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BERN CONVENTION – SEMINAR ON LARGE CARNIVORES IN THE BALKANS The Conservation of the Balkan Lynx

The increasing impact of human activities and development in the biosphere has made necessary a parallel investment in the interest of nature conservation. In the last few decades, conservation has become a real concern and an accepted objective for most societies.

By focusing the attention on the fate and problems of particular threatened species, many other issues come to light: the effects that agriculture, urban development or pollution are having on nature, the sustainability of the use made of natural resources, the interconnection of species, habitats and their management, as well as the complexity of ecological processes. At a time when most conservation efforts in Europe are devoted to habitat protection in the hope that it will automatically yield species conservation, looking at the precise case of a species is highly revealing. It can for instance help us to identify priorities and therefore make the best possible use of the scarce conservation resources.

The case of the lynx and other large carnivores provides us with a clear example of the different issues at stake when it comes to the conservation of a species. The south-western Balkan Lynx is the most threatened autochthonous population of Eurasian lynx. The conservation of the Balkan lynx is a high priority also because it may be a distinct subspecies and the population consists of not more than one hundred adult individuals. This is a very critical status for one subspecies, especially when we consider that in significant parts of the distribution range, its prey base is low and its habitat destroyed.

The sustainability of the Balkan Lynx population very much depends on our capacity to identify and implement measures likely to ensure its recovery. This of course includes efforts to guarantee its habitat conservation and to prevent illegal killings. Experience shows that a conservation strategy supported by a carefully designed management plan are excellent instruments to meet the conservation challenge. The Bern Convention, the EU Habitat Directive and other international legal instruments advocate such an approach as a means to ensure compliance by States of their international commitments. Conservationists, scientists, politicians and wildlife managers face the enormous challenge of translating legal instruments and concepts such as sustainable development, ecosystem management or restoration ecology into concrete and successful measures.

Conservation of most species has at present become a transboundary issue and one of the reasons why collaboration between governments, the scientific community and NGOs has become essential. Fora such as the one provided under the Bern Convention make this important dialogue possible and pave the way for the implementation of measures at all appropriate levels, whether local, national or global. In the case of the Balkan lynx, we are particularly happy to witness now the birth of a cross-border partnership between "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Albania.

Over the last decade, the Bern Convention and LCIE have jointly developed a series of action plans on threatened species of large carnivores. We are now proud to note that these plans have provided an extraordinary opportunity for further work on the conservation of the Balkan lynx. The results of your meeting will therefore be reported to the governments which have ratified the Bern Convention.

Let us hope that the different measures envisaged and the conservation efforts already made can achieve optimal results for the Balkan lynx and will definitely preserve this part of our natural heritage, not only for us, but for the future generations.

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