

Welcome to the twelfth 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](mailto:news@soslynx.org)



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## III International Iberian Lynx Seminar

The third International Iberian Lynx Seminar was held in Huelva, Andalucía from 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> November 2008, with many key individuals and organisations in attendance, from both Spain and Portugal, as well as the international level.

The conference was organised by the government of Andalucía as part of the Lynx LIFE Project, and included two open days, when a number of presentations were made, and a third “closed” day, when representatives of key administrations and organisations discussed aspects of the future reintroduction plans for the Iberian Lynx, in four specified working groups:

1. Strategy and Long Term Goals
2. Rehabilitation and Release Protocol
3. Post Release Monitoring
4. Communication and Public Involvement

Many important and interesting presentations were made during the first two days of the seminar, including those on:

- i. The status of wild lynx in Andalucía (*see opposite*);
- ii. The lynx captive breeding programme (*see page 2*);
- iii. Plans for future lynx reintroductions (*see page 2*);
- iv. Human aspects of predator conservation (*see page 3*);
- v. Experience with reintroducing other felines species;
- vi. Lynx recovery plans in Portugal (*see LynxBrief no. 11*).

In general, the seminar showed that there has been real progress in Iberian Lynx conservation since the previous International Seminar held in Cordoba in 2004, in particular with *in situ* conservation in the Sierra Morena mountains and in the captive breeding programme. As a result, lynx decline has been halted and there is a real prospect of reintroducing the species into areas where it survived until recently, from 2009 (see page 2).

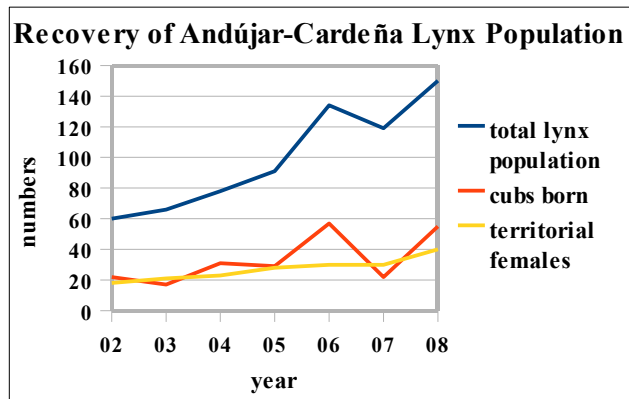
Despite this good progress, however, discussions held after the presentations and during the third day of working groups, highlighted a number of challenges that still need to be overcome to ensure long-term lynx recovery. These include:

- Addressing the problem of inappropriate, inhumane (and often illegal) predator control methods that are still used extensively in Spain and Portugal (see page 2).
- Reversing the massive decline in wild rabbit populations that has occurred in recent decades (see page 3).
- Building more trust amongst different organisations and individuals involved in Iberian Lynx conservation, and between key organisations and the public (see page 3).
- Securing longer term funding for lynx conservation, particularly beyond the current LIFE project (see page 3).
- Increasing transparency of information, e.g concerning the location of lynx in Castilla-La Mancha (see page 4).

Overall, by providing a forum for discussing these challenges, and effectively communicating the real progress that has been made in Iberian Lynx conservation, the III International Seminar has been a very important and effective initiative. Nevertheless, improvements could be made in the organisation of future seminars, e.g. by involving more key individuals and groups in the planning and organisation of sessions, materials and working groups. *LynxBrief* thus looks forward to more important seminars in the future, hoping that they can build on, and be a bit more open and inclusive than, those in the past.

## Current Iberian Lynx Numbers

As reported at the III International Seminar, Iberian Lynx recovery has continued well in the Sierra Morena area just north of Andújar, Andalucía, with 40 breeding females, 55 cubs born in 2008 and 150 individuals overall. This compares with 18 females, 22 cubs and 60 individuals in 2002, as shown:



Source: Presentation at III International Lynx Seminar, on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2008, by Miguel Angel Simón, Junta de Andalucía.

As a result of this increase, the lynx area in Andújar-Cardeña has probably reached its carrying capacity and thus could provide animals for future reintroductions elsewhere. This is an unexpected, welcome and important achievement, not least because it is generally preferable to reintroduce felines bred in the wild rather than those bred in captivity (if possible) because they are more likely to be fully adapted to living in the wild.

In addition to these *in situ* achievements in the Sierra Morena, the *ex situ* captive breeding programme has also progressed well, with 52 individuals, 24 of which were bred in captivity. Moreover, the *ex situ* population will also be able to provide 20 to 40 individuals per year for reintroductions, from 2010.

