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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

23rd meeting
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**Report of the 2nd visit of the International
Committee for the Follow-up of Iberian Lynx
Conservation Actions to Spain**

(27-28 October 2003)

Document prepared by
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Abstract

On 2003 the Council of Europe (Bern Convention Secretariat), the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group and the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE) formed an international committee to follow-up conservation actions on the Iberian lynx. The Committee visited institutions involved in the conservation of the Iberian lynx in Spain for the first time on 17 – 19 March 2003, for the second time on 27 – 28 October 2003 (the last visit was preceded by the more technical visit of Urs Breitenmoser, IUCN Cat SG and Alexander Sliwa, EAZA Felid Tag – report of the visit in Appendix 3). The second visit of the Committee focused on the political aspects of the Iberian lynx conservation (constitution of the Bilateral Commission and its work, signature of the agreement between the two administrations, preparation and implementation of the captive breeding programme). We were not visiting any of the filed projects in Andalucía (for the technical side of Iberian lynx projects advances and details of the projects implementation, see also the report in Appendix 3). There are efforts to intensify the *ex situ* conservation actions and some political decisions were taken in this regard. Since January 2003, there have been four females in captivity in El Acebuche experimental captive breeding station in Doñana NP, two males in Los Villares (Córdoba) wildlife rehabilitation station and one male in Jerez ZOO (from all those animals only one female and one male are in the right age to breed). The priority would be to at least try to socialize adult animals and start realisation of the objectives of the breeding programme.

1. Introduction

In 2002, the IUCN Red List authorities declared the Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) Critically Endangered 0. After the “International seminar on the conservation of the Iberian lynx” in Andújar (Spain) on 29-31 October 2002, and following the Recommendation N° 94. of the Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) the “International Committee for the Follow-up of Iberian Lynx Conservation Actions to Spain” was formed. The Committee visited institutions involved in the conservation of the Iberian lynx in Spain for the first time on 17 – 19 March 2003 0.

From 27 to 28 October the group visited Spain for the second time. We met with the institutions and persons involved in the Iberian lynx conservation in Madrid and Sevilla. The official visit was preceded by the more “technical” visit of Urs Breitenmoser (IUCN Cat Specialist Group) and Alexander Sliwa (Wuppertal ZOO, EAZA Felid Tag) – see the report in Appendix 3.

Programme of the visit, institutions and experts met are to be found in Appendices 1 and 2.

2. Constitution of the Bilateral Commission and its work

On 2 March 2003 the agreement on the joint actions concerning the Iberian lynx conservation between the Ministry of Environment (Ministerio de Medio Ambiente) and Regional Ministry of Andalucía (Consejería de Medio Ambiente de la Junta de Andalucía) was signed. Following that document the “Convenio de Colaboración” between Spanish Ministry of the Environment (Ministerio de Medio Ambiente = MIMAM) and Regional Ministry of Environment of Andalucía (Consejería de Medio Ambiente de la Junta de Andalucía = CMA) was signed on 9 June 2003 0. According to this convention, a Bilateral Commission was created, with members of the Central and Regional Ministries, as follows:

For the MIMAM :

Juan del Álamo Jiménez – Secretary General of the Ministry of Environment

Inés González Doncel – General Director of the Nature Conservation Dept.

Basilio Rada Martínez – General Director of the National Parks Dept.

Miguel Aymerich Huyghues as Secretary

For CMA :

Isabel Mateos Guilarte – Vice minister

Hermelindo Castro Nogueira – General Director of RENPA

José Guiraldo Romero – General Director of the Nature Cons. Dept.

Miguel Ángel Simón Mata as Secretary

Additionally, an Advisory Committee to the Bilateral Commission was created with the following members: for MIMAM: Borja Heredia (DGCN) and Francisco Cantos (National Parks); for CMA: Miguel Ángel Simón Mata and a person indicated by him.

