

PROTECTED AREAS IN SPECIES CONSERVATION - THE PROTECTED AREA COMPONENT WITHIN THE FRAME OF THE BALKAN LYNX RECOVERY PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT

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Protected areas can play an important role in species conservation. Therefore, the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme, jointly implemented by EURONATUR and KORA as international partners and the NGOs PPNEA and MES as the main national partners, does not only focus on generating more and new information about the Balkan Lynx (*Lynx lynx martinoi*), its distribution and population status, but also includes measures for the designation of new transboundary protected areas as well as the development of sustainable land use schemes in and outside protected areas.

The paper puts the contents of the protected area component within the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme in an international context by highlighting its importance within the European Green Belt, respectively the Balkan Green Belt initiative as well as depicting its role within the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme itself.

Subsequently, the objectives and actions of the protected area component and the reasons for the selection of the project sites – namely the Jablanica-Shebenik mountain range between Albania and Macedonia, the Albanian Alps in northern Albania close to border of Montenegro, the Shar Planina-Korab mountain range at the border triangle of Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo as well as Illinska-Paklenska corridor in Macedonia - are presented.

Introduction

Objective of the protected area component within the course of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme is to secure the survival of the remnant lynx population within a series of protected areas where nature conservation has priority over any other land use. For this purpose, five areas were chosen as project sites, namely:

Jablanica-Shebenik mountain range (Albania/Macedonia)

Šar Planina (MK) and the adjacent Korabi Mountain (AL)

Albanian Alps (AL)

Illinska-Plakenska mountain range (MK).

Selection of the sites – the process

The selection of the sites was based upon the following different criteria:

(Potential) Habitat of the Balkan Lynx

Located in border region to be part of the European/Balkan Green Belt¹

Reference to the site in respective national strategies for the protection of biodiversity

Reference to the site in international strate-

¹ The Balkan Green Belt is part of the Green Belt initiative launched by IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN), which is supported by Bund Naturschutz, Euronatur and other NGO and GO partners. Aim of the Green Belt initiative is to transform the former Iron Curtain running from the Barents to the Black Sea into an ecological network contributing to Europe's global commitments to halting biodiversity loss by 2010. The Balkan Green Belt forms the southernmost part of the European Green Belt.

gies for the protection of biodiversity.

Consequently, the following studies and strategies, being the most significant and widely accepted documents concerning future conservation actions in Albania, Macedonia and adjacent countries were viewed and analysed:

ELOIS Data and Maps (von Arx et al 2004) on the distribution of the Balkan Lynx in the South-Western Balkans

Map of (intended) Green Belt Areas, Macedonia

Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje 2004 and Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan of the Republic of Albania, Tirana 1999 with the corresponding maps

Strategic Plan for the IUCN South-Eastern European Programme (Schneider-Jacoby 2004).

Table 1 summarizes the different arguments and pieces of information gathered and analysed during the determination process.

Applying the above mentioned criteria, a number of areas became apparent as potential proj-

Tab. 1. Arguments and information gathered and analysed during the determination process.

Jablanica - Shebenik (AL/MK)				
ELOIS	Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan MK	Green Belt Macedonia Map	Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan AL	Remarks
Jablanica: Single observations of BLx, not confirmed Shebenik: Area constantly occupied by BLx	Jablanica: Declaration of Jablanica National Park intended for 2006 -> 2nd priority ²	Jablanica Area indicated as part of the Green Belt Macedonia	Shebenik: already partly status as protected area (Rajca as Scientific Reserve/Strict Nature Reserve, and part of Qarrishta as Managed Nature Reserve); additionally proposed to be extended, including Stebleva and Fushe Stude and be part of "Proposed Representative Network of Protected Area"; in this context also as transboundary protected area	Although Jablanica is mentioned as 2 nd priority in the Macedonian Biodiversity and Action Plan only, it became project area within the frame of the BfN Project due to the fact that it had long been identified as important area for lynx and that works could be started easily as the political situation both in Macedonia and Albania allow action.
Shar Planina – Korabi Mt. (MK/AL)				
ELOIS	Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan MK	Green Belt Macedonia Map	Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan AL	Remarks
Border triangle indicated as area constantly occupied by BLx Main occurrence in Shar Planina (MK)/ Korab Area (AL)	Proclamation of Shar Planina National Park 2004 – 2006; 1 st priority ²	Shar Planina not indicated as Green Belt Area, but Korab Mt. adjacent in the south	Gjalica-Lumës-Korabi Area not yet protected, but mentioned as part of "Proposed Representative Network of Protected Area"; Status proposed Landscape PA; in this context also as transboundary protected area	Fact finding mission to evaluate whether Kosovo offers habitat for BLx at all and whether the basic conditions for successful work (e.g. reliable partners, sufficient political stability and support, existent legal framework) are given
Albanian Alps (AL)				
ELOIS	Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan AL		Remarks	
Albania: Area constantly occupied by BLx Montenegro: single observations not yet confirmed	Area already partly protected as National Park (Thethi and Valbona), Strict Nature Reserve (Lumi i Gashit, and Livadhi i Harushes); additionally mentioned as part of "Proposed Representative Network of Protected Area" (in larger extent); in this context also as Transboundary Protected Area		Fact Finding Mission to evaluate whether Montenegro offers habitat for BLx at all and whether the basic conditions for successful work (e.g. reliable partners, sufficient political stability and support, existent legal framework) are given	
Illinska-Paklenska (MK)				
ELOIS	Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan MK		Remarks	
Single observations not yet confirmed; parts of corridor are indicated as area constantly occupied by BLx Illinska-Paklenska corridor connects different areas with BLx occurrence (Mavrovo NP; Galicica NP and Pelister NP)	Not mentioned explicitly, but "Establish bio-corridors among protected area" listed as general activity (2 nd priority ²) with the output to improve connection between protected areas		According to results of previous works of the University of Skopje, Faculty of Natural Science and Mathematics, Institute of Biology (unpublished) the mountain range of Illinska-Paklenska forms one of the most important bio-corridors in Macedonia.	