Finally, in Doñana, the lynx population seems to have remained steady in recent years, with around 50 individuals reported in total each year between 2002 and 2008. This is despite the loss of at least 9 individuals to Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV) in 2007, thanks partly to the successful translocation of a breeding male lynx from Andújar-Cardeña to Doñana in December 2007 (see *LynxBrief* no. 10 and 11). Moreover, a second lynx was successfully translocated into Doñana in November 2008.

*LynxBrief* thus congratulates all those involved in both *in situ* and *ex situ* lynx conservation for these important achievements.



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## Plans for Iberian Lynx Reintroductions

As reported in *LynxBrief* no. 10, the Andalusian government and its LIFE partners plan to reintroduce Iberian Lynx into the areas of Guarrizas and Guadalmellato in northern Andalucía over the coming years. The current proposals were presented in more detail at the International Seminar, including:

- Begin reintroducing Iberian Lynx into Guadalmellato from 2009, and into Guarrizas from 2010 - 11.
- Use *soft\** release methods for the first reintroductions and consider *hard\** release approaches in the future, and monitor all released lynx with state-of-the-art methods.
- Reintroduce a sustainable population in each site, with 15 female territories and maximum genetic variability.
- In the longer term, to achieve the carrying capacity of 30 female territories in each site, through natural growth.

The proposals were subject to discussion during the working groups on the final day of the seminar, where it became clear that further discussions and the involvement of more key organisations and individuals will be needed to finalise important details, including during a dedicated workshop. Thus, although the reintroduction plans are an important achievement, improvements need to be made in the near future.

*\*Note: Soft release is when animals are first released into a caged area. Hard release involves direct release into the wild.*

## Addressing Inappropriate Predator Control

Despite real achievements in *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation, and the planning of future reintroductions, a number of challenges remain for longer-term lynx recovery in Spain and Portugal. One particular challenge that was highlighted repeatedly during discussions at the International Seminar was the issue of inappropriate, cruel and often illegal predator control methods, still used widely across the Iberian Peninsula.

Much of Spain and Portugal is used extensively for hunting, and this is especially true of current and potential lynx areas; e.g. 70% of Spain is covered by hunting estates (used by over 1 million registered hunters), and the majority of lynx living in the wild are situated in such estates. Moreover, techniques used by gamekeepers and landowners to kill, especially, rabbit and partridge predators have been strongly implicated in the past decline of the Iberian Lynx, and the on-going decline of many other species. For example, it is suspected that the 1990s extinction of the lynx population in Montes de Toledo, central Spain (where good habitat and rabbit populations remain) was due to the widespread use of leg traps and snares in the area. Similarly, such techniques continue to kill many Wild Cats in Spain (a species with similar needs to the Iberian Lynx), and an increasing number of birds of prey have been killed in recent years by the illegal use of poison in Andalucía; e.g., see: [www.ecologistasenaccion.org/cordoba/sosveneno/comenz.htm](http://www.ecologistasenaccion.org/cordoba/sosveneno/comenz.htm)

Many of the predator control techniques employed by gamekeepers and landowners are cruel – causing great pain and a very slow death to predators – and almost all are unselective, killing non-target and protected species as well as more common predators such as foxes and mongoose. Moreover, many techniques used are probably illegal under both national and EU legislation, and administrations have not been very effective at controlling their widespread use in many areas.

The use of poison, traps and snares has increased with rabbit decline, as hunters have been keen to recover rabbits and have often mistakenly blamed predators for past declines. However, predator control has been largely ineffective at reducing overall predation pressure or bringing about rabbit recovery. Moreover, predator control may actually have been counter-productive, by eradicating top predators such as the lynx, which naturally regulate the number of more common predators such as foxes.

In recent years, predator control seems to have accounted for a lower percentage of known lynx mortality than in past decades. However, this is due largely to the fact that Iberian Lynx only survive at present in two relatively small areas, which can and have been extensively monitored and protected by conservation personnel, and because the fate of some lynx dispersing from these areas is unknown. Moreover, some individual lynx are still known to have been killed by traps and poison. For example, in 2006 an adult male lynx died after being severely injured by a leg trap in Doñana (see *LynxBrief* no. 8). Similarly, **just on 6 November 2008 it was announced that a male lynx had died in the Sierra de Andújar due to poisoning.** See: <http://www.ecologistasenaccion.org/spip.php?article12706>

A lot more work is thus needed to educate, monitor and (if necessary) sanction gamekeepers and the owners of hunting estates, to benefit predator conservation in general across Spain and Portugal, and to safeguard any lynx that may disperse from, be reintroduced outside of, or be threatened within, current areas. This work will not be easy, not least because many lynx and other conservation projects rely upon good cooperation with hunters and landowners. Moreover, at present there is neither sufficient research and development of selective, humane predator control methods, nor agreement



amongst experts as to the effectiveness of, or the need for, predator control, even regarding more common and unprotected predators. Thus more individuals and organisations need to focus more attention and cooperation on these issues.



