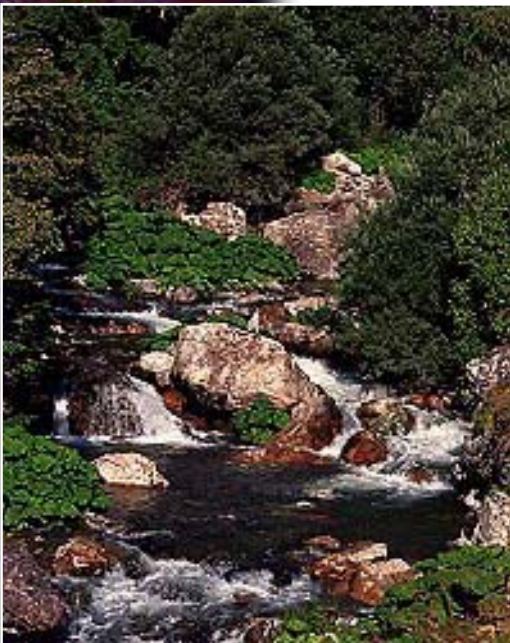


## The Missing Lynx

Macedonia has three National Parks listed under IUCN category II, several Natural Monuments listed under IUCN category III and Nature Conservation Reserves under IUCN category IV, comprising an overall protected territory of 6.4%. According to Macedonia's Physical Plan, this share is to increase to 18% by the year 2000. The situation of the parks is critical, because of the economic situation and there is not enough money to maintain the parks in an adequate way.

It is in Mavrovo National Park (73,088 ha), where the last stand of one of three fragmented populations of the near-extinct European Lynx survives today. To date, the European Lynx has not received a scientific name, and it is still not known whether it should be granted full species or subspecies status.



The habitat the European Lynx lives in today has a long geological history containing relicts from the tertiary, glacial epochs and even two plant species from the early tropical vegetation. "The most interesting tertiary relicts are the Macedonian pine and the Whitebark pine, rare endemic conifers of the Central Balkans. This group includes the endemic Greek maple and the yew (extremely uncommon in the Mediterranean. One of the few natural habitats of the common chestnuts (an endemic Balkan tertiary relict) exists on the southern slopes of Mt. Bistra. A large area of the park is overgrown with astonishingly old and beautiful forests of the Macedonian fir (a riddling hybrid fir species) which is to be found only in these areas of the Balkans and is also a remnant of the late Tertiary age."

The park abounds with numerous glacial relict species from the Ice age, mostly in the form of awkward herbaceous plants scattered throughout the Alpine zone. Certainly one of the most dazzling forests is the community of Norway spruce hidden deep in an inaccessible canyon of the Western Shar mountains. This forest is far beyond the southernmost point of the range of Norway spruce, indicating that a long time ago it had invaded the Mediterranean regions.

The diverse forest vegetation supports an abundance of wildlife. More than 140 species of birds (some of them very rare, like hawks, eagles and vultures) thrive in the forested areas of the park. With more than 45 species, the park is among the richest reserves of rare animals. There are bears, several types of deer, wild goats, otters, wolves, etc.



Within Mavrovo National Park, the population of about 60 European Lynx, lives predominantly in the western and central areas and it's likely no less in danger of extinction than the Florida Panther.

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Nancy  
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