

Presentation

The existing knowledge on the Status and Distribution of the Lynx (*Lynx lynx*) in Albania

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Introduction

This is a report on the existing knowledge about the lynx status and distribution in Albania, based upon the last 10 years field trip throughout the country. The visits have been carried in the framework of the PhD thesis of the author (1992-1997), and the two projects, respectively: "Existing conditions on the Protected Areas proposed under the World Bank Forestry Project of Albania (1998-2000)" and "Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Management Planning in 13 High Forest Areas of Albania". Some 27 Mountainous Protected Areas (PA), and some 20 other high mountain forest areas, from the North to the South of Albania, have been surveyed during the field work undertaken by the project team, spending some 2-5 days in each forest area.

Methods

The main method used to collect data was that of "transects" identified on maps and followed carefully in the field. The researcher looks for animal signs and tracks, mostly for foot prints on soft grounds or snow and faeces (**Bang & Dahlstrom, 1990. *The Collins guide to Animal Tracks and Signs***).

Apart from this direct method, interviewing target local people, such as shepherds, hunters, foresters, was practised in almost all the visited areas where possible. To get as much information as possible, questions like When? Where?, How many?, Why?, In which circumstances? etc., were used.

Results and Discussions

The remaining population of the lynx includes some 3-4 main nucleuses, such as: 1) Alps (Vermosh-Livadhi Harushes); 2) Balgjaj-Martanesh (Mat and Bulqize districts); 3) Qarrishte-Rrajce (Librazhd), and 4) Sopot-Zavaline-Holte (Librazhd-Elbasan-Gramsh districts). The most important nucleus seems to be the last two ones, that's of Sopot-Zavaline-Holte, and Qarrishte/Rajce that includes some vaste areas of still well preserved high mountain forest areas.

In the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan of Albania (BSAP) the lynx (*Lynx lynx*) is one of the priority mammal species for which a Species Action Plan is required to be prepared within the next two years. This is based on the existing data and the trend of the species in Albania during the last 50 years. The lynx population in Albania has known a strong decline since 1970, and a rough estimation shows that the lynx has loosed more then 60% of its population at the beginning of the years 50. The current lynx population in Albania is estimated somehow between 20-25 individuals. This figure tells that lynx now has become a critically endangered species in Albania, and appeals, at the same time, for the urgent need for actions to be taken.

Proposals

1. There is a need for updating the information and knowledge about the lynx population, following to main pathways:
 - (i) Carrying out surveys on the potential lynx areas not yet visited and surveyed during the last 10 years. This will provide information whether the lynx is present or absent in these areas. If yes,
 - (ii) Undertaking more detailed surveys on the Lynx areas already identified as such.
2. Based upon the data collected by the field surveys, a Lynx National Recovery Action Plan should be drafted and discussed. This would include: (i) the identification of the sites that are critical for this species to be taken under protection and appropriate management; (ii) related institutional and legislation arrangements and enforcement; (iii) publication of raising awareness materials and organisation of campaigns, focused particularly on the villages surrounding lynx areas; (iv) considering the compensation policy by the state authority for the farmers, in the cases of damages caused by the Lynx; etc.
3. A regional Lynx Recovery Program should be set up in a very near future, in order to better co-ordinate actions and measures to be taken by the West-eastern Balkan Countries, and address the Lynx Rec. Program to the European level, and raise more funds to implement it.

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