



## Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme

### NEWSLETTER

02/2014

### Lynx mother with cub photographed outside Mavrovo National Park

The pictures are from the Karaorman Mt.

In October 2014, a lynx female with a cub was photographed on the territory of the private hunting ground "Piton" on Karaorman Mt., Ohrid Region. The owner of the hunting ground, a member of the Balkan lynx monitoring network in Macedonia, got 3 photos of lynx and shared them with the MES lynx team.



Fig. 1: Lynx mother with cub camera-trapped by Cvetko Choleski, hunting ground Piton.

Although relatively close to the Mavrovo National Park, this photo is of great importance for Balkan lynx conservation, representing the first evidence for lynx reproduction outside the park. Further investigations with more camera traps should be made to get more information on the lynx presence in this region.

The event once again demonstrated the importance of the monitoring network for the project. It is clear that the Balkan lynx stands much greater chance of recovery while working together with local communities, sharing knowledge and experience.

*Aleksandar Stojanov & Dime Melovski, MES*

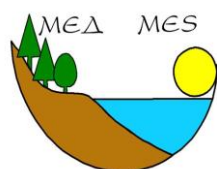
### BLRP range-wide meeting

#### Balkan lynx teams from four range countries met in Skopje

From 12-13 November 2014 altogether 13 participants from partner NGOs representing all four Balkan lynx range countries plus 4 members of the international coordination team gathered in Skopje on occasion of the second Balkan lynx range-wide meeting.

The main objective of the meeting was to discuss progress in lynx and wildlife monitoring and management as well as in protected area development. One of the main outputs of the meeting was the preparation of detailed work plans for the forthcoming camera trapping session in winter and early spring 2014/15. Other important topics that were addressed during the meeting were the arrangement of an international Balkan lynx symposium in autumn 2015 and the production of a project promotion film.

Since the beginning of 2014 a total of three new sub-teams from Kosovo and Montenegro have been integrated in the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme. These teams had been



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successfully trained and equipped starting already in 2012 and are now fully deployable. One of their main tasks in the future will be to corroborate the findings of the baseline survey conducted in 2013 which pointed out the potential presence of Balkan lynx in these two countries.



Fig. 2: The BLRP team discussing project activities.

The enlarged geographic scope of the programme and the challenges associated with the coordination of more teams in the field will make it necessary to carry out range-wide meetings on a more regular basis in the future. This was also one of the findings of the meeting in Skopje.

*Thies Geertz, EuroNatur*

## Summer camp, Edition 2014

### Report from the Munella Mountain, Albania

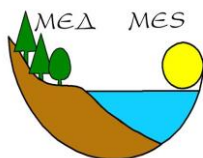
The wonderful view and tranquility of mountains standing proud in the northern part of Albania show more. They have evidence about the animal world and our ancient history. One of these mountains, Munella, which serves as main “shelter” of Balkan lynx in Albania, lies on the border of Puka and Mirdita districts in Northern Albania. Munella was

the next destinations were PPNEA organized an Ecological Summer Camp in the frame of the BLRP from 30 August to 2 September 2014. The camp brought together 17 students and nature conservation experts from different cities of Albania and Macedonia who were introduced to different information about three important components inevitably connected with each other: Munella Mt., Balkan lynx and local community.

Although very few people have heard of it, Albania and especially Munella, is a small but important place for biodiversity in Europe. The geographical position of Munella Mt., the presence of different types of trees, the cultural diversity, traditions of the area and most importantly the presence of 15 different mammal species (lynx, bear, wolf, chamois, etc.) make it a place of extraordinary value and give all of us a responsibility to protect it from damaging activities like illegal cutting of trees which unfortunately has destroyed a considerable part of the forests.

During these days we learnt the functioning of the GPS telemetry method and its importance in ecological and biological data collection of lynx like home range sizes and diet composition. An important moment was the demonstration of the operation of this method to the students.

