



Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme

NEWSLETTER

01/2013

BLRP Phase III - 2013-2015

The Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme enters a new phase

The Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme (BLRP) has received the official notification of approval from the MAVA foundation. The mutual signing of the grant agreement in May 2013 marks the beginning of a new phase of our longstanding transboundary conservation programme as it secures funding for the implementation of a series of conservation and community liaison measures for the next three years. The overall objective of this programme is no less than to save the Critically Endangered Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*) from extinction. At the same time the Balkan lynx team wants to prepare the ground for a future recovery of this emblematic flagship for nature conservation in the SW Balkans. The last presently known occurrence of this elusive cat is located along the Balkan Green Belt, more precisely in the border zone between Macedonia and Albania.

Improvement of the protected area network and research on the ecology and conservation status of lynx and prey populations form the backbone of our new programme phase. Appreciating the outstanding role that local communities play in our conservation efforts we have designed a variety of community liaison measures, ranging from the development of lynx-specific education kits for pupils to the organization of information fora for local NGOs.

With regard to habitat improvement the struggle for the expansion of the protected

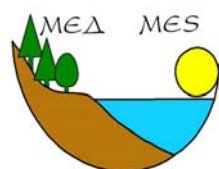
area network remains a main focus of our programme in the future.

The protected area network along the Balkan Green Belt is growing. This is evident from the latest PA proclamations in Albania and Kosovo. However, natural resources management inside protected areas remains too often insufficient. Here, we intend to increase the political pressure on national governments to improve the management of protected areas and to equip the relevant authorities with sufficient funds.



Fig. 1: Lynx most important prey species: roe deer.

The root causes for the critical status of the Balkan lynx are unsustainable hunting practices along with habitat destruction. Unsustainable hunting impacts on the lynx population by depleting its favourite prey: roe deer and chamois. In order to produce relief, the Balkan lynx team has developed a multi-level initiative. Introducing sustainable hunting practices together with local hunters associations, making proposals for an improved legal framework and lobbying for sustainable wild-



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life management on the political level are the centrepieces of this new approach.

Research on lynx and its main prey populations provides the knowledge basis for the development of sound conservation measures and allows us to adapt our strategy to the situation on the ground. It also allows us to monitor the long-term success of conservation measures. In order to broaden our knowledge basis we will conduct extensive camera-trap surveys in the most promising areas in Albania and Macedonia. The neighbouring countries Montenegro and Kosovo form part of the potential Balkan lynx distribution range. However, up to now the knowledge about lynx presence in these countries is very poor. Together with local partners we will conduct a baseline survey by systematic interviews with local people thus identifying the most promising areas for camera-trap surveys planned to start this winter.

Capacity building and equipment is being provided in this respect to our new partners from Kosovo and Montenegro making the formerly bi-national Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme a new endeavour with four different countries involved. With great eagerness we are awaiting the results of the baseline survey in these two additional countries. The identification and promotion of possible protected areas along with community liaison activities are other new tasks that our Kosovar and Montenegrin colleagues have taken over in the meantime.

Although the conservation status of the Balkan lynx remains critical, the promising results of the latest camera-trap surveys in Albania and Macedonia fill us with enthusiasm and give us courage to take on the challenges ahead and eventually turn the tide for this charismatic felid.

Thies Geertz

Balkan lynx united European hunters and conservationists

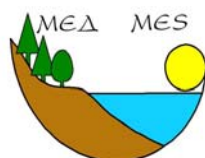
CIC meeting on 1-2 March in Skopje

We presented the BLRP and lynx conservation in general on the 14th meeting of CIC's Coordination Forum for Central and Eastern Europe on 1-2 March in Skopje. The International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) is a politically independent advisory body which aims to preserve wild game and hunting by promoting the sustainable use of wildlife resources. The event was organised together with the Public Enterprise Jasen which manages the PA Jasen, where lynx presence was confirmed earlier.



Fig. 2: Participants of the CIC meeting in Skopje.

The aim of the conference was to raise the awareness about the critical status of the Balkan lynx among hunters and decision makers and to discuss a potential collaboration for its conservation. Sustainable hunting and hunting tourism were further topics on the agenda. All of the present delegates (mostly coming from South-East European countries) expressed their concern about the unfavourable status of the Balkan lynx and its prey due to unsustainable hunting and poaching, respectively. Delegates formed the Green Alliance for the Balkan lynx and a Steering Group who will work towards the implementation of the declaration "Message



from Skopje - Conservation of the Balkan lynx and sustainable hunting” developed during the meeting. More details about the conference and its outcomes can be found on: <http://www.cic-wildlife.org/2013/03/14th-meeting-of-cics-coordination-forum-for-central-and-eastern-europe12-march-2013>.

Gjorge Ivanov

More lynx in the northern mountains of Albania

Results from the camera-trapping season 2013

In 2011, Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA), in the frame of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme photographed the first Balkan lynx in Albania using camera-traps. It was the first evidence which proved the presence of this critically endangered subspecies of the Eurasian lynx in the country. To further monitor a possible remaining sub-population in Albania, the study continued further in 2012 and 2013 in the regions of Puke and Mirdite, around the areas of the first photo evidence.

