



Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme

NEWSLETTER

02/2013

New lynx occurrence?

First camera-trap photograph of lynx on Pelister Mountain

Pelister National Park, as part of the wider mountain massive called Baba, was the firstly proclaimed national park in the former Yugoslavia in 1948. The total area of the park in that time was around 12'000 hectares and it was just several years ago when the Macedonian government decided to enlarge its territory to 17'150 hectares. Excellent conditions in terms of different types of habitats, suitable climate and relatively well protected ground, allowed the wildlife to thrive in this area. The symbol of this protected area is the bear which is often observed in the forests of the park.

When we started the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme, we were often told that lynx is very likely present in that region. However, during the Baseline Survey, only 9 of 33 people answered that the lynx is present on Pelister and all of them stated that it is very rare. The area was therefore not in our working focus. It was only recently that we received a vague camera-trap photo from the western side of the national park showing two blurred individuals resembling lynx. Nobody can still verify with 100% accuracy the species which is photographed but this picture triggered a lot of questions. Is lynx really present on Pelister? And if yes, is there more than one individual? And if yes, is it a mother with her cub? This third question is of immense importance to the project as we still lack reproduction proof outside Mavrovo area, despite the fact that several individuals are already

roaming on Munella Mt. in central-north Albania.

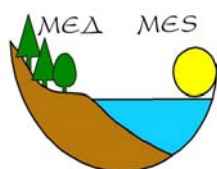
In November 2013 the game wardens from Pelister collected the camera-traps and revealed a proof for the lynx presence in the park (Fig 1). One individual was photographed several times on a mountain trail in September after 5-6 months of monitoring. This news is of great importance for the project. The Balkan lynx team is now negotiating a semi-systematic camera-trapping session with the park administration which will more or less encompass the whole mountain. This monitoring will help have a better picture on the wildlife present in the area.



Fig. 1: Lynx pictured in Pelister NP in September 2013.

Let us hope that news like this will start to appear not only from the protected areas in Macedonia, but also throughout the entire potential Balkan lynx distribution range.

Dime Melovski, MES



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Strengthening the Balkan Lynx Monitoring Network in Albania

Training Workshop in Tirana, 18 October 2013#

Since its beginning, the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme (BLRP) has aimed to establish and strengthen a national monitoring network in Albania, which will collaborate with PPNEA on the monitoring of Balkan lynx, its prey species and within the protected areas component. Part of this network are people or groups, the activities of whom are linked with forests, wildlife and nature – like foresters, hunters, local environmental NGOs, environmentalists, etc. Continuously, PPNEA has undertaken several initiatives for the training of network members in terms of Balkan lynx monitoring, including technical aspects such as track and other signs identification in the field.

In line with the previous work and to further strengthen and consolidate the network, PPNEA organized a training workshop on 18 October 2013 with participants of the monitoring network from all the regions with presumed lynx presence in the country. The goal of this training was to expand the existing monitoring network and strengthen the cooperation between different target groups in the monitored and the most promising areas for Balkan lynx. Participants engaged in a broad discussion about information exchange and possible suggestions to expand lynx surveys to other potential areas. The participants were expressing the need for several educational activities to be developed, particularly implemented in the three communes surrounding Munella Mountain – Reps, Fan and Gjegjan – in which schools, municipalities and local residents must be involved. Similar activities can be extended to other areas as well. Ongoing communication with local communities is important when taking envi-

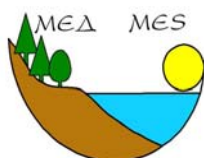
ronmental protection measures, having in mind that the environment belongs to everyone and therefore the responsibility falls on all of us. Among the biggest problems Balkan countries are facing in terms of nature conservation are illegal and unsustainable hunting practices. All participants agreed on the need for cooperation against this, and not only through information exchange but also by taking part in monitoring activities, awareness raising meetings, supporting the PPNEA team and lobbying activities in order to minimize these incidents.



Fig. 2: Members of the Albanian monitoring network gathering for the training workshop.