The importance of protecting the values of Munella became more obvious during the two days of fieldwork. During the first day, the students, divided into two groups, were setting two camera-traps at two different locations where the Balkan lynx and other large carnivores were photographed before. The interest, attention, curiosity and desire of the students to learn more about the functioning of the camera-traps were very meaningful and motivating for our ongoing work.



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**Fig. 3: Group picture with students in Munella Mountain.**

On the second day in the field we were climbing on one of the highest peaks of Munella Mountain, known as Topi peak. Happiness, adventure, and jokes in the group were some of the feelings that accompanied the group during the hours of hiking. Despite the difficulties encountered, tiredness and sweating, the students were motivated and did not give up until arrival at final destination. The students were introduced and had the opportunity to walk on the paths used by lynx, bear, wolf and other animals and to identify some tracks and scats, evidence of the presence of these different animals. During the climbing we noticed the existence of typical plants in the region like Macedonian pine (*Pinus peuce*), sweet marjoram (*Origanum marjorana*) and orchid species. The arrival at Topi peak was accompanied by an extraordinary sense of adrenaline and pride.

The students were at the same time amazed by Munella Mountain and regretted the destruction of its forests. We left the "house" of lynx and other "residents" hoping that the next time we return we will find this nature treasure well protected.

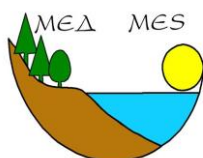
*Fjorina Artemisiu, Volunteer & Bledi Hoxha, PPNEA*

## Kopranik youth expedition

### ERA organised skills workshop with Peja youth

From 14-15 June 2014, nine local Kosovar youth participated in an overnight skills workshop in the Kopranik mountains near Peja. The skills workshop was led by two young ERA team members, and covered the topics of introduction to BLRP project, and how to find and interpret signs of wildlife. During the overnight trip, the young people spotted unidentified scats as well as tracks from two bears. The youth used the signs spotted during the trip to practice the skills learned during the workshop. This workshop was an effective mechanism for team members to practice and use their skills prior to the camera trapping sessions. Here ERA-BLRP team member Bardh Sanaja describes the workshop:

While we were waiting for the camera traps to arrive, we decided to do an expedition-style trip to Kopranik. Kopranik is a mountain seen from Peja and has very little human impacts. During this expedition, Parsim and I shared with other youth the camera trapping knowledge which was acquired by participating in the workshops of BLRP. It was a one night expedition that covered 13 kilometers, and while hiking on the trail we were lucky to find signs of wildlife and to see tracks of animals that had passed before us. The hike was done in pretty harsh conditions, and at night it was foggy and rainy. It was raining the day before we left Peja, so the animal tracks were obvious to find in the mud and were not filled with water. Some of the tracks and scats we couldn't identify, but others were certainly from bears. After we arrived at the place where we set up a camp, we collected woods all together as a group and found a place to set-up tents and slept overnight there.



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**Fig. 4: Participants of the youth expedition in Koprnik.**

During the expedition we gave a short presentation for wild animals that included: wild animals' ecology for each species; wild animal movement in general; and the importance of protecting the wild animals. We also shared skills on how to investigate tracks, such as: How do you take photos of footprints and why it is important to acquire data; How to differentiate footprints; and How to identify which animal foot print you have found. We also covered the skills related to camera trapping and best locations to put camera traps: How to pick a camera spot, what makes a location a good camera trap spot; How you choose the camera trap spot depending on what animals you want to capture. As well we shared materials with them, photos of wild animals, and animal ecology scripts.

The lecture methods were practical so they could test the books and resources for identifying footprints themselves. We tried to identify fore and hind legs of bear and measure the distance between them. It was kind of hard to differentiate the fore and hind legs, since there were so many tracks. Passing the knowledge to others was not so hard and boring. Because the youth tried the skills out right away, rather than us just speaking in theory. So this was a good way to share and

learn new things. This was a good test for us of our own skills, and gave us the chance to practice the knowledge we acquired from BLRP workshops.