². Priorities as defined in Biodiversity Action Plan and Strategy: For each particular activity, verifiable achievements and outputs are listed. The relative priority for each particular activity on a three-point scale is given.

ect sites. Main reason for the selection of the above mentioned sites though was that these areas – according to current information - are proven to be lynx range and, at the same time, exposed to severe human impact caused by inadequate forms of land use such as intensive logging. Therefore, urgent actions need to be taken in order to guarantee the survival of the remnant lynx population in these areas.

Due to the fact that the areas are mentioned both in national and international strategies for the conservation of biodiversity, political support for conservation actions in these areas is given. In addition, all areas apart from Illinska-Plakenska (MK) are part of the European Green Belt which will put the measures undertaken in an international context.

Initial objective within the protected area component of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme was the preparation of the designation of the areas as protected areas, including the compilation of the technical documents which are to be handed in at the respective ministries in Albania and Macedonia. Within the course of the project though this objective was altered, depending on the current situation and circumstances in the particular area. Still, long term goal is the designation of the areas as protected areas. Therefore, the activities implemented serve as preparatory phase.

In addition to preparing the designation of further protected areas, model projects for sustainable regional development will be implemented. For this task, Jablanica-Shebenik was chosen, as here, the field works as well as all preparatory works are most advanced.

In the following, the main features of each area as well as the main target to be achieved within the course of the project are shortly described.

Jablanica-Shebenik (AL/MK)

Jablanica-Shebenik mountain range is located in the border area of Albania and Macedonia, north of Lake Ohrid. For Jablanica-Shebenik, the technical documents needed for the designation of the area as protected areas (target category: national park) were already prepared within the frame of the previously conducted project “Balkan Green Belt as ecological corridor for Wolf, Bear and Lynx” which was financially supported by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN). Both for the Albanian side of the project area (Shebenik) as well as for the Macedonian side (Jablanica), reports, including a description of the respective area, existent flora and fauna species as well as a zonation proposal were prepared and handed in at the Ministry of Environment in Albania and Macedonia, respectively.

Objective of the follow-up activities implemented within the frame of the Balkan Lynx Project is to foster the process of final designation of the

areas as national protected area with a future perspective to become transboundary protected area. In addition, on the Macedonian side, a socio-economic assessment will be prepared and a working group established, involving the most important stakeholders from the communities within the future protected area. On one hand, this will create future acceptance for the protected area and the use restrictions associated, on the other hand, this serves to prepare pilot projects for sustainable regional development as described further below.

In order to ensure local support on the Albanian side, round table meetings with local stakeholders such as the head of communes will take place. Again, these meetings will also serve to gain an impression of the needs and wishes of the local population. This will help to design and implement the pilot projects for sustainable development.

Šar Planina (MK)

Shar Planina Mt. is the largest mountain range, both in length and height, in Macedonia. Its crest stretches along Macedonian and Kosovo protectorate border. The whole crest is about 90 km in length, out of which about 85 km are above 2000 m elevation without interruption. The geology is very complex, geomorphology extremely diverse and biodiversity very rich. Due to the fact that it is the most important part for boreal and alpine elements (spruce forests, glacial lakes, alpine pastures and rocky vegetation) it is very important for Macedonian overall biodiversity.

The Kosovo part of Shar Planina is already protected as National Park „Shar Planina“. Having in mind the great natural and cultural values of Shar Planina area, the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning submitted a proposal to the Macedonian Government for establishment of national park on the Macedonian side in 1999. Unfortunately, the proposal was rejected by the Parliament after negative results of the short and unelaborated public participation process.

Proclamation of Shar Planina as protected area is important since it is classified as Important Plant Area (IPA) and Important Bird Area (IBA). In addition, it is an important habitat of large carnivores like Balkan lynx and Brown bear.

Due to the yet unsolved future of Kosovo, working towards a trilateral transboundary protected area (including parts of Šar Planina Mountain in Macedonia and Kosovo, extending towards Korabi Mt. in Albania – see below) as it had been foreseen previously is currently not possible. Therefore, main goals of this activity on the Macedonian side will not be the preparation of designating the Macedonian part of the mountain range as protected area, but rather

- to amend the past activities for the establishment of a national park on Šar Planina Mountain and
- to inform the local population of the need of establishing a protected area in the mountain range and the possible benefits. This will create the future acceptance of any initiative towards the designation of the area as protected.