All participants were invited to be part and to contribute to the lynx monitoring. PPNEA prepared and distributed monitoring network specific membership cards. Apart from being a proof of membership to the monitoring network, they contain the relevant information for members on how to share any observations of lynx and wildlife in general. In addition it was agreed that in order to make the collection and reporting of data from network members in a systematic way, PPNEA will send each member of the monitoring network a form once every three months where they can report on the latest lynx signs observed or heard and other relevant wildlife information in their respective regions.

Bekim Trezhnjeva & Bledi Hoxha, PPNEA



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Improving knowledge and raising awareness on lynx in Kosovo

Baseline Survey Kosovo – Part I

The Baseline Survey in Kosovo began in August 2013. The main focus of the survey is to obtain information about the Balkan lynx, its prey species, habitat and people's perception towards wildlife. This information will be the cornerstone for a successful future recovery strategy.

In essence, the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme in Kosovo began with the process of selecting grid squares on the map of Kosovo for the alleged presence of lynx by members of the NGOs Finch and ERA at the Capacity Building Workshop in Vevcani in October 2012 (see Newsletter 02/2012). This selection process was not entirely conjectural, but it was made in accordance with the work experience of the teams in Macedonia and Albania, assuming that data on the Balkan lynx are most likely to be found in the south-western part of Kosovo where promising habitats for this rare flagship species cover the whole of Sharr mountain range, the whole of Koritnik mountain range, Pashtrik and Bjeshkët e Nemuna (Albanian Alps).

35 grids were selected by the Kosovo team, each of these grids representing 10x10 square km (100 km²). NGO Finch was responsible for the survey in 27 grids in southern Kosovo and NGO ERA for 8 grids in the western parts of the country.

After three trainings (Vevcani, Librazhd and Valbona), the practical execution of the BLRP was initiated on 13 August 2013 by a visit of Dime Melovski from MES to help starting the Baseline Survey in the field and preparing us on potential difficulties which could be encountered. We carried out a 2 day work session with practical training of doing interviews

with citizens from the area of Zupa and Gora, respectively, in the villages Rapce, Donje Lubinje, etc. We also worked on entering the interview data into the database.

We made the selection of locations within a grid by choosing areas with more suitable potential habitats for the Balkan lynx and other species from the list.



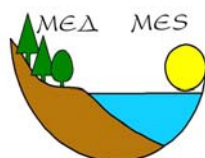
Fig. 3: "Finch" team conducting interviews with farmers in Kashtanjevë village.

We paid particular importance to raise the awareness of people on the lynx matter by explaining about the lynx' status as a critically endangered species and handing out leaflets also to those people whom we met in the field and did not interview.

During our work, we were pleasantly surprised that we got some positive results for lynx presence and by the fact that roe deer and some other species (wild cat, fox, and hare) were believed by the interviewees to be abundant in almost each area we visited.

To summarize:

- We spent 33 full days in the field
- All 27 grids were completed
- We visited around 100 villages and conducted interviews in 88 of them



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- 181 people were interviewed
- People belonging to 5 different ethnicities were interviewed (Albanians, Serbs, Torbesh, Gorani and Roma)
- Interviews were made throughout 5 major mountain ranges (Sharr, Koritnik, Pashtrik, Zatriq and the Albanian Alps)
- About 90% of the interviewees were people of target groups who recognize the wildlife situation well (hunters, forest rangers, farmers, shepherds, etc).

Based on the data we collected, we have about 15 eye witnesses who state to have seen lynx in the last 5 years. From them, we have selected 5 locations as more promising:

- Forests between Krusevo and Gllboqica of Gora (2 eye witnesses)
- Koritnik forests above Rapqe village (2 eye witnesses; we have indications that 2 lynx were killed there in the last 3 years)
- Area above Billushë village near the place called “bad curve” (3 different eye witnesses)
- In the hills above Gornje Selo village
- Beneath Prevalla by Oshlak side and Shterpce (2 eye witnesses).

Meetings were held with relevant stakeholders like local hunter’s association members and chiefs, with members of municipal assemblies, with media journalists, etc. in order to inform them about our activities.

One of the largest national TV channels (KTV – Koha Vision) in Kosovo filmed a short programme about NGO Finch and its work in which interviews were given regarding the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme. We handed over several photos from our Baseline Survey activities and a few lynx pictures from Macedonia which they placed between video sequences.

