



THE WWF/Adena's IBERIAN LYNX PROJECT

Summary report

The Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) is classified by the World Union for the Nature (IUCN) as the world's most endangered feline species (Nowell & Jackson, 1996). In October 2002, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species upgraded the lynx to **Critically Endangered** following new evidence of alarming decline.

At the end of the decade of the eighty, Rodríguez and Delibes (1990) estimated the Spanish population's size of Iberian lynx in about 1.100 animals, with less than 350 breeding females. Of the 48 areas of stable presence found in Spain, only in eight of them, it was considered a number superior of lynxes than 25. These stable's presence areas were grouped genetically in nine isolated populations, in the southwest quadrant of the Iberian Peninsula. Probably only two of these populations, that included the 70% of the total population, were viable short term: Sierra Morena and Toledo Mountains. In Portugal the population's size was ignored, although probably it didn't surpass the 50 lynxes.

The main **threats** that affect this feline are the shortage of its basic prey, the rabbit, due to the different epidemics that it has suffered since the fifties (Myxomatosis and Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease, the RHD); the mortality taken place by the man in a deliberate (poaching) or accidental way (traps dedicated to other animals, car accidents, etc.); the destruction or alteration of its habitat, the scrub and Mediterranean forest; and the isolation and the fragmentation of its populations, that were already very small and are every day more isolated, due to the construction of public works like highways or dams, that are creating new barriers on the corridors areas between populations.

The international **normative** (CITES, Annexed I; Bern Convention, Annex II), as well as the community (Habitats Directive, Annex II as high-priority species and Annex IV) and the national normative (R.D. 439/90 and Law 4/89) protect this species. In the Spanish case, the legislation forces, since more than ten years, to the writing of recovery plans for the species classified in extinction danger. For the Iberian lynx only in 1999, the central Administration edited a *National Strategy for the Conservation of the Iberian Lynx*, largely coincident with the WWF's Action Plan. However, **none of the Regional Governments with territories where the species lives has approved its respective plans**, and only some of them have drafts. These Regional Governments have also spent millionaire quantities, mainly coming from the Program Life of the E.U, for the conservation of the Iberian lynx, but with scarce results. In spite of that and, although during the last years the efforts for its conservation have been intensified, the situation of the Iberian lynx is every day **more critical** and recovery indications are not observed.

The most recent national survey (Guzmán, García, Garrote, Perez de Ayala and Iglesias, 2002) indicate that at the present time the Iberian lynx would **only breeds in 2** of the 48 areas, that Delibes and Rodríguez identified one decade ago. These two areas are: Doñana and Sierra de Andújar (Eastern Sierra Morena), where the estimated population is around 150 individuals. Isolated individuals should survive in other areas like East Montes de Toledo, Western Sistema Central and Western Sierra Morena (although in the last survey it was only detected the presence of one lynx's scat in eastern Montes de Toledo). In Portugal a similar survey conducted in 2002 by the *Instituto da Conservação da Natureza* failed to detect a single lynx and no lynx has been detected since 1997.

So the last estimations (2002) seem to indicate that the total population is **fewer than 200 Iberian lynxes in the world**.

Great part of the area of distribution of the Iberian lynx is included in lands of private ownership. In these big estates devoted to hunting practices, the influence of the Administration is very scarce. The lack of participation of the private sector in the efforts of conservation of this species can be related with the scarce positive results obtained up to now. For that reason, WWF/Adena is developing work lines with a bigger protagonism of the private initiative.

In the mark of the *National Strategy for the Conservation of the Iberian Lynx*, with the economic support of the "Fundación Biodiversidad" of the Environment Ministry, and in coordination with the rest of the entities involved in the conservation of this species, WWF/Adena has been developing for last three years (2000 - 2002) a project based on the participation of the owners and managers of private shooting properties, with very good results.

Within this project WWF/Adena has established **administration agreements** or collaborations with the owners of different properties in the two of the three most important areas for the Iberian lynx: Sierra Morena and Montes de Toledo. Actually WWF/Adena has agreements with ten private estates and these arrangements cover an extension of 14.535 ha. Six of these properties, with a total surface of 5.733 ha are in the Toledo Mountain's area and four, with 8.802 ha in total, are in Sierra Morena.