In addition, a comprehensive documentation on the natural values of Šar Planina will be produced which can be used for the preparation of the technical documents for the protected area designation. At the same time, these findings will also serve as base for the preparation of a booklet and a tourist map about mountain paths on Šar Planina mountain which will be used for promotional activities of the area.

Korabi Mountain (AL)

Geographically, Šar Planina Mountain range does not extend into Albania; the adjacent mountain range on the Albanian side is Korabi Mountain. Strategically, the Korabi area is very important as it forms a corridor to the Mavrovo National Park in Macedonia and was therefore included in the project.

Korabi Mountain is, due to heavy overuse of the forest areas, strongly degraded and does not yet fulfil the requirements to become a protected area. Only very few parts bear at all potential for forest regeneration which is urgently needed to prevent further damage. It was therefore decided to work in the area, as designation of the area as protected area will form a better basis for implementing regenerating activities in parts of the Korabi Mountains in the future. Objective for such activities will be natural forest regeneration rather than regeneration through reforestation. A future approach (not to be initiated within the current project) could be that certain parts of the mountain range are taken out of use (no use zone), while other areas are being used in a rotating system which allows timely restricted use. In order to compensate villagers for additional effort and potential financial loss, they are being compensated.

Albanian Alps (AL)

The Albanian Alps in northern Albania are a comparably spacious area which is in some parts hard to access. In addition, geological and geomorphological diversity results in high diversity in landscape and, consequently, biodiversity. Therefore, it will be difficult to compile both the biodiversity assessment as well as the socio-economic study as detailed as for the Shebenik area within the time available. Nevertheless, enough data will be collected to

compile the technical documents needed for submitting a proposal for designation of the Albanian Alps as protected area to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Water Administration.

Illinska-Plakenska (MK)

Illinska-Plakenska mountain range is located in south eastern Macedonia and forms a corridor between Mavrovo National Park in the north and Pelister and Galichica National Parks in the south. Consequently, it connects the northern and the southern part of the "Macedonian Green Belt".

Due to its location between several national parks which have indication to be lynx habitat and its great importance as migration corridor for large carnivores, it plays an important role as ecological corridor – a feature which has not yet paid much attention to in Macedonia.

The area of Illinska-Plakenska Mt. is still well preserved and human pressure is low until now. However, local plans for development of the region, esp. in regard to road networks could alter the main meaning of the area as biocorridor.

Therefore, main goals are

- to evaluate the natural characteristics of Illinska-Plakenska corridor
- to submit a proposal for proclamation of a protected area with the main service as biocorridor
- to raise local and national awareness for the significance of ecological networks and biocorridors
- to disseminate information about possible benefits arising from the proclamation and existence of a protected area.

At the end of the project, a proposal will be elaborated according to the provisions of the Law on Nature Protection (Official Gazette of RM, 67/04). The proposal will be presented the main stakeholders in Illinska-Plakenska area; after improvement of the document, it will be submitted to the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning.

Establishment of model projects for sustainable land use

In order to be able to successfully implement this approach, the area chosen has to be carefully assessed in regard to its different values and potential low-impact development possibilities. The comprehensive field appraisals and the public involvement as foreseen for the preparation of the declaration of protected areas will form the basis for these suggestions. Still, additional field work will have to be conducted and participatory meetings with the local people are to be held to meet their needs.

The social and economic effects which could result from the establishment of a protected area are of particular interest and concern to residents, businesses and local groups in the proposed area and the nearby communities. The designation of protected areas imposes significant social and economic (both direct and opportunity) costs. For instance, without adequate provision for alternative means of work and income, the designation of protected areas may have adverse effects on the food security and livelihoods of people living in and around protected areas. This could happen due to the restrictions in the use of common property resources for food gathering, harvest of medicinal plants, grazing, fishing, hunting, collection of wood and other products from forests and wetlands, crop damage caused by protected wildlife, or because of opportunity costs related to restricted access to resources, etc. On the other hand, local communities potentially derive a number of benefits from protected areas, such as local employment, stimulation of rural enterprise through ecotourism and other forms of alternative tourism, public investments (governments, donors, access to development funds), revenue-sharing policies, etc.

In order to provide for the long-term viability of the protected areas, socio-economic effects need to be considered during the process of identification and designation of the protected area. This will also rise the acceptance of the protected area by locals.

Objective of this task is to initiate a sustainable management of the multi-use landscape which will become part of the future protected areas and to

create economic incentives for the local population living in such areas through initiating model projects.

For the implementation of this task, Jablanica-Shebenik area was chosen as due to (i) the project previously conducted (see above), and (ii) the process of protected area designation is most advanced in this area. As already mentioned above, the socio-economic assessment and the establishment of a "Jablancia Working Group" in Macedonia as well as the conduction of round table meetings in Albania are implemented to form the basis for future pilot projects.

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