

Welcome to the tenth edition of *LynxBrief*, a briefing paper focusing on the conservation of the Iberian Lynx, **the most endangered feline species in the world**. Comments on, and questions about, any issue relating to the conservation of the Iberian Lynx should be emailed to: news@soslynx.org

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Challenges to Doñana's Lynxes

The Doñana lynx population, in south west Andalucía, Spain, is the source of most scientific studies into the species, and is still one of just two known wild breeding populations. The lynx in Doñana is also an important “umbrella species”, promoting and justifying the protection and restoration of habitat important for many other species, as well as being closely tied to the success, or not, of Doñana National Park, a World Heritage Site.

Unfortunately, however, the lynx in Doñana is in serious trouble. In contrast to the Sierra Morena lynx population – which has been successfully stabilised and expanded in recent years – and the growing captive breeding population (see below), the situation for the Doñana lynx population seems to be going from bad to worse.

As reported in previous editions of *LynxBrief*, many lynx have been killed in the Doñana area in recent years as a result of increases in the speed and volume of road traffic; e.g. 10 lynx were killed by traffic in Doñana from 2004 to 2006 alone. In addition, a lot of valuable lynx habitat has been consumed and fragmented by legal and illegal developments in intensive (strawberry) farming, including right up to the border of the national park.

To make matters worse, in 2007 an outbreak of Feline Lucaemia Virus (FeLV) killed four adult lynx in the Coto del Rey area to the north of the national park, and resulted in a further seven infected individuals being removed from the population – see *LynxBrief* no. 9. The disease outbreak, which has now been controlled, was likely triggered by contact between lynx and infected domestic cats. However, the impact of the disease was probably so severe due to low genetic diversity, and thus low disease resistance, resulting from inbreeding in this small and long-isolated Iberian Lynx population.

It has been reported as a “success” that no lynx were killed by vehicles in the Doñana area in 2007. However, this may at least have been partly due to the fact that so many adult lynx were lost in Doñana to FeLV, particularly from the Coto del Rey area, where many lynx have been run over in previous years. Threats from road vehicles may not have been reduced so much as eclipsed by the devastating impact of the disease.



©Ex-situ conservation programme

On top of threats from road vehicles, intensive agriculture and a disease outbreak, Doñana's lynxes are also apparently being inadequately served by management of the protected areas. **In particular, on 2 April a male adult lynx was found dead in an unused enclosure inside the core biological reserve of the national park.** The lynx was wearing a radio collar and the enclosure it died in had been constructed by the Andalusian government for a planned translocation of lynx from Sierra Morena, that was later switched to Coto del Rey to address losses to FeLV. The lynx probably died from hunger and thirst, having jumped into the unused enclosure but then being unable to jump out.

See: http://www.adena.es/noticias/sala_de_prensa/noticias_de_especies.cfm?uNewsID=3300

And: <http://www.ecologistasenaccion.org/spip.php?article6144>

And: <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2008/04/04/ciencia/1207311494.html>

This was an obvious case of poor management, as has been forcefully argued in the media by both WWF Spain and Ecololgistas en Acción. The lynx died in the most protected and studied area of the national park, and, as it was wearing a radio collar, it could have been easily located. Moreover, the enclosure was known about by the park authorities and the lynx that died was the last known male to inhabit the biological reserve, and should thus have been subject to extra surveillance and care.

The Andalusian government, which manages the national park and is ultimately responsible for lynx conservation in the region, estimates that there are now around 35 lynxes in Doñana, including just 17 adults, 8-9 sub-adults (< 2 years), and 8-9 cubs born in 2007. 8 new cubs are to have been born this year in Coto del Rey. However, at least 3 of these cubs have since died. The lynx population is thus precariously small and extremely threatened. It is also isolated by 300km, and surrounding intensive development, from the Sierra Morena population, making natural connection unlikely.

See: <http://www.publico.es/ciencias/068173/donana/linces/muertes/wwfadena>

Efforts have been made in recent years to address the problems in Doñana, by the national and regional governments, NGOs, scientists and others. This has included: signs, underpasses and fences on many roads; outreach work, particularly with the hunting community and key land owners; attempted rabbit recovery work; the vaccination of most wild lynx against FeLV, and most recently; **the translocation of a lynx (Baya) from Sierra Morena into Doñana in December 2007, resulting in the first wild interbreeding between the two populations in at least 50 years.** The translocation was supported by the regional government and the EU, and was overseen by feline expert Dr. Melody Roelke.