In my personal experience, I find this a very good way to promote the BLRP project because we invited different youth activists, who are organisers of different events in Peja. This was a different hike done in a different perspective rather than just normal walking from point A to point B. So I believe that made the participants connect with nature in a different way and feel more emotional towards it. They were seeing and observing things that mostly they would miss. I believe this is a very good way of raising awareness and connecting people with nature and make them feel that they are part of it as well, and that their action no matter how little, they still impact that environment.

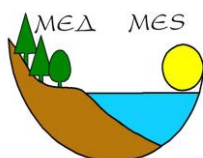
*Bardh Sanaja, ERA*

## Natura 2000 training

### Harmonisation of legislation between the EU and candidate countries

The implementation of a Natura 2000 network in Macedonia will be an important step in nature conservation in the future. Therefore, the Balkan lynx team considered to develop local capacity in this field and to meet the challenges of designating and managing future Natura 2000 sites.

For that purpose a Natura 2000 training was organized in one of the areas that are proposed for protection (Ilinska-Plakenska Mts.). The Slovenian NGO ZaVita was selected to prepare and guide the training. The training took place from 6 to 10 October 2014. It consisted of two parts. The first part was held in



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the MES office in Skopje with a presentation on general information about Natura 2000, the legal framework, important organisational issues and basic information about the management of Natura 2000 sites. The second part of the training was held in the proposed study area – Belchishko Blato, located in the foothills of Ilinska Mt. This part was focused on the preparation of a Natura 2000 Standard Data Form (SDF) for the site.

The detailed process of establishing Natura 2000 sites was presented to the trainees with focus on habitats and species listed in the Annex I + II of the Habitat Directive. At the beginning the desktop analysis was performed working mainly on literature data. The next two days were dedicated mostly to fieldwork.



**Fig. 5: Collecting information in the field for the Standard Data Form of Belchishko Blato.**

The trainees visited Belchishko Blato (Emerald site) and collected information and samples for identification of habitats and species. During the fieldwork, it was suggested to enlarge the Emerald site towards north and include the new areas in the future Natura 2000 site as habitats were very similar to the ones in Belchishko Blato. All important habitats were identified and mapped. Moreover, presences of most of the species identified during the desktop study were confirmed in

the field. Finally, new borders of the future pSCI Belchishko Blato were defined and the SDF was fulfilled on the basis of fieldwork.

*Aleksandar Stojanov, MES*

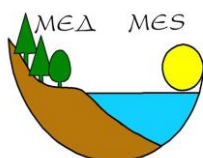
## Five projects selected

### 3rd phase of micro-grants within the BLRP

The Shebenik-Jabllanica mountain range has been within the focus of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme since the beginnings of the initiative. Due to the research work and activities done by the BLRP in the region, the area was proclaimed as a National Park in May 2008 with an area of 340 km<sup>2</sup>. Subsequent to its creation, the BLRP has promoted the conservation of natural values of the park based on sustainable development principles. A micro-granting scheme for local organisations and other interested parties has taken place in the first and second phase of the BLRP.

Similarly, during the third phase of the BLRP (2013-15), local projects were supported through a micro-granting scheme – projects that would foster the protection of natural habitats and ensure local sustainable development in Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park.

The approach undertaken for this third phase of small projects differed with previous ones as PPNEA provided technical assistance and training to interested local organisations and other relevant parties in how to write project proposals and how to develop ideas into action. Such an approach was considered as a much needed one due to lack of capacity and experience among local organisations in the region. This training component was covered by the EU-funded project “Enhancing transboundary cooperation in Shebenik-Jabllanica mountain region through active local involve-



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ment” that PPNEA is running together with MES and EuroNatur. The training was done in the form of three participative workshops between January and June 2014, where local stakeholders were actively involved in defining the main fields of action and coming up with ideas for concrete project development.



Fig. 6: Opening call for applications.

