

## Existing knowledge on the status and distribution of the Lynx in Albania

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This report on the existing knowledge about lynx status and distribution in Albania is based on the last 10 years of field trips throughout the country. The visits have been carried out in the framework of the PhD thesis by the author (1992–1997), and two projects, respectively: „Existing conditions in 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.

### 1. Methods

The main method used to collect data was that of "transects" identified on maps and followed carefully in the field. The researcher looked for animal signs and tracks, mostly for footprints on soft ground 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 and foresters, was practiced 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.

### 2. Results and Discussions

The remaining population of the lynx includes some 3–4 main nuclei, 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 nuclei seem to be the last two, Sopot-Zavaline-Holte and Qarrishte/Rajces which include some vast 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 estimate shows that the lynx has lost more than 60% of its population since the early 1950s. The current lynx population in Albania is estimated at between 20–25 individuals. This figure shows that the

lynx has now become a critically endangered species in Albania, and indicates, at the same time, the urgent need for action to be taken.

### 3. Proposals

a) There is a need to update information and knowledge about the lynx population, following two 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.
- (ii) Undertaking more detailed surveys on the lynx areas already identified as such.

b) 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 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 materials which raise awareness and organization of campaigns, focused particularly on the villages surrounding lynx areas;
- (iv) Considering the compensation policy by the state authority for farmers, in the cases of damage caused by lynx; etc.

c) A regional Lynx Recovery Program should be set up in the very near future, in order to better co-ordinate actions and measures to be taken by the western Balkan Countries, raise the Lynx Recovery Program to the European level, and search for more funds to implement it.

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