See: http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/medioambiente/web/Bloques_Tematicos/Publicaciones_Divulgacion_Y_Noticias/Publicaciones_Periodicas/gato_clavo/gato_clavo_13.pdf

Although these are important and commendable achievements, however, not enough has yet been done, and what has been achieved continues to be undermined by contradictory practices and policies, including: inadequate control of, and tacit support for, agricultural development and traffic growth, and; apparent cases of mismanagement in the protected areas. Moreover, the attitudes of some local people themselves seem to – at times – conflict with lynx conservation in their demand for unsustainable development and their apparent hostility to some conservation measures. For example, when it was proposed that the illegally constructed (but widely used) Villamanrique-El Rocio road might be closed in response to calls from NGOs and the EU Commission, to avoid further lynx being run over, some local people threatened to withdraw cooperation with the regional government in hunting agreements, and some even threatened to deliberately target the lynx.

A lot thus needs to be achieved to save the lynx in Doñana, more than seems achievable under current trajectories. However, it is essential that this is done for the sake of the species as well as the emblematic and important protected areas. It thus seems appropriate that an **“emergency recovery plan” be urgently drafted and implemented for Doñana’s lynxes**, as called for by WWF Spain. Such a plan would need to address:

- High traffic speeds and volumes
- Habitat loss to intensive agriculture
- Apparent mismanagement of protected areas
- The population’s small size and low diversity
- Conflicting attitudes amongst local people

Individuals and representatives of organisations are called upon to write to the president of Andalucía calling upon his government to urgently draft and implement an emergency recovery plan for Doñana’s lynxes, using the address below. The EU Environment Commissioner should also be written to, urging him to pressure the Andalusian government to implement such a plan, given that Europe as a whole has partial responsibility, and provides funding, for a lot Iberian Lynx conservation.

**Excmo. Sr Presidente de la Junta de Andalucía,
Dr Manuel Chaves, Palacio de San Telmo,
Avenida de Roma, 41071 Sevilla, SPAIN
email: manuel.chaves@juntadeandalucia.es**

**Mr Stavros Dimas, Environment Commissioner,
European Commission, B-1049 Brussels, BELGIUM
email: stavros.dimas@ec.europa.eu**

A model lobby letter is provided below. However, be sure to add your own name and address, and to adapt the letter with your own thoughts, so as to give it more force.

[YOUR ADDRESS HERE]

[DATE]

Dear Dr Chavez

I am writing to you concerning the Iberian Lynx population in Doñana, Andalucía, which has now declined to just 35 individuals (and only 17 adults) as a result of habitat loss and fragmentation, rabbit decline and high non-natural mortality, particularly from the growing speed and volume of road traffic in the area.

In addition, the lynx in Doñana have suffered from apparent mismanagement of the protected areas. For example, on 2 April 2008, an adult male lynx was found dead in an unused enclosure in the highly protected and studied biological reserve of the national park. This lynx appears to have died needlessly as a result of inadequate care and surveillance on the part of the park authorities.

Given the number and severity of threats facing Doñana’s few remaining lynx, and the importance of this population for the species and the future of the area, I call upon your government to urgently create and implement a lynx “emergency recovery plan” for the area, addressing: habitat loss and fragmentation; the growth in speeds, volume and impacts of road vehicles; apparent mismanagement of protected areas, and; some conflicting attitudes amongst some local people.

If such urgent action is not taken, the decline of lynx in Doñana will continue to undermine the real achievements in the captive breeding programme and lynx conservation in the Sierra Morena. It will also be a bad indictment of management of Doñana National Park – a World Heritage Site and one of Europe’s most important and most well-known protected areas.

Yours sincerely

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More Captive Breeding Success

The Iberian Lynx captive breeding programme is advancing well, both in terms of more captive breeding success, and in terms of actions and plans made for: further captive breeding centres, and; the planned reintroduction of captive bred animals in the future.



So far this year, seven female lynx have successfully given birth to a total of fourteen cubs in captivity. On 20 March, Brisa, herself born in captivity in 2005, gave birth prematurely to two cubs. One cub was still-born, whilst the other was rejected by the mother and has since been raised by staff at El Acebuche, Doñana. Studies have shown that around 50% of feline first-time mothers will give birth prematurely and/or reject their offspring.