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## Reversing Declines in Wild Rabbits

Along with inappropriate predator control, decline in wild rabbits was one of the main causes of Iberian Lynx decline in recent decades. Moreover, rabbit decline has affected many other predator species and is a complex problem that has yet to be effectively solved. Although, in a few areas, rabbit populations have remained quite high and have recovered, populations in most areas remain extremely low (e.g. less than 5% of 1950s densities) due to a combination of myxomatosis, Rabbit Haemorrhagic Virus, excessive hunting and habitat loss.

One of the key obstacles to reversing rabbit decline has been that rabbits, and rabbit conservation, in Spain and Portugal have not been given the profile and attention they deserve, particularly in contrast to the conservation of more emblematic species in the Iberian Peninsula, and the control and eradication of rabbits in areas of the world where they have been introduced (e.g. Australia). In addition, the rabbit conservation projects that have occurred have been implemented rather independently by different organisations and under programmes with different priorities (e.g. for hunting, for the Iberian Lynx and for various birds of prey), resulting in few successes and a failure to learn from, or inform, each other.

A clear example of the lack of importance given to rabbit conservation in Spain and Portugal in recent decades is that rabbits remained classified as “Least Concern” despite massive declines that clearly qualified the species for a higher conservation status. Fortunately, this situation has recently changed. In Portugal in 2006, national authorities re-classified the European Rabbit as “Near Threatened”, and in Spain in 2007, the species was re-classified by national authorities as “Vulnerable”. Moreover, **the World Conservation Union (IUCN) has also, just this year, re-classified the European Rabbit globally in its native range (Spain, Portugal and parts of north Africa) from “Least Concern” to “Near Threatened”**. See: <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/41291>

It is hoped that these re-classifications can help rabbits, and rabbit conservation, in the Iberian Peninsula finally receive the attention they deserve, and also encourage organisations and administrations to work more together to solve what is possibly the single biggest challenge to nature conservation in Spain and Portugal. One further way to address this problem, which has been repeatedly called for (e.g. see *LynxBrief* 3 and 9), is the organisation of an inclusive conference aimed specifically at rabbit recovery in the Iberian Peninsula. Such a conference was again called for at the III International Iberian Lynx Seminar, and *LynxBrief* hopes that this can be urgently organised.

For more information about rabbit conservation in Spain and Portugal see the report “Reversing Rabbit Decline”, available at: [http://www.ualberta.ca/~dhik/lsg/report\\_lynx\\_rabbit.pdf](http://www.ualberta.ca/~dhik/lsg/report_lynx_rabbit.pdf)

## Building Trust in Communication

Communication and public involvement are essential components of successful nature conservation. Moreover, this is an area of work where many mistakes are made, resulting in slow and/or ineffective conservation projects. This was highlighted at the III International Iberian Lynx Seminar, in particular by Dr Alistair Bath from Memorial University, Canada, who gave a presentation entitled “Public Awareness, Information and Involvement”, which drew upon his experience in predator conservation. One of the key messages of this presentation was the importance of trust and credibility for the success of communication activities, both amongst organisations and between key organisations and the public.

An organisation or individual that may have an important, intelligent and accurate message to convey may nonetheless not be believed or accepted by their target audience because they are not trusted or seen as “credible” (e.g. due to past resentment or misunderstanding, or simply belonging to a different group). Moreover, such so called “behavioural conflict” seems to be particularly important in the recent history of Iberian Lynx conservation where several key individuals and organisations have not been able to communicate or work with each other effectively, seemingly because they do not sufficiently trust each other. Similarly, it has been the case in both Spain and Portugal that representatives of government agencies have, at times, not been able to convey key nature conservation messages to key members of the public because their administrations are viewed with mistrust or suspicion by some.

It is important that these situations are acknowledged and addressed, to prevent individuals and organisations wasting a lot of time and energy, now and in the future, on communication in ways that are never likely to succeed. In particular, discussions during a working group at the International Seminar highlighted that it will be important to organise workshops and/or “team building” events amongst those involved in lynx conservation, and to collectively agree a coherent communication strategy, so as to overcome past problems of mistrust and credibility. *LynxBrief* thus hopes that such initiatives can be urgently and effectively carried out.