Since 9 June 2003 the Bilateral Commission is the united body to take decisions concerning the Iberian lynx conservation in Andalucía. The **first meeting of the Bilateral Commission** took place in Lugar Nuevo (Andalucía) on 24 June 2003. The commission plans to meet at least three times a year¹. Several points were discussed at the first meeting: constitution of the Bilateral Commission and organization of work, current situation of the Iberian lynx, state of projects concerning Iberian lynx conservation, and exchange of information between the two partners (two documents, one on all actions since 1 January 2000 to date, a second one on future actions and plans are being prepared). The most important point was the Captive Breeding Programme, where urgent decisions had to be taken, including a coordinated approach on how to incorporate the animals once breed in captivity into the field projects. Furthermore, the commission decided on the transfer of males to El Acebuche station and the implementation of previous decisions of the Iberian lynx Working Group¹ (see also reference¹ and Appendix 3): The adult male from Los Villares breeding station (Córdoba) should have been transferred to El Acebuche station by the end of September 2003. He was however not transferred till now, because of the *Cytaouxsoon* infection (see below). Two more males were planned to be captured in October, one from the Andújar, the other from the Doñana population. At present, there are two juvenile males, both from the Andújar population, in Los Villares station (captured on 1 September 2003, born in 2002, with a leg injured and corona virus present), and in Jerez Zoo (a 6 months old rather healthy cub), respectively, but none of them is old enough to mate (for more details see report in Appendix 3). The juvenile male from Jerez Zoo should be transferred to El Acebuche station by the end of November.

The Experimental Captive Breeding Programme should be prepared and presented on the next Bilateral Commission meeting for comments and approval. A new director with adequate professional background was to be nominated and equipped with appropriate competences to decide and realise the objectives of the Captive Breeding Programme. At our meeting with MIMAM in Madrid, we were informed that the Commission had recently elected Dr. Astrid Vargas the new director of the conservation breeding programme.

The **second meeting of the Bilateral Commission** was organized on 20 October 2003. Astrid Vargas was invited to present her programme proposal (she had already prepared an earlier version of the programme¹) and to negotiate working conditions. The Captive Breeding Programme Director will be employed by the Ministry of Environment in Madrid, but will report to the Bilateral Commission.

The only adult male was finally not transferred from Los Villares to El Acebuche, because the blood parasite *Cyteauxsoon felis* was discovered in a blood test. The animal will be kept in quarantine in Los Villares until further tests allow assessing the risk of an infection of the animals in El Acebuche or the wild population in Doñana NP. The Bilateral Commission decided to wait until the week of 3 – 7 November for the veterinary analyses and report from the three veterinarians involved, in order to assess the suitability of the infected animals for the breeding programme. If the veterinarians' report would favour the transfer of the adult male to El Acebuche, another young subadult male should be captured in the Doñana area. If the report would not favour a transfer, a young adult male (ready to reproduce) should be captured instead. The International Committee offered to review the veterinary report once it would be available, in order to assist the Bilateral Commission's decision, and the proposal was welcomed and accepted. The definitive form of the Captive Breeding Programme should be ready by 30 November 2003 and subsequently discussed and approved by the Bilateral Commission¹.

Great progress has been made since March 2003 in regard to the co-operation between the National Ministry of Environment and the regional Ministry of Environment of Andalucía. The two administrations now work together, more and more efficiently and in a very progressive way. The Bilateral Commission is a powerful and still small enough body to provide leadership and to take fast

¹ On last week of November and adult male was captured in Andújar area. Unfortunately, after the veterinary and sanitary tests the animal was released because of the presence of the parasite (*Cyteauxsoon felis*) in its blood.

decisions. Yet, there are still many points to discuss and to improve. Numerous problems may still stop (or delay) the captive breeding programme. The most urgent issue is to contract a director of the Captive Breeding Programme², responsible for the realisation of the programme – including the appointment of personnel –, for the co-operation with the *in situ* teams and outside experts. There are a number of problems hampering the Captive Breeding Programme, including lack of co-operation between the El Acebuche station staff on one side and the technicians of CMA and researchers of C.S.I.C. Estación Biológica de Doñana on the other side, but also conceptual and technical questions, such as implementation of the capture programme (the plan was to take the smallest cub from any litter of three, and/or juvenile dispersing animals, but also the capture of adult animals was discussed), veterinary procedures (e.g. length of the quarantine), breeding procedures (habituate the lynx with humans or not?) and incorporation of animals bred in captivity into the wild population. All these questions need to be resolved, and until then, many delays in realisation of the breeding programme are still possible.

3. Field projects in rabbit recovery areas, WWF/Adena campaigns and other issues

The International Committee had a short meeting with two representatives of WWF/Adena (Jesús Cobo, Luis Suárez) in Madrid, in order to get an update on the activities of NGOs. Luis Suárez and Jesús Cobo shortly presented the state of their conservation actions and campaigns in the Sierra Morena and Montes de Toledo (agreements with owners and managers of the private hunting estates, buying up of the hunting permissions for rabbits, establishing rabbit recovery areas with artificial breeding places; see spring 2003 report). The current problems are as follows:

WWF/Adena has funding to continue the contracts till the end of year 2005. Afterwards, an alternative way of solving the “rabbit-hunting-problem” in the private estates must be found.