On 22 March, Saliega (Brisa's mother and the first lynx to give birth in captivity in 2005), gave birth for the fourth consecutive year to two cubs, both of which are being well raised by their mother. Then, on 4 April, Adelfa – born in the wild in Sierra Morena in 2004 – gave birth to two cubs, which she is caring for “impeccably”. Next, on 6 April Boj – born in the wild in Doñana in 2005 – gave birth to a further three cubs, which are all being raised well by their mother.

Most recently, Aliaga gave birth in the last few days to three cubs at El Acubuche. This followed the birth of one cub by Esperanza on 12 April and two cubs by Aura on 13 April. In addition, Azaha at Zoo Jerez, and Castanela and Barraca at the La Olivilla (Jaén, also in Andalucía) are pregnant and expected to give birth very soon.

For more information see: www.lynxexsitu.es

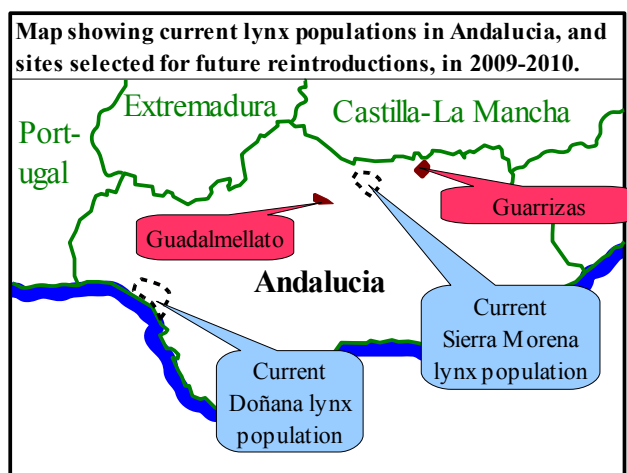
Beyond this progress with captive breeding, the network of breeding centres is set to expand with new centres under construction in Andalucía (Villafranca, Cordoba), Portugal (Silves, Algarve) and Extremadura (Las Correderas), and the announcement in November 2007 that the government of Castilla-La Mancha will also construct a captive breeding centre, at Cabañeros National Park. These four new centres, along with the confirmation of lynx presence in Castilla-La Mancha (see below), will help to spread responsibilities and success in lynx conservation, and will also help maintain an “Iberian”, as opposed to an Andalusian, lynx. This is in turn important both to help restore the historical range of the species, and to keep national and international organisations involved in Iberian Lynx conservation.

The ultimate aims of the captive breeding programme include to: help maintain the genetic diversity of the species; act as an “outreach” tool, and; provide captive-bred individuals for reintroduction into the wild. Significant additional progress has been made recently, particularly towards this last aim, with the selection of two sites in Andalucía for reintroductions (Guarrizas and Guadalmellato – see map below). These may take place as early as next year, subject to further success in captive breeding and adequate preparation of the selected sites.

Recent surveys have shown that a large majority of local people in both the sites, including hunters, support lynx reintroductions. In addition, the sites were also chosen due to their: optimal habitat; availability of rabbit prey; low threat levels, and; potential connectivity with current populations. The Andalusian government – along with partners in the lynx LIFE programme – is now working to prepare and optimise both sites, from which one will be selected as the most suitable for the reintroduction of a viable lynx population. If all goes well, lynx should then be reintroduced in 2009-10, first into a “soft release” enclosure (similar to that used for the successful translocation of a lynx from Sierra to Doñana – see above), and then later released into the wider area.

For more information see: www.lifeline.org

LynxBrief congratulates all those involved in all these important achievements – both those working in the *ex situ* as well as the *in situ* conservation programmes – and looks forward to more good news in the near future.



Lynx presence in Castilla-La Mancha

As reported in *LynxBrief* no. 9, in October and November 2007, a number of official announcements were made in the Spanish media concerning the presence of Iberian Lynx in Castilla-La Mancha; a Spanish autonomous region immediately north of Andalucía.

On 21 October, the El País newspaper reported video footage, provided by the regional government, showing two different Iberian Lynx in Castilla-La Mancha. This announcement was followed by more precise statements from the president of Castilla-La Mancha that there was a stable population in the region's Ciudad Real province, of around 15 individuals, including 3 reproductive females, 2 adult males, 4 sub-adults and 6 cubs.

This later statement was based upon DNA analysis of excrement samples that were backed up by camera trap surveys conducted in October/November 2007, and it was followed by the publication of a photo taken by a camera trap in Cuidad Real of a lynx on 8 November.

