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In Macedonia and Albania, Last 100 Balkan Lynx Face Possible Extinction

BalkanTravellers.com

5 March 2009 | The survival of the rare Balkan lynx, of which 100 members at most live in the wilds of Macedonia and Albania, is critically endangered. However, initiatives aimed at battling the causes of their disappearance are underway.

Long seen as an unofficial national symbol in Macedonia, the Balkan lynx - a subspecies of the Eurasian lynx, is featured on both a postal stamp and a coin. With a short tail, long legs and thick neck, the tufts of hair on both ears are the defining characteristic of the lynx.

"The Balkan lynx population, estimated at about 100 individuals, lives in Albania, Macedonia and parts of Serbia-Montenegro in isolation from the lynx populations of Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia," according to the European Nature Heritage Fund – EuroNatur, a non-profit foundation. "While the latter are derived from reintroduced specimen from the Carpathian Mountains, the Balkan lynx is represents the original subspecies of lynx indigenous to the Balkan Mountains."

Although, as reported by the Scientific American magazine, the species is legally protected in both Albania and Macedonia, its rarity has also made it misunderstood and easily targeted. "There seems to be a lack of knowledge about the species and the legislation," Manuela von Arx of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme (BLRP) said.

There is a monitoring scheme underway in western Macedonia's Mavrovo National Park and in Albania in cooperation with the Swiss-based research group KORA, EuroNatur and the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research. In addition to determining the cats' status via camera data, research and interviews, the project aims to establish protected areas for the animal and help local authorities develop a conservation strategy.

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Macedonia



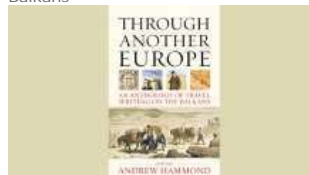
Macedonia's Krushevo to Become the First "Ethno Town" in the Balkans

22 December 2008 | In an effort to attract tourists to the town of Krushevo in central Macedonia, its residents intend to re-enact the historical Ilinden Uprising every year between July 5 and August 13.

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Balkans



Through Another Europe (2009) | Edited by Andrew Hammond

When Henry Blount journeyed through Bosnia in the 1630s, two things struck him: the purity of the water and the great height of the Bosnians, which, he noted, "made me suppose them the offspring of those old Germans noted by Tacitus and Caesar for their huge



TRAVEL NEWS



11 June 2009 | The second edition of the Lonely Planet's guide to the Western Balkans, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, came out in May to the delight of first-time visitors and more experienced travellers.

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While a more detailed protection plan is expected to be completed by the end of the year, the BLRP is currently focusing on education and awareness to battle the causes of the species' extinction.

Some are killed accidentally – in snares or when eating poisoned meat meant for another species, according to von Arx. The wild cats, however, are poached by villagers mainly for their prized, spotted golden-brown fur.

"The main cause of the extinction threat is illegal hunting, as well as environmental destruction and, above all, uncontrolled forest cutting," biologist Dime Melovski of the Macedonian Ecological Society explained.

The lynx' reputation for killing livestock also doesn't help, although Macedonian ecologist Aleksandar Stoyanov says data shows that in only four cases has the animal actually caused any damage, and it was minimal. Preying on roe deer, the mountain goat-like chamois and hares, the lynx never attacks its greatest threat – human beings.

Although hunting lynx is punishable by prison terms of up to eight years, poachers continue to pursue the animal with impunity, and no one has ever been prosecuted for doing so, international media reported recently. "Legal protection is meaningless if violations are not persecuted," von Arx said in a statement. "In the long run co-existence between large carnivores and people can only be achieved and secured if the local people and land users are willing to tolerate animals such as the Balkan lynx in their vicinity."

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size."
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MUSIC

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RED&WHITE SOFIA. On the 1st of March Bulgarians say goodbye to the winter. They buy each other red&white threads to carry around until they see a stork and spring can begin. Photography by Lode Deconinck