Funds are also needed to continue the filed projects (mainly in rabbit recovery areas).

Other Spanish provinces than Andalucía should be involved in the Iberian lynx conservation (Castilla-la Mancha, Castilla-León, Extremadura and consequently also Portugal). Only Castilla-la Mancha has prepared an “Iberian lynx population recovery plan”, which was approved by the local government.

WWF/Adena is very concerned about further development projects in habitats important for the recovery and spread of the Sierra Morena population. Luis Suárez informed the group about the planned construction of a new highway (Autopista N IV Toledo – Ciudad Real, continuing to Córdoba), which would cross the Sierra Morena just west of the Andújar population and obstruct the expansion of the population. The highway is cutting other potential recovery area for the lynx and other endangered species. This and other development projects must be reviewed under the aspect of their ecological and economical tolerability.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

As stated in the first report, the *ex situ* and *in situ* rabbit breeding programmes, and the projects on rabbit recovery and habitat improvement are progressing well and seem to stabilise the two remnant populations. Those conservation activities are fundamental for the survival of the populations in Sierra Morena and Doñana, which are the sole sources for the conservation breeding and future translocations.

There is a strong and urgent need to implement the Captive Breeding Programme soonest possible, trying not to lose this coming breeding season. The political and administrative preconditions are now met and both administrations work together, which gives hope for future common actions. We recommend to take all decision needed soon. Apart from technical captive breeding issues, a comprehensive strategy should be prepared, reassuring that the captive breeding programme is an integral part of the general conservation strategy and the reintroduction projects, which should involve not only Andalucía, but also other Spanish provinces and Portugal.

² Only some days after the meeting of the Bilateral Commission with the International Follow-up Group, Dr. Astrid Vargas was appointed new director of the conservation breeding programme.

One of the priorities of this coming breeding season must be trying to socialise two adult animals (the female in El Acebuche and the male in Los Villares or a substitute), which would be also helpful for two juvenile females in El Acebuche. As mentioned above, one of the main concerns is to keep species-specific socialization of the animals kept already in captivity, and also elaboration of the techniques to breed animals in a way to be prepared to be rehabilitated for living in the wild. Current management methods in El Acebuche station may not be optimised for this and we recommend to review the procedures applied in collaboration with captive breeding and reintroduction experts.

Some further steps were proposed to the institutions and people involved in the Iberian lynx conservation for the discussion.

References

Anonymous. 2002. Iberian lynx declared Critically Endangered. Cat News 37, 2.

Report of the visit of the International Committee for the Follow-up of Iberian lynx conservation Actions to Spain (17-19 March 2003). T-PVS Inf (2003) 5

Plan de cría en cautividad del lince ibérico (*Lynx pardinus*). Versión aprobada por la Comisión Nacional de Protección de la Naturaleza el 8 de febrero de 2001, Dirección General de Conservación de la Naturaleza, Secretaría General de Medio Ambiente, Ministerio de Medio Ambiente.

Agreement between Ministry of Environment and Regional Ministry of Environment of Andalucía (RESOLUCIÓN de 23 de Junio 2003, de la Secretaria General de Medio Ambiente, por la que se dispone la publicación del Convenio de Colaboración suscrito entre el Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y la Junta de Andalucía para el desarrollo de un unico programa coordinado de actuaciones para la aplicación de la Estrategia Nacional de Conservación del Lince en Andalucía.) [only in Spanish]

Report of the 1st meeting of the Bilateral Commission of 24 July 2003 (1º reunión de la Comisión Bilateral Consejería de Medio Ambiente – Ministerio de Medio Ambiente para la conservación del lince ibérico (*Lynx pardinus*) en Andalucía. celebrada en Lugar Nuevo, Andujar (Jaen), el 24 de Julio de 2003) [only in Spanish]

Appendix 1. Programme of the visit

MONDAY, 27 OCTOBER

Morning – Meeting with Dirección General de Conservación de la Naturaleza y Organismo Autónomo de Parques Nacionales, Ministerio de Medio Ambiente.

Noon – Meeting with WWF/Adena.

Afternoon – departure for Sevilla

TUESDAY, 28 OCTOBER

Morning – Meeting in Sevilla with Junta de Andalucía

Noon – Meeting in Sevilla with Miguel Delibes and Paco Palomares, C.S.I.C. Estación Biológica de Doñana

Evening – departure for Madrid

Appendix 2. Participants of the meetings

<i>Name</i>	<i>Affiliation / function</i>	<i>Contact</i>
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