Subsequently, the call for grants was opened on 30 September 2014 and in total 11 proposals were received. Of these, the following projects were selected for funding by a multinational and independent evaluation board:

- Bee keeping development at Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park Region has a possibility for alternative income resource for local population and contribution on area environment protection (Bee keepers NGO, 4'000 €);
- Eco tourism promotion through facilities for tourists of Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park (RACPF NGO, 3'985 €);
- Sustainable development ambassadors in the National Park of Shebenik-Jabllanica (Agnatic NGO, 3'000 €);
- Protection and sustainable management plants in Shebenik-Jabllanica NP (AgriEn NGO, 3'890 €);
- Strengthening the role of women in the community for the promotion of

tourism as an alternative source of income, nature conservation and sustainable development in the area of Shebenik-Jabllanica NP (Women Society in Librazhd, 3'950 €).

The selected projects are scheduled to be implemented within September 2015 and PPNEA will closely work with the beneficiaries to ensure quality in implementation of actions and help them through technical assistance when needed.

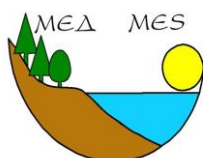
*Aleksandër Trajçe, PPNEA*

## MSc in Biology obtained in the frame of the BLRP

### Gjorge Ivanov successfully defended his master thesis

On 11 November – prior to the range-wide meeting in Skopje (see second article of this Newsletter) – the BLRP team gathered at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics of the University of Skopje. Gjorge Ivanov, member of the Macedonian Ecological Society and involved in the BLRP since its start in 2006 had to defend his master thesis entitled “A spatially explicit model for defining the habitat suitability and the potential distribution of the Critically Endangered Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*)”.

The objective of this master thesis was to produce a spatially explicit model for the recovery of the Balkan lynx by (1) modelling the potential Balkan lynx distribution to predict the area of recovery; (2) identifying suitable habitats, fragmentation and connectivity of distinct suitable patches with the source population [Mavrovo National Park] to predict the re-colonisation process; and (3) estimating the potential Balkan lynx population size in-



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side and outside protected areas in the south-western Balkans for the down listing of the lynx to Endangered, Vulnerable and Near Threatened.

The model was developed using MaxEnt software, available environmental variables and data on Balkan lynx presence generated by the BLRP over the years using robust monitoring methods.



Fig. 7: Gjorge answering questions of the jury.

The master thesis revealed that Balkan lynx prefers more forest and rocky habitats. However, despite the predominant mountainous landscapes on the Balkans, only 17% of the study area – defined as the area of the historical distribution of the Balkan lynx – yet offer suitable habitats for lynx. Nevertheless, these would offer space for 275 resident lynx individuals which would just be enough to down-list the Balkan lynx from Critically Endangered to Vulnerable. As there are currently not even 50 individuals, the recovery will however take some time.

The remaining suitable habitats for Balkan lynx are fragmented. Out of 20 patches, only 3 are significantly big and could hold 80% of the recovered population, Gjorge found out further. The connection of distinct habitat patches is therefore needed. Most of the corridors that were identified in this thesis are

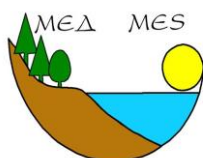
within dispersal distance of lynx (<50 km) but their permeability must be tested.

The model outcomes will be very helpful for planning the long-term recovery of the Balkan lynx in the area of its historical distribution. As the largest patches of suitable habitat are shared between several countries, the necessity of coordinated work and the need for relevant international structures to obtain a successful recovery of the lynx are obvious.

After his presentation, Gjorge was challenged by questions of the jury, consisting of Prof. Ljupcho Melovski, Dr. Slavco Hristovski and Dr. Urs Breitenmoser. He managed well and – after a pause where the jury retreated to discuss its verdict – Gjorge was declared Master of Science in Biology. We congratulate Gjorge for this achievement!

*Manuela von Arx, KORA*

The „Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme” is jointly implemented by EuroNatur Foundation, KORA (Carnivore Ecology and Wildlife Management), MES (Macedonian Ecological Society), and PPNEA (Society for the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania). Activities in Kosovo are carried out in co-operation with NGO Finch and ERA (Environmentally Responsible Action) group and in Montenegro in co-operation with CZIP (Center for Protection and Research of Birds of Montenegro) and National Parks of Montenegro. The Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme is financially supported by MAVA



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