

Macedonian Ecological Society
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Conservation assessment of the Balkan lynx *Lynx lynx balcanicus*

To Whom It May Concern:

The Balkan lynx, described as a subspecies of the Eurasian lynx by Buresh (1941) as *Lynx lynx balcanicus* and by Miric (1978) as *Lynx lynx martinoi* is a phylogenetically distinct form of lynx in the south-western Balkans. As a consequence of its neighbourhood to the Carpathian lynx *Lynx lynx carpathicus*, its systematic distinctiveness was long debated (see e.g. Hemmer 1993). New molecular-genetic findings have clearly confirmed the distinctiveness of the Balkan lynx from the Carpathian population (Breitenmoser-Würsten & Obexer-Ruff 2003) and hence its phylogenetic particularity.

As most of the felid subspecies, the Balkan lynx has not yet been formally assessed in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, although IUCN encourages such assessments. As we have been aware of the critical situation of the Balkan lynx for several years, we have initiated a field survey (e.g. Breitenmoser et al. 2008; Ivanov et al. 2008) and a formal assessment according to IUCN Red List procedures (presently done as a MSc thesis by Dime Melovski at the University of Podgorica, Montenegro). The assessment reveals that beyond any doubt, the Balkan lynx has to be considered as Critically Endangered according to IUCN criteria.

The total number of Balkan lynx is, even considering an optimistic estimation, below 100 mature individuals, and the distribution area is highly fragmented. Conservation measures are of utmost importance and have been initiated in the frame of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme supported by international funders and national authorities (e.g. in the development of a Conservation Strategy and National Action Plans for Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; see Breitenmoser et al. 2008). Our field survey and findings from the recent work has shown that Mavrovo National Park is the stronghold of the Balkan lynx. As a matter of fact, we could find no proof for reproduction anywhere outside the Mavrovo region. It is very likely that Mavrovo hosts the only remaining source population of the Balkan lynx and that any occurrence outside the Mavrovo region would disappear, too, if the Mavrovo sub-population is further decreasing.



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