

Welcome to the eleventh 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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Environmental Education

Environmental Education is a very important component of effective nature conservation, and in the longer term it is probably the most important action. Species survival and recovery requires supportive local people, with attitudes and behaviours compatible with long-term conservation. Moreover, specific target groups – including policymakers, farmers, landowners, hunters and foresters – need to be made aware and supportive of the needs and importance of nature conservation.

Iberian Lynx conservation, in particular, requires environmental education. Firstly, because most people in Spain and Portugal rarely see, or know much about, the species, and secondly because a lot of practices – especially in hunting and forestry – continue to be incompatible with lynx conservation. In addition, thirdly, there are many demands and expectations for rapid unsustainable development in Spain and Portugal which are incompatible not just with the Iberian Lynx but also with the conservation of many other species of flora and fauna.

Against these many challenges, the Iberian Lynx has one great asset – it is a very beautiful creature. Whilst it is often hard to get people excited about many important yet unattractive species (e.g. many insects), most people are often amazed by photos and videos of the Iberian Lynx and can be made to quickly care a lot about its welfare and conservation.

For photos and videos of the Iberian Lynx, see:
www.lynxexsitu.es and www.soslynx.org

Many organisations and individuals have been working for some time to educate school children, hunters, landowners, policy makers and others about the Iberian Lynx. In Spain, these include WWF Spain, Ecologistas en Acción, Fundación CBD Habitat and the Andalusian Regional Government, and in Portugal these include SOS Lynx, LPN and Quercus.

In particular, Ecologistas en Acción and the Andalusian Regional Government both have dedicated environmental education officers that work within the lynx LIFE project with school children, hunters, landowners and international volunteers to promote understanding and knowledge of the Iberian Lynx and related issues, especially within the current lynx areas of Doñana and the Sierra Morena. The work with school children is particularly important and effective, both because children will form the next generation of local people and because educating children is often the easiest way of “reaching” their parents, and thus older generations.

Particular initiatives organised by Ecologistas en Acción and the Regional Government include 2-hourly lessons to schools

about the Mediterranean forest and its biodiversity (including the lynx, Imperial Eagle, Black Vulture and European Rabbit), and longer repeated lessons about what can be done to conserve the Iberian Lynx. Other lessons include introducing children to animal sounds and the touch and smell of various native plants.

In Portugal, SOS Lynx is currently working to expand its environmental education work, to focus on the “lynx priority areas”, as designated in the recently published Portuguese Action Plan for the lynx (see page 2 below). SOS Lynx aims to work in partnership with other important organizations including Aguas do Algarve, ICNB and LPN to educate school children, hunters, landowners, students and policymakers about the needs and importance of the Iberian Lynx as well as other associated predators including Bonelli’s Eagle, Imperial Eagle and Wild Cat. *Those interested in learning more about, or wishing to support, the environmental education work of SOS Lynx in southern Portugal should email:* enquires@soslynx.org



©Ex-situ conservation programme

Captive Breeding Update

The Iberian Lynx Captive Breeding programme continues to progress well, with three current breeding centres at Doñana, Zoo Jerez and Jaén, all in Andalucía. A further centre is now under construction at Silves in the Algarve region of Portugal (see below), and further centres are planned in the Spanish regions of Extremadura, Castilla-La Mancha and Andalucía.

The captive breeding programme now numbers 53 individual lynx, of which 24 were born in captivity. 13 young lynx were born in 2008 alone, with Brisa, Saliega, Adelfa, Boj, Aliaga, Esperanza and Aura all successfully giving birth. Brisa was the first captive-born lynx to herself give birth and the cubs of Esperanza, Aura and Boj are particularly important as they resulted from breeding between Doñana and Sierra Morena lynx, thus helping to maintain the species’ genetic diversity. Six of the 13 cubs born in captivity this year have had to be hand-raised, having been rejected by their mothers, who were very young, and/or inexperienced (Aliaga, Brisa and Boj).

The captive breeding programme is proceeding as previously planned, and captive-bred lynx should be available in the coming years both to supply founder individuals for further captive breeding centres (e.g. in Portugal, see below), and for reintroductions into the wild to form new wild populations. The first reintroduction sites, identified and being prepared for reintroductions in 2009/10, are Guarrizas and Guadalmellato in the Sierra Morena in north Andalucía (see *LynxBrief* no. 10).

For more information see: www.lynxexsitu.es

Lynx Conservation in Portugal

The Iberian Lynx is native, and was once widespread across, both Spain and Portugal. Unfortunately, however, breeding Iberian Lynx can only now be confirmed in two areas of Andalucía (Doñana and Andújar-Cardena), and close to the border of Andalucía, in Castilla-La Mancha, also in Spain.

Some individual Iberian Lynx may well still exist elsewhere – including in Portugal – either as remnants of past populations or dispersing from populations in Andalucía. However, the recovery of viable Iberian Lynx populations outside of Andalucía will almost certainly require drastic and sustained interventions, including reintroducing captive-bred animals.

In Portugal, in particular, a number of important achievements have been made recently that increase the possibility of long term Iberian Lynx recovery in the country. This will in turn be important to: help secure the survival of the species; help maintain the lynx as both politically and ecologically “Iberian”, and; help wider nature conservation efforts