See: http://www.elpais.com/articulo/sociedad/lince/vuelve/manada/Castilla-La-Mancha/elpepusoc/20071021elpepusoc_6/Tes

Cuidad Real province borders the area of northern Andalucía with current lynx presence (Andújar – Cardena). This, combined with the fact that extensive surveys conducted over previous years failed to confirm lynx presence, suggests that the lynx in Castilla-La Mancha are individuals dispersed from northern Andalucía rather than a separate remnant population.

Unofficial suggestions have been made that the photographed lynx come from a specific private hunting estate bordering Andalucía in southern Cuidad Real province, which, if true, would confirm the hypothesis that these animals dispersed from Andalucía. Unfortunately, however, the regional government has refused to confirm the precise location of these lynx.

The Castilla-La Mancha government has justified withholding this information so as to protect the lynxes' habitat. However, the reverse would seem to be true. The precise location of lynxes in Andalucía has been widely publicised for several years without apparent detrimental impact upon their habitat. Moreover, it would seem that accurate and openly-available information about lynx presence has been key to allowing effective lynx conservation in Andalucía through co-ordination, lobbying, conservation projects, research and outreach.

Thus it is important that the government of Castilla-La Mancha urgently releases more precise information about the location of lynxes in the region, and those interested in Iberian Lynx conservation are called upon to write to the president of Castilla-La Mancha, urging his government to do so. Individuals and representatives of organisations should write a letter to:

Excmo. Sr Presidente de la Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha, D. José María Barreda Fontes, Palacio de Fuensalida, Plaza del Conde,5 45071 – Toledo, SPAIN

New SOS Lynx Website Launched

SOS Lynx has recently launched a new website at: www.soslynx.org (available in English and Portuguese). The new site includes background information and reports about the Iberian Lynx, and a dedicated Action Page encouraging visitors to write emails and letters, and sign petitions, in support of the species. The site also features all current and past editions of *LynxBrief* (in English, Spanish and Portuguese), as well as photographs and videos of the Iberian Lynx, for non-commercial use.

Any comments about the new website or lynx conservation should be sent to: news@soslynx.org whilst media enquiries should be sent to: media@soslynx.org. Finally, any financial enquiries (including about donations) should be addressed to: enquiries@soslynx.org

Conclusions

It is important that all those interested and working in lynx conservation (in research, conservation and/or lobbying) work together to ensure the survival of this beautiful and important creature, particularly in the face of conflicting interests. In particular, it is important that those interested in lynx conservation write lobby letters to politicians and policy-makers to encourage them to alter their actions in favour of the Iberian Lynx.

In this edition, *LynxBrief* advises those interested and/or working in lynx conservation to write a letter to the President of Andalucía and the EU Environment Commissioner, calling upon the Andalusian government to urgently create and implement an emergency recovery plan for Doñana's lynx, given challenges from intensive agriculture, fast road traffic, conflicting local attitudes and apparent mismanagement of the protected areas.

In addition, individuals and representatives of organisations are called upon to write a letter to the president of Castilla-La Mancha, calling upon his government to be more open and accurate in the provision of information about lynx in this region.

Finally, *LynxBrief* sends best wishes to all those interested and involved in lynx conservation, and looks forward to more of your comments and suggestions.

About the author

LynxBrief is edited by **Dan Ward**, who has a degree in Natural Sciences (Cambridge University), a MSc specialising in Environmental Policy and experience in conservation projects in Scotland, New Zealand, Ecuador and Spain. He accepts no responsibility for the use that may be made of this report.

About SOS Lynx

SOS Lynx is a campaign organisation set up in 2000 to promote the conservation of the Iberian Lynx, and works mainly at the International level. For more information about, and to support, SOS Lynx, see the new website at: www.soslynx.org

About Ecologistas en Acción – Andalucía

Ecologistas en Acción – Andalucía is a federation of ecological groups that works to conserve the Iberian Lynx and the natural environment in general, and promotes peace and solidarity. Ecologistas en Acción is not necessarily identified with all the contents of this publication. You can contact the organisation by email at: andalucia@ecologistasenaccion.org

About One Planet Living and Pelicano SA

In 2001, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said: "Our biggest challenge this new century is to take an idea that seems abstract – sustainable development – and turn it into a reality for all the world's people". BioRegional and WWF have sought to take up this challenge. One Planet Living (OPL) is a joint initiative that aims to make it easy, attractive and affordable for people everywhere to adopt sustainable lifestyles, and at the same time support nature conservation. Pelicano SA, a Portuguese developer, is a Founding Global Partner of the OPL initiative, and is directly supporting lynx conservation in Portugal.