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REPORT

of the Workshop “Development of a Conservation Strategy for the Balkan Lynx”

organised by the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme¹
3-4 June 2008, Peshani, “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”

*Report prepared by
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¹ The “Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme” is a partnership project between the Macedonian Ecological Society (MES), the Society for Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPENA), 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). The Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme is assisted by the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group and financially supported by the MAVA Foundation, Switzerland and the Norwegian Research Council.

Workshop “Development of a Conservation Strategy for the Balkan Lynx”

organised by the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme²
under the auspices of the Bern Convention
3-4 June 2008, Peshtani, “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”

Meeting report prepared by Manuela von Arx & Urs Breitenmoser, KORA

INTRODUCTION

The population of the Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx martinoi*) ranges over the western part of “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and eastern Albania, reaching north to the southern rims of Kosovo and Montenegro. Available information indicate that less than 100 mature individuals remain. The recovery of the Balkan lynx is important not only because it is the most threatened autochthonous population of Eurasian lynx in its entire Euro-Asiatic range, but also because the lynx in south-eastern Europe was described as a distinct subspecies already in the 1940s and 1970s. Recent preliminary genetic analyses support the subspecies status of the Balkan lynx.

The Bern Convention of the Council of Europe has recognised the conservation of the Balkan lynx as a priority for large carnivore conservation efforts in Europe (e.g. T-PVS (2000) 22 and T-PVS/Inf (2002) 26) and has endorsed the first bilateral Balkan lynx conservation meeting for authorities in charge of nature protection and wildlife management of Albania and “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” in November 2005 (T-PVS/Inf (2005) 20). The conclusions of this seminar were that (1) more detailed baseline information on the taxonomy, ecology, distribution and abundance of the Balkan lynx is needed for the definition of target-oriented conservation measures, (2) a broad partnership must be established, and (3) capacity development and a public awareness campaign is urgent.

These points were considered in a proposal for a 3-years'-project, the “Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme”, which was approved in August 2006¹. The project consists of three components, namely (1) lynx (KORA), (2) protected areas (Euronatur) and (3) human attitude and threats (NINA) (see “project information” on www.catsg.org/balkanlynx for more information about the project). The national implementing partners are the Macedonian Ecological Society (MES) in “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and the Society for Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA). Junior members of these organisations were trained in theoretical and practical aspects of lynx and prey monitoring, data analysis, interpretation and reporting. They form the core of the project staff.

BASELINE INFORMATION

To gain reliable information on lynx distribution and abundance, potential prey and habitat quality, and people's attitude to lynx as a prerequisite for the development of a Conservation Strategy, a baseline survey based on interviewing local inhabitants was the first task tackled. This survey has resulted in a wealth of important information presented to the workshop participants as a start for the development of the Strategy.

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The main outcomes of the field activities were: The presence of lynx is confined to the west of “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (Mavrovo-Bистра, Shar Planina and Stogovo-Karaorman), with the highest concentration of observations and signs in and around Mavrovo National Park. This is the core area of the lynx population, where we produced more than 30 pictures of 7-10 different lynx by means of camera-trapping. In Albania, lynx is scarcely distributed with only a few nuclei of presence in the eastern part of the Albanian Alps (north-eastern Albania) and in central-east Albania (Shebenik-Jabllanica and Martanesh). The lynx population was generally considered to be strongly decreasing by people interviewed in “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” while in Albania, the trend could not be assessed as people’s opinion differed strongly. In both countries potential lynx prey like roe deer, hare or chamois were considered to be fairly abundant; however, trends indicated for these species are negative. This might be a constraint for the recovery of the lynx population. Illegal killing of lynx still occurs in both countries. Every now and then the teams discovered stuffed lynx or pelts. Lynx is hardly causing any damage to livestock, and depredation seems not to be the reason for shooting lynx. Livestock-large carnivore conflicts are thus not likely to limit lynx recovery. We are now trying to understand the underlying reasons for the illegal killing of lynx through the human attitudes’ investigations.

CONSERVATION STRATEGY WORKSHOP

50 nature conservation experts from governmental agencies, universities and important interest groups from Albania and “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” met in Peshtani, MK, on 3-4 June 2008 for a Balkan lynx conservation planning workshop, held under the auspices of the Bern Convention. The guidelines for the development of the Strategy were prepared by KORA and the workshop facilitated by Urs Breitenmoser and Manuela von Arx. MES and PPNEA were responsible for the invitation of relevant institutions and experts from their countries. MES was furthermore responsible for the logistics and organisation at site. The first point on the agenda was to inform the participants about the background information, i.e. the results of the baseline survey summarised above.

The purpose of the workshop was “to prepare a common Strategy for the conservation of the Critically Endangered Balkan lynx population in “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Albania”. This was achieved in a participative process involving all interest groups and based on an assessment of problems and enabling conditions in the two countries. The Strategy should be endorsed by the authorities of Albania and “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” as well as by international partners, and provide a frame for the development of National Action Plans as a follow-up.

We used the Logical Framework process and divided the participants into four mixed working groups: 1.) species & population, 2.) habitat & prey, 3. lack of capacity & means (resources) and 4. awareness, policy & legislation. Each group worked separately on the definitions of the strategic elements of the document: the common Vision and Goal for the Balkan lynx, the problem analysis and derived from these, the definition of Objectives, Targets and Activities for Balkan lynx conservation. After each step, the results of the working groups were merged where needed, and discussed in the plenary until we reached a common consensus.

Vision, Goal and, emerging from latter and the problem analysis exercise, the Objectives of the Strategy are:

Vision:

The southwest Balkans will be a region committed to sustainable development and the conservation of its natural and cultural heritage.

Goal:

Secure a viable population of the Balkan lynx living in a matrix of protected and sustainably managed habitat in coexistence with the rural population.

Objectives:

1. To conduct research on the biology, ecology and conservation of Balkan lynx and their prey.
2. To establish and enforce appropriate wildlife management practices to reverse the decline of lynx and their prey.
3. To maintain and restore the structure, function and connectivity of the landscape for wildlife.
4. To develop the capacity and knowledge and raise awareness on national and local levels about lynx, wildlife and nature conservation.
5. To develop the capacity of governmental, non-governmental and scientific institutions.
6. To improve the coverage and management of the protected area system.
7. To establish a monitoring system for wildlife.
8. To secure long-term funds for lynx conservation within a wider nature conservation funding strategy.
9. To adapt secondary legislation and improve law enforcement.
10. To establish and organise transboundary cooperation.
11. To integrate Balkan lynx conservation into Sectorial Coordination and EU Harmonisation.

For these 11 Objectives, a total of 33 Targets and 76 Activities were proposed by the working groups. After the workshop, an editorial team reviewed, revised and merged Targets and Activities wherever needed, to make the Strategy as comprehensive and concise as possible.

CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS

The draft Strategy is currently under review by the partners involved in the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme and will be sent to all workshop participants for comments in early November 2008. A presentation about the development of the Strategy will be given at the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention on 24 November 2008. After endorsement of the revised and finalised Strategy through relevant governmental institutions, it will be published, and we will organise participative workshops in Albania and “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” to develop National Action Plans as implementing tools for the Strategy. The Strategy and the more concrete Action Plans will provide a road map for the recovery and long-term conservation of the Balkan lynx. As the work progresses and more and better information on lynx ecology, prey status, human attitudes, etc. become available, the strategic instruments will need to be reviewed and revised. The life-span of the present Strategy was defined at the workshop to be five years.