

ities to support improving the critical situation of the Balkan lynx. However, it requires long-term commitment and collaboration of all interest groups to prevent the Balkan lynx from extinction.

Key words: Balkan lynx, *Lynx lynx balcanicus syn. martinoi*, conservation, research, threats, capacity development

IMPROVING KNOWLEDGE OF THE STATUS OF BALKAN LYNX (*Lynx lynx balcanicus/martinoi*) AND OTHER WILDLIFE SPECIES IN ALBANIA: RESULTS FROM CAMERA-TRAPPING SURVEYS IN 2009 – 2012

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The existing information on large mammals' distribution in Albania remains rather scarce, not based on systematic survey methods and often coming solely from experts' interpretations and estimates. Improving the quality of data on wildlife status and distribution is of crucial importance to defining better management and conservation strategies.

Camera-trapping is one of the most widely used methods for identification and inventorying of medium to large mammal species worldwide. We conducted three large scale camera-trapping surveys in northern and eastern parts of Albania in 2009, 2010-11 and 2011-12, respectively. This research was done in the frame of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme and the SCOPES Balkan lynx project. The main aims of these surveys were to prove the existence of the critically endangered Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus/martinoi*) in Albania and generate more information on other mammal species. We employed an extensive camera-trapping approach throughout winter seasons (between October and May) by focusing on areas that had highest indications of lynx presence. The monitored regions were Valbona Valley, Pukë-Mirditë Mountains, Balgjaj-Mbasdejë, Bardhet-Martanesh, Shebenik-Jabllanica and Gërmenj-Shelegurë.

We managed to prove the existence of Balkan lynx in Albania, with the first ever picture of a wild lynx being taken on 26 March 2011 in the mountainous region of Pukë-Mirditë. Subsequently, two more pictures of different individuals were taken on 28 March 2012 and 12 May 2012 in the same region, indicating that at least two resident individuals occupy the area. Moreover, 15 mammal species were evidenced throughout the seasons in all the monitored regions, generating valuable information on other large carnivores like brown bears (*Ursus arctos*) and wolves (*Canis lupus*) and prey species (*Capreolus capreolus*, *Rupicapra rupicapra*, *Lepus europaeus*) – crucial for the future recovery of Balkan lynx in the country.

Keywords: Balkan lynx, *Lynx lynx balcanicus/martinoi*, camera-trapping, research, Albania