Thanks to these administration agreements, in those areas it has been favoured and encouraged a kind of **management** that reduces the main threats for the Iberian lynx, in different ways as:

- The prey scarcity has been tried to minimize reducing the shooting pressure with the prohibition of rabbit's hunting in all those properties.
- To stop the mortality caused by the man, the control of predators has been eliminated in the properties with agreements and restrictions of some hunting practices have been applied to reduce the risk of accidents for the lynxes. Also, thanks to the surveillance of the personnel of WWF/Adena, poachers and snares have been detected and removed.
- The loss and transformation of the habitat has been suppressed in these properties; it has been regulated the use of tracks and roads inside the estates and it has been carried out habitat improvements to promote the presence of the rabbit.

WWF/Adena has been also collaborating in the **National Diagnostic Census** that has been developed between 2000 and 2002, to discover the size of the population of the lynxes and their current status. The census was based on the detection of marks and signs of the animal and mainly in the use of photographic-traps.

The **reinforcement of the rabbit populations** is also a basic guideline for the Iberian Lynx recovery. In the past WWF/Adena has developed different pilot works of rabbit reintroductions in some estates of Montes de Toledo (in collaboration with Fundación Los Ballesteros). From September to December 2002 we've also initiated an ambitious project of rabbit population's reinforcement in the rented estates of Sierra Morena. We conditioned the habitat (removing the scrubland and fertilizing the soil to favour the pasture growing) in a 6 hectares plot, placed in one of these properties. Then we built 20 artificial refuges for the rabbits and we surrounded the plot with a fence, to protect the animals from their predators. Finally we captured 100 rabbits in a neighbouring estate (in order to guarantee the adaptation of these to the particular conditions of the area), we vaccinated and we released them.

Another basic guideline is the **improvement of the habitat** in favour of the rabbit and lynx presence. To favour this kind of management a study, titled "*Proposals for the administration of shooting properties included in the area of distribution of the Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*)*", was carried out in 2000 by the Department of Ecology of the Autonomous University of Madrid, and thanks to the support of WWF International. This study was the basis of a brochure titled *Management of lynx estates*, which was distributed among landowners, estate managers,

guardians, and keepers, etc. to favour the implementation of sustainable management models in hunting properties, compatible with the conservation of the lynx.

Joint to this WWF/Adena is carrying out other actions of **raising awareness** and **education**, through the edition of materials like a specific bulletin for the hunt properties (2.000 units), posters (19.000 u.), pamphlets (48.000 u.), stickers (9.000 u.), etc. that have been distributed among the local population to inform about the situation of the Iberian lynx and to give diffusion to the project. At the same time WWF is also working with the regional, national and international media.

Also, different actions of **political lobby** and **office works** are being carried out to improve the situation of the Iberian lynx, like revision of drafts of plans, meetings with politics, participation on different regional, national and international forums, etc. One of the most important aspects of this work is the **Iberian lynx Shadow list** that WWF/Adena has developed to analyse the Natura 2000 Spanish Official Proposal for the Iberian lynx. This is a very important aspect, because as it has been admitted on the International Seminar held in Andújar (Spain) last October, it is crucial for the future of the species to guarantee the conservation of the distribution area according to the data of 1989. Thanks also to our efforts, in the last meeting for the Mediterranean region (January 2003) the European Commission has considered the Spanish proposal for the Iberian lynx as insufficient, and, the different Spanish regions will have to submit a wider proposal. Another lobby action is the monitoring of the evolution of the **Captive Breeding Plan**, a basic tool for the future conservation of the species.

WWF/Adena is also compiling an **inventory of projects and public works**, supported by WWF International, that affect the area of Spanish distribution of the Iberian lynx, to evaluate its impact, to analyse its financing and to propose, when it is possible, alternative or correcting measures. This study, that we are finishing in these days, includes till now, 53 different Public works, including 26 dams, 14 highways, 4 high velocity train railways and 3 gas ducts.

Finally, all this work it would not be possible without the economic support of many entities, and, beside those already mentioned as the WWF International and WWF Netherlands or the "Fundación Biodiversidad", it is necessary to point out the help of *CajaSur* (environmental education, administration proposals in properties and diffusion of materials mainly), *Rover España* (conveyance of a 4x4 vehicle to support the surveillance and the field works) and *Félix Solís* (reprint book on the lynx).

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