We organized a press conference on 12 December with an emphasis on the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme in Kosovo. The echo was great: three local TV stations and journalists from several newspapers were present.

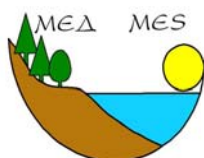
Azem Ramadani & Rafet Elezi, NGO “Finch”

Stuffed lynx found

Baseline Survey Kosovo – Part II

Environmental Responsible Action (ERA) group conducted the Baseline Survey from August to November 2013 in the Bjeshkët e Nemuna Region (Prokletije) which borders with Montenegro. The survey was conducted in eight grids (10x10 km), six of them were priority grids, and with a minimum of eight interviews per grid - not such a big territory but a very difficult terrain. In total 54 people were interviewed.

Bjeshkët e Nemuna has been proclaimed as a National Park in 2013. This was planned as the destroying of habitats was taking a bigger scale with uncontrolled logging and poaching. However, 80% of its territory is private land and it was very hard to implement the new law since local people do not agree with it and barely understand. This new protection status interfered with our work as well. Since the start we had some challenges with local people who were confused and didn’t want to answer the questions. This concerned particularly questions like “Have you seen any killed animal?” “When did you see it?” After a few attempts we decided to inform key people before going finding contacts in the respective villages. We got all the contacts from the Hunter Association “Roqebulli” and we contacted a hunter of the village first and then asked him to introduce us to his neighbours. This approach was a necessity for every village for two reasons: 1) both we and the local



inhabitants felt more comfortable and 2) we did not lose time going to places no one was living.

We also held several meetings and had a very good cooperation with the Hunter Association which has around 100 members and a very big experience in this area. In addition, their name is “Roqebulli” (Lynx). We heard many times the story of a lynx shot in 1989. Xhevdet Gorani (director of the hunter association) mentioned that a killed lynx is in the national museum of Pristina, and he knows exactly where and when this lynx was killed: It was shot in February 1989 by a local in Rugova because he didn't know what animal it was. He explained that there were two of this animals “fighting” with each other and he shot one dead.



Fig. 4: Lynx killed in 1989 in Rugova and now exposed in the national museum of Pristina.

We went to the museum and the lynx was there but stuffed in a very bad shape (Fig. 4). It was however good enough to take some hair samples.

Based on the evidence obtained by hunters and locals through the survey, two sites have been identified as promising concerning potential lynx presence: 1. “Llazi dhisë” in the village Liqenati Drelajve, because of the large

number of chamois and its location in a high-altitude valley, and 2. village Pepaj where the lynx was killed in 1989 of which we have taken hair samples in the museum.

Parësim Sanaja & Bardh Sanaja, ERA

Improving knowledge and raising awareness on lynx in Montenegro

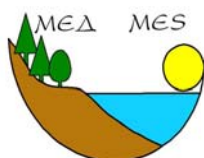
Baseline Survey Montenegro

The most recent data about the Balkan lynx presence in Montenegro had been collected by Mr. Bratislav Grubač (2000). Most of these data were collected by questionnaires given to experts (biologist, forestry and hunting officials), specially trained associates in the field, as well as the local community.

Since then, there has been no new or reliable data on Balkan lynx distribution or even its presence in Montenegro. Up to now, no conservation strategy has been elaborated. The only positive fact concerns the legal protection lynx appreciates.

To assure the survival of Balkan lynx, starting from 25 July 2013, the Centre for protection and research of birds of MNE (CZIP), in cooperation with Public Enterprise for National Parks of Montenegro (PE NP MNE), started implementing the “Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme” (BLRP) in Montenegro by conducting the Baseline Survey containing series of logical questions related to wildlife which were answered by local people who were chosen based on their affinity for nature.

The main aim of the Baseline Survey was to assess the distribution and relative abundance of lynx and other large carnivores, in addition to potential prey species like wild ungulates and lagomorphs by means of interview techniques. The results of the survey will



indicate the main direction where further monitoring methods will take place in the future (setting up of camera traps). It gives a better idea on the lynx status in Montenegro and assesses the attitudes of the local community towards the large carnivores in general.



