

Workshops on the Conservation of the Balkan Lynx

Urs Breitenmoser

The lynx occurrence in the south-western Balkans has been identified as the most threatened autochthonous Eurasian lynx population. Although the critical status has been known for long, no specific conservation actions were taken so far. The population ranges over western Macedonia, eastern Albania and the southern rim of the Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro).

International co-operation is indispensable for a recovery programme, but not easy in this region that has recently faced war-like commotions. Two workshops initiated by Euronatur and the Cat Spe-

cialist Group, in Mavrovo National Park (Macedonia) and in Tirana (Albania) in April 2005 have explored the possibilities to establish a cross-border alliance for the conservation of the Balkan lynx.

Available information indicates that the population consists of less than 100 mature individuals. This critical status is worsened by the fact that in significant parts of the range, prey is scarce and the habitat destroyed. The recovery of the Balkan lynx population is important because the lynx in south-eastern Europe was described as a distinct subspecies by Buresch (1941) and Mirić (1971). As this classification was controversial, material has been collected and a genetic study is under way.

The workshop goals were to re-assess the status of the Balkan lynx, its prey and habitat, and to explore the organisational structures and the institutional responsibilities in regard to a future Balkan lynx alliance. Participants concluded that the lynx would be a perfect flagship species to promote IUCN's Green Belt initiative (www.greenbelteurope.org) in the Balkans, and that the international co-operation and first on-the-ground activities should be discussed in another meeting in fall 2005. For more information, see the Balkan Lynx Compendium (www.catsg.org) and the ELOIS project (www.kora.unibe.ch).