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CHALLENGES IN THE CONSERVATION OF THE BALKAN LYNX

Manuela von ARX¹, Bledi HOXHA², Gjorgje IVANOV³, Dime MELOVSKI³, Aleksandar STOJANOV³, Aleksandër TRAJÇE², Slavcho HRISTOVSKI^{3,4}, Ljupcho MELOVSKI^{3,4}, Spase SHUMKA^{2,5}, Annette SPANGENBERG⁶, Gabriel SCHWADERER⁶, Thies GEERTZ⁶, John LINNELL⁷, Urs BREITENMOSER^{1,8}

¹KORA - Carnivore Ecology and Wildlife Management, Thunstrasse 31, 3074 Muri b. Bern, Switzerland
m.vonarx@kora.ch

²PPNEA - Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania, Rr. "Vangjush Furxhi" 16 / 1
/ 10, Tirana, Albania,

b.hoxha@ppnea.org; a.trajce@ppnea.org; s.shumka@ppnea.org

³Macedonian Ecological Society, P.O. Box 162, 1000 Skopje, Macedonia
ivanov@mes.org.mk; melovskid@mes.org.mk; stojanov@mes.org.mk

⁴Institute of Biology, Faculty of Natural Science and Mathematics, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University,
Skopje, Arhimedova 5, 1000 Skopje, Republic of Macedonia

slavco_h@iunona.pmf.ukim.edu.mk; melovski@iunona.pmf.ukim.edu.mk

⁵Faculty of Biotechnology and Food, Agricultural University of Tirana, Koder Kamza, 1000 Tirana,
Albania s.shumka@ppnea.org

⁶EuroNatur, Konstanzer Strasse 22, 78315 Radolfzell, Germany

annette.spangenberg@euronatur.org; gabriel.schwaderer@euronatur.org; thies.geertz@euronatur.org

⁷NINA – Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, PO Box 5685 Sluppen, 7485 Trondheim, Norway john.
linnell@nina.no

⁸Institute of Veterinary Virology, University of Berne, Länggassstrasse 122, 3012 Bern urs.breitenmoser@
vetsuisse.unibe.ch

The Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus* syn. *martinoi*) is Critically Endangered according to IUCN Red List Criteria. Since 2006, several projects – of which 3 still ongoing – have aimed to improve the knowledge on the ecology, status and needs of the Balkan lynx and apply targeted conservation measures in Macedonia and Albania. A comprehensive approach integrating lynx and prey conservation, landscape preservation as well as human dimensions is used. The main objectives are (1) lynx research by means of methods like camera-trapping and radio-telemetry, (2) habitat protection through the establishment of protected areas and (3) working with local people with the support of projects for local sustainable development. Direct contacts, presentations, brochures, press articles and documentaries on TV started raising public awareness on the status and conservation of the Balkan lynx. Knowledge about its ecology has been generated and will be presented during this Congress. The investigations so far let us conclude that the Balkan lynx is even less numerous than previously estimated and that the only functioning population with reproduction is restricted to the Mavrovo National Park and surroundings in Macedonia. The threats are mainly direct persecution, decreasing prey populations (through over-hunting) and – in certain areas – habitat degradation. The small size and fragmentation of the current lynx population makes it vulnerable to additional threats like genetic impoverishment and infrastructure developments furthering the fragmentation. A Regional Conservation Strategy and National Action Plans were developed in participatory workshops in Albania and Macedonia and endorsed by the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, Council of Europe. Although the Balkan lynx range countries have signed and ratified this international treaty there is so far little engagement of the author-