Fig. 5: The authors conducting an interview in the frame of the Baseline Survey.

Based on the scientific literature data on lynx presence, the central and northern parts of Montenegro were selected for the Baseline Survey. The investigated area included: three national parks in MNE – NP Prokletije, NP Durmitor, NP Biogradska gora – and their surroundings, mainly mountainous areas (hunting areas) where lynx presence can be expected.

Interviews were conducted in 41 priority squares. The total number of interviewed people is 242. The following profiles were chosen as most relevant for the conduction of the questionnaires: veterinary doctors, game wardens, foresters, hunters, shepherds, farmers, livestock breeders, beekeepers, naturalists, shop owners and others.

Besides the Baseline Survey, the BLRP team conducted over 10 meetings with different stakeholders such as the representatives of the Ministry of agriculture, Ministry of sustainable development and tourism, Hunting fed-

eration of Montenegro, hunting societies (8), WWF representatives, IUCN representatives for SEE, ZaVita Slovenian organisation for environment protection, Fodemo-project (Luxemburgish organisation for the forest management) etc.

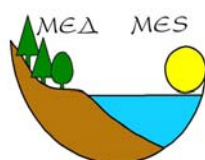
The information about the BLRP was presented through different national media (6). The directors of all NPs and general directors of PAs, were informed about the BLRP and the Baseline Survey. To increase the outreach, we organized a meeting for stakeholders in the NP Prokletije about the history of the Programme in the region and through two presentations informed local people about the main goals and the first steps which are taken in Montenegro in the frame of the BLRP.

According to the questionnaires, the presence of animal species in the protected areas is higher than in the rest of the investigated mountain areas, and the brown bear, wolf and especially red fox are in most of the cases considered as damage-causing animals.

The most positive answers for lynx presence are given in the area of sector Prokletije, Kaludra and Šekular gorges and Moračke and Kučke mountains. All of these mountains are in the cross border region between Montenegro-Albania and Montenegro-Kosovo. Also, in these regions the Montenegro BLRP team found 5 hard facts of presence of the Balkan lynx (stuffed lynx or lynx pelts).

The next steps of the BLRP team will be the setting up of camera traps in the ecologically most attractive habitats for the Balkan lynx with the hope that Montenegro will also have the first picture of this beautiful cat species.

Marina Đurović, National parks of Montenegro & Aleksandar Perović, CZIP



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Capacity building workshops

The programme for young conservationists continued in Montenegro and Kosovo

From 18-22 October 2013 in Shtavna, on the foothills of Mountain Komovi (Montenegro) and from 8-11 November 2013 in Prizren (Kosovo) two capacity building workshops for young conservationist from Western Balkans were held. Both workshops were jointly organized by EuroNatur, Center for Protection and Research of birds of Montenegro and NGO Finch from Kosovo and were carried out in the framework of continuing activities to strengthen the capacity of environmental NGOs in Montenegro and Kosovo.



Fig. 6: Workshop participants at the foothills of Mt. Pashtrik, Kosovo.

While the November workshop was specially focused on presenting preliminary results of the ongoing Baseline Survey in Kosovo and Montenegro within the third phase of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme and sharing experiences with colleagues from Macedonia and Albania, the workshop held in October mainly dealt with topics related to protected area management. Among the topics addressed during the workshop were achievements and challenges in the development of protected areas in the region of the Western Balkans and examples of good practices in the development of protected areas in South

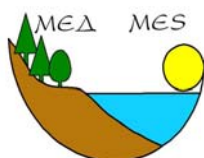
East Europe as well as the importance of a Natura 2000 network. During both workshops participants shared their experience about guidelines and improvement of implementation of projects which focus on species or habitat conservation.

In addition to the theoretical part of the workshops, participants of the trainings visited several mountain regions and National Parks in Montenegro and Kosovo. During these field trips they gained an insight on the possible habitats of Balkan lynx in these countries and received information about problems and challenges which these areas are facing.

The workshops in Shtavna and Prizren were part of a series of four workshops which were realized within the project „Capacity building of nature conservation NGOs in Montenegro and Kosovo“ which is financially supported by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN).

Marija Stanišić, CZIP

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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