

REINTRODUCTION OF LYNX IN YUGOSLAVIA

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Two separate populations of lynx live in Yugoslavia. An aboriginal group inhabits the high mountains of Korab, Sara and Prokletija in the region of Macedonia, Kosova and Montenegro by the Yugoslav-Albanian border. Today, this Balkan population of lynx is isolated, occupying a territory of about 600,000 ha with an estimated 200 head. Despite the ban on hunting since 1945, they have not extended their territory.

In March 1973, a group of lynx was reintroduced about 700 km north of there, in the region of Kocevje forest, 60 km from Ljubljana. Slovenia lies in the northern part of Yugoslavia, bordering on Italy and Austria. The last lynx in Slovenia had been caught in 1912.

Six lynx were transported from Slovakia (Czech and Slovak Republic), in a 1:1 sex ratio, and released in January 1973, quarantined in the vicinity of Trnovec pod Rogom (1099 m above sea level), in the "Medved" hunting preserve in Kocevje, from which the suggestion for reintroduction had come. After 46 days quarantine, on March 2, 1973, the lynx were freed. The release of the lynx at mating time appeared successful since some months later four young were spotted, which was at least a partial guarantee that the reintroduction could be successful.

At the start of this project, the institute was given the task of following the reintroduction and research was continuous from 1973 to 1990. J. Cop was given responsibility for the project.

The lynx have constantly extended their territory in three directions:

- towards the southeast over Gorska Kotar in hunting grounds along the mountains by the Adriatic coast in Croatia; in Lika, a lynx was found in 1984 in hunting preserves of the Republic of Bosnia where it was run over in the valley of the river Una. Further south, a lynx was shot in a mouflon pen at Kamenica, close to Zavidovic, some 300 km from the site of reintroduction;
- towards the southwest, in the direction of Slavnik and Postojna, and Trnovo forest in the direction of Italy (in 1988, one was shot near Grgar close to the Italian border, 120 km from release);
- towards the northwest over Jelovica into the region of the Julian Alps.

Lynx have come into the Karavanke here from Austria. Nine (9) were reintroduced near Murau in Steiermark in 1977.

The central territory of the reintroduced lynx in 1990 is estimated to be about 600,000 ha with about half of it in Slovenia and the remainder in Croatia.

Shooting of lynx began in 1978, with annual permits issued by the Ministry of Forestry. To date legal shootings have been:

- in Slovenia 85
- in Croatia 102
- in Bosnia and Herzegovina 5

Altogether 192 lynx.

If illegal shooting is also taken into account, more than 200 lynx have probably been eliminated from the territory.

The results of our study show that the main prey of lynx is roe-deer, with red deer in second place. In two areas of more than 1000 ha, lynx have exterminated an entire colony of mouflon (between 250-300 head). There is not for the moment a major problem with sheep, since there are very few sheep farms in the central territory, although migration of lynx is occurring into areas in which sheep farming is important. Of 21 lynx shot outside the central territory, all have been single males (as with bear). Despite the existence of rabies in the area in which the lynx live, there has been no sign of this disease in the lynx shot to date.

Hunters in some areas are opposed to the lynx in the belief that the lynx will exterminate the deer. Our research suggests otherwise - deer shot in hunting preserves in which most lynx live is on the increase!

The author believes that the reintroduction has been successful, although it is estimated that the population of lynx is not yet stabilised (genetic and isolation problems, etc). Unfortunately, financial resources for the continuation of the study are lacking.