From 20 March to 21 June 2013, the research team of PPNEA conducted a survey with cameras-traps in the aforementioned regions. The objectives of this study were:

- To investigate whether there are further Balkan lynx present in the northern highland of Albania.
- To investigate the possibility of reproduction and thus the presence of a small Balkan lynx population in Albania.

We set 16 camera-traps at 18 different locations (four camera-traps switched location during the season) in two study areas in the region of Puke in Albania. At some locations we set two parallel camera-traps. Both study

areas covered about 100 km² and the distance between locations varied from 1.5 km to 2 km.

After three months of camera-trapping we had obtained 157 photographs of wildlife species, including 13 photos of *Lynx lynx balcanicus*, 11 *Martes foina*, 1 *Felis silvestris*, 2 *Meles meles*, 7 *Vulpes vulpes*, 4 *Sus scrofa*, 83 *Lepus europaeus*, 2 *Canis lupus*, 25 *Ursus arctos*, 9 *Capreolus capreolus*.

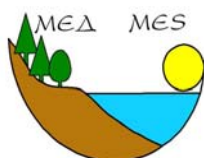


Fig. 3: Lynx photographed in Puke-Mirdite in April 2013.

The great achievement during this extensive season with camera-traps was:

After each survey period from 2011 to 2013, all *Lynx lynx balcanicus* photographs (in total 18 photos of Balkan lynx) were checked for individual recognition based on coat pattern differences, to have a preliminary estimate of abundance. The photographs so far suggest that 4-5 individuals of Balkan lynx roam the mountains of Puke-Mirdite regions and prove the occurrence of Balkan lynx in Albania. Further camera-trapping will be conducted in order to find out whether it concerns a small reproducing population or single dispersed individuals from the source population in western Macedonia.

Bledi Hoxha & Bekim Trezhnjeva



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High number of lynx pictures

Third systematic camera-trapping survey in Mavrovo National Park, Macedonia

During winter 2012/2013, the Macedonian Ecological Society conducted the third systematic camera-trapping survey in the area of the Mavrovo National Park, Macedonia, as part of the activities foreseen in the third phase of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme 2013-2015. The goal was to make an estimation of the size and the density of the lynx population by using photographic capture-recapture sampling, as well as to get information about the population trend by comparing the results with the previous studies in the area.

The survey started on 9 March 2013 and lasted till 8 May 2013. 64 camera-traps were installed at 32 different sites in the area of Mavrovo NP and its adjacent areas. The study resulted in 60 lynx pictures from 13 different camera-trap sites. During the comparison of the pictures, 9 different lynx individuals were identified. Compared to the previous camera-trapping studies in Mavrovo NP (in 2008 and 2010), we got the highest number of lynx pictures and positive sites.



Fig. 4: One of the 60 lynx pictures captured during the season 2012/13.

The model M(h) of the program MARK fitted the data best and resulted in 12 ± 2.94 individuals in the Mavrovo NP. The 95% confidence interval was 10 to 21, which means that there is a 95% chance that the number of different lynx individuals in the park is in that range. The corresponding density was estimated to be 1.57 ± 0.32 independent individuals/100km². By comparing the results with the ones of the previous sessions, one can notice that there is an increase of both, the population size and the density. This can be expected considering the fact that this last session in 2013 was relatively successful resulting in a high number of lynx pictures. In order to verify the assumption that the population is increasing, we have to continue with the monitoring activities in the following periods.

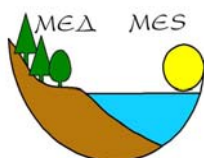
Apart from the lynx individuals photographed during this session, we got 1727 pictures of other large mammals present in the park and its adjacent areas. Most of the photographs taken were from brown hare (433), followed by badger (421), red fox (194), marten (142), brown bear (130), roe deer (115), wild boar (90), wolf (80), wild cat (70), chamois (47) and red deer (5 photographs).

Aleksandar Stojanov

The BLRP expands to Kosovo and Montenegro

Capacity building workshop in Valbona AL in June

Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA) together with its partners from the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme organised a capacity building workshop on wildlife monitoring methods and human dimensions. The workshop was held from 24-30 June 2013 in the National Park of Valbona/Albanian Alps. This event was the



continuation of various efforts carried out by the NGO coalition comprised by MES, PPNEA, EuroNatur and KORA for the establishment of national monitoring networks in Albania, Macedonia and eventually in the two neighbouring countries Kosovo and Montenegro in order for data on Balkan lynx and its prey to be collected in a systematic way. Following the first capacity building workshop held last year in Vevçan/ MK and Librazhd/AL (see Newsletter 02/2012), the workshop in Valbona was a further step towards the extension of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme beyond Albania and Macedonia.



Fig. 5: Participants of the workshop during an excursion in the Valbona valley, Albanian Alps.

