

CONSERVATION STATUS OF THE BALKAN LYNX IN ALBANIA

Aleksandër Trajçe¹, Erjola Keçi², Ferdinand Bego², Kujtim Mersini¹, Olsi Qazimi¹
¹Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania, PPNEA
²Albanian Society for the Protection of Birds and Mammals, ASPBM

Project description

The "Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme" is an integrated project using the charismatic lynx as a flagship species to promote the conservation of the landscape, the habitat, the wild ungulates that are its main prey species, and the Critically Endangered Balkan lynx¹. Much of the original habitat and, as a consequence, wild herbivore populations were degraded in Albania during the past 30 years with the heavy exploitation of forests. The Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme is a cooperation project between Albanian, Macedonian and international institutions². The present project phase that aims to initiate and implement comprehensive conservation actions lasts from October 2006–September 2009.

Distribution and population size of the Balkan lynx

The Balkan lynx population once stretched along the entire Dinaric-Pindus range. It is now restricted to the border area between Macedonia and Albania, with a few lynx remaining in Kosovo and Montenegro, and possibly also in northern Greece. The estimated size of the Balkan lynx population in all range countries is less than 100 mature individuals, making the Balkan lynx the most endangered autochthonous population of *Lynx lynx* (Breitenmoser et al. 2000). The latest estimate indicates that the population of the Balkan lynx in Albania is not more than 20–25 mature individuals (Bego, 2001).

Methods

The Baseline Survey carried out in Albania was intended to produce a preliminary evaluation of the distribution and relative abundance of lynx and their potential prey species by surveying local knowledge through the administration of a questionnaire. The potential lynx area in Albania was divided into 63 grid cells of 10 x 10 km. At least one village per grid cell was randomly selected. On average, 5 people were interviewed per grid cell. In Albania, a total of 320 people from 171 villages were interviewed. Additional lynx observations such as sightings, tracks or dead lynx were recorded in a special form. The information on lynx distribution collected during the Baseline Survey is represented in the large map.

Balkan lynx "Hard facts"

A number of observations ("hard facts") that confirmed the presence of lynx were collected during the baseline survey. These "hard facts" include photos of killed lynx, stuffed lynx and lynx pelts (see numbers in the map and photos).



A Well preserved lynx and prey habitat in the Albanian Alps, north Albania



B Degraded habitat in Korabi Mt., east Albania



3 A stuffed lynx, killed on Balgjaj mountain, central Albania, in 2000



4 A stuffed lynx in Burrel, killed on Balgjaj mountain in 2005



5 A stuffed lynx in the private house of a hunter in Shkoder, North Albania, killed in the Puka region in 2005



6 A pelt of a lynx killed on Kolesjan mountain in autumn 2006, Kukes, Northeast Albania

¹Breitenmoser U., Breitenmoser-Würstler Ch., Okarma H., Kaphegyi T., Kaphegyi-Wallmann U. and Müller U. 2000. Action plan for the conservation of the Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) in Europe. Nature and environment No. 112. Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, 1–70. Bures, I. 1941. Risove v Makedonija [Lynx in Macedonia]. *Priroda*, 42 (3): 51–52 (in Bulgarian).
²Bego F. 2001. Existing knowledge on the status and distribution of the Lynx in Albania, Page 18 in: Breitenmoser Ch. and Breitenmoser U. (eds). The Balkan lynx population – history, recent knowledge on its status and conservation needs. KORA Report 7e, Muri, Switzerland.
 Mirić, D. 1978. Lynx martini ssp. nova (Carnivora, Mammalia). Neue Luchsunterart von der Balkanhalbinsel. Bulletin de muséum d'histoire naturelle, Belgrade, Série B, Livre 33, 29–36.

³The Balkan lynx was described as an own subspecies (Buresch 1941; Mirić 1978), believed to be distinct from the Carpathian lynx. The latest genetic analysis confirms that lynx in the southern Balkans are distinct from other European populations. To date, there has been little focus on the status of this population and almost no ecological research.
⁴Project partners are the Society for Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA), the Albanian Society for the Protection of Birds and Mammals (ASPBM), the Macedonian Ecological Society (MES), the Coordinated Research Projects for the Conservation and Management of Carnivores in Switzerland (KORA), the European Nature Heritage Fund (Euronatur) and the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA). Main founders are the MAVA Foundation (Switzerland) and Research Council of Norway.



2 A stuffed lynx in a restaurant near Librazhd, killed in 2003 on Shebenik mountain



1 A stuffed lynx in a hotel-restaurant near Fushë-Arrez, in Puka region, North Albania, killed in 2006.

Map with the "hard fact" observations of lynx presence in Albania for the past 20 years. The information was acquired from the questionnaires conducted in the framework of the Balkan Lynx baseline survey. The locations are approximate, due to the limited precision of the site descriptions. The data on lynx presence refers to the places where questionnaires were conducted, while the "hard fact" data and the data on lynx observation refers to the exact locations.

