from wild cat. There were no good sites for camera-trapping on this part of the mountain.

The second day we had a trip to the southern part of the mountain in the fir forest that spreads above the village (Photo 4). There were also some rocky places with many small caves. Snow conditions were same as the pervious day.



▪ **Photo 4.** View in the fir forest

Local people guided us to the places where lynx and lynx tracks were observed. Along the transect we found many chamois and wild boar (Photo 5 and 6) scats and tracks, but also some hare and fox tracks and scats. We noticed several sites on a forest road that are good for setting camera-traps. After the field trip, we came back to the village where few questionnaires were conducted and posters and leaflets were disseminated to our guides.



• **Photo 5.** Wild boar tracks



• **Photo 6.** Wild boar scat

Conclusions

Considering the experience gained from last year trip and results of the questionnaires, the members of Macedonian Lynx Group conducted a field survey in the forest above village Sence on Bistra Mt. This survey was a routine activity foreseen in the project. The results of the survey can be appointed as follows:

- The habitat is in good condition
- Although the snow conditions were bad, a lot of tracks from chamois and wild boar and less hare and fox tracks were encountered
- Lynx presence can be expected in this area due to good habitat and presence of lynx pray, mainly chamois and hare
- Some good sites for camera traps were observed
- Contacts with local people were established

The good habitat and presence of chamois and hare, as well as the information from local people can be indicators for lynx presence in this area. Therefore, additional surveys need to be done and camera-traps to be set in the area in near future to confirm the lynx presence. Local people should be also included in the survey as members of the Monitoring Network.