The workshop was attended by representatives from organisations such as PPNEA, MES, FINCH, ERA, CZIP, OZONE, representatives from Sharr National Park in Kosovo and the National Parks of Montenegro, and members of the Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency (KEPA). The participants were trained on the basics of monitoring principles, methods, tracking, and human dimensions in wildlife monitoring. More concretely, the agenda included presentations from prominent wildlife researchers like Urs Breitenmoser and Manuela von Arx from KORA/Switzerland, Kujtim Mersini, Aleksandër Trajçe and Bledi Hoxha from

PPNEA/Albania, and Ljupcho Melovski, Dime Melovski and Gjorge Ivanov from MES/Macedonia:

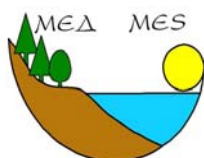
http://www.catsg.org/balkanlynx/01_recovery-programme/1_6_meetings/capacity-building-june-2013/capacity-building-june-2013.htm.

Along with theoretical presentations on wildlife monitoring methods, results and lessons learnt from the implementation of the Programme in Albania and Macedonia, an essential part of the workshop were also the field practicals which helped participants to actually discover by themselves the biodiversity of the area, and implement one of the Balkan lynx monitoring methods, namely camera-trapping. During the field excursion the participants set two camera-traps along strategic paths and gained knowledge on the quality of the habitats and the high values of flora and fauna in the area. Equally important was the talk of our local contact point Catherine Bohne, who emphasized the importance of engaging the local community in wildlife monitoring and raising their awareness on the importance of wildlife conservation.

At the end of the workshop the organisers highlighted the fact that the experience and work results of MES and PPNEA may very well serve as a model which can be further improved by the colleagues in Kosovo and Montenegro. Subsequently, the expansion of the network for the monitoring of the Balkan lynx gives a new burst of energy and raises the level of commitment for the conservation of the remaining Balkan lynx population.

Bekim Trezhnjeva, Silva Huda & Bledi Hoxha

This capacity building workshop was financially supported by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) with means of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU).



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Balkan lynx – Inspiration for success in Macedonian sport

Balkan lynx as mascot for the Macedonian football team and the European Junior Wrestling Championship

Balkan lynx is becoming popular in Macedonian sport. First the national football association accepted lynx as a team symbol. They put it on their jerseys and named the lynx mascot RISKO. The new jerseys and the mascot were first promoted during the football match between Macedonia and Belgium in March this year. MES supported this event with 3000 paper masques for the supporters of the Macedonian team. On the backside of every masque there was a short text about the Balkan lynx and its status.

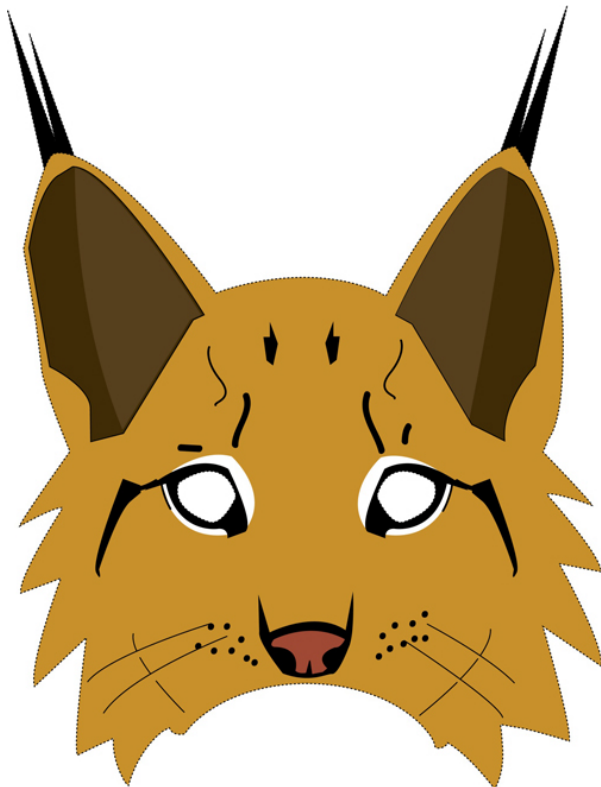


Fig. 6: Paper masque to support the Macedonian football team.

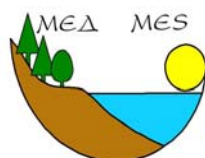
Later this year, the European Junior Wrestling Championship which took place in Skop-

je MK in early July 2013 also adopted Balkan lynx as their symbol and mascot (<http://www.wrestlingskopje2013.com/dokumenti/Banner%202.pdf>).

We are pleased to find these two gestures of accepting the lynx as a sport symbol - not only because lynx is a charismatic cat, but also because of its critical status and the support of our cause. By promoting the Balkan lynx through sport, people from all ages will receive the message concerning its conservation and familiarize with the BLRP. We will continue to strongly support initiatives that include awareness rising in favour of the Balkan lynx.

Gjorge Ivanov

The „Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme” is jointly implemented by EuroNatur Foundation, KORA (Coordinated research projects for the conservation and management of carnivores in Switzerland), MES (Macedonian Ecological Society), PPNEA (Society for the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania) and financially supported by MAVA Foundation for Nature Conservation.



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