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## Securing Longer Term Funding

Iberian Lynx conservation is, at present, well funded (at least in Spain), particularly in contrast to many other nature conservation programmes. The Lynx LIFE project alone has a budget of over €25 million, and a lot of other money is also being spent on other projects directly or indirectly associated with the species, including the captive breeding programme.

This level of funding is important and has allowed conservation projects to be carried out that would not otherwise have been possible. Moreover, this level of funding is justified because the Iberian Lynx serves as a true “umbrella species”, with lynx

conservation projects benefiting a lot of other species of plants and animals. The current level of funding, however, is not secured for the future, particularly beyond current EU LIFE funding, which runs out in 2011. In addition, many of the current Iberian Lynx plans and projects – particularly lynx reintroductions – will require significant long-term funding.

This issue was discussed at the International Seminar, with many people concerned that sufficient long-term funding had not yet been secured. However, it was also argued that insecurity of long-term funding should not be allowed to hold up the current conservation effort, and that the profile and importance of the Iberian Lynx means that it is likely to continue attracting sufficient funding, particularly from the EU and relevant governments. Thus, more work needs to be done to secure longer term funding for the Iberian Lynx, but individuals and organisations may also have to live with some level of financial insecurity in their conservation programmes.

## Transparency of Information

Finally, along with some mistrust amongst key individuals and organisations, a lack of transparency of information has also been a key obstacle to Iberian Lynx conservation in recent years. A very current example, discussed at the International Seminar, was the presence of lynx in Castilla – La Mancha.

As reported in *LynxBrief* no. 10, the government of Castilla – La Mancha, Spain announced in 2007 that up to 15 Iberian Lynx could be confirmed in their region. However, in over a year, specific details about the location of these lynx have not been provided by the relevant authorities. Moreover, without specific information, some have started to be suspicious of the number, or even existence, of lynx in Castilla – La Mancha, and the effective co-ordination of Iberian Lynx conservation between Castilla – La Mancha and Andalucía has not been possible, as required, particularly, for planned reintroductions that will take place close to the border between the two regions.

The Castilla – La Mancha authorities have argued that they cannot release the location of their lynx because they fear attracting too many nature watchers to these areas. However, the precise location of lynx in Andalucía has been widely publicised for many years without a detrimental impact from the public. Moreover, sharing this information has actually been essential for effective conservation, as has also been the case for other felines (e.g. Eurasian Lynx in Switzerland).

It has been alleged that the real reason that the Castilla – La Mancha government do not want to publicise the location of their lynx is actually because they are reluctant to share knowledge (and thus power), or because of a fear on the part of landowners that public knowledge of lynx presence will increase pressure for restrictions on the current use of predator control methods. Moreover, it has also been alleged that at least one of the locations of lynx in Castilla – La Mancha is a large estate bordering Andalucía, owned by a British Lord, who allegedly has considerable influence over local authorities.

In order to avoid unnecessary suspicions, misunderstandings and a lack of co-ordination, the government of Castilla – La Mancha is again called upon to urgently and openly publicise the location of lynx in their region. Individuals and organisations interested in Iberian Lynx conservation are urged to write to the president of Castilla – La Mancha, calling upon his government to do so, using the contact details below:

**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**

## Conclusions

In order to achieve long-term lynx recovery, it is important that all those working and/or interested in the conservation of the Iberian Lynx continue to work together and not against each other. To this end, conferences, such as the III International Seminar, are important events. However, it will also be important to build more trust in key individuals and organisations, and to improve the transparency of information.

These improvements are necessary to ensure that past achievements in both *in situ* and *ex situ* lynx conservation can be translated into hoped for future successes in rabbit recovery, decreasing inappropriate predator control, lynx reintroductions and (ultimately) long term, widespread Iberian Lynx recovery.

One specific issue that recipients of *LynxBrief* are urged to address, by writing to the responsible government, is the lack of openly available information regarding the location of Iberian Lynx in Castilla – La Mancha.

Finally, *LynxBrief* sends best wishes to all those who attended the III International Iberian Lynx Seminar, as well as everyone else who is interested and/or working in Iberian Lynx conservation, and looks forward to more of your comments and suggestions in the near future.

### 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: [www.soslynx.org](http://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](mailto:andalucia@ecologistasenaccion.org)

### About WWF International's One Planet initiative & Pelicano

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”. WWF is working with Pelicano SA to demonstrate 'one planet living' in action through the Mata de Sesimbra project. Pelicano SA, a Portuguese developer, is a Founding Global Partner of the one planet living initiative, and is directly supporting lynx conservation in Portugal. For more information about WWF and the One Planet initiative please visit: [www.panda.org/oneplanet](http://www.panda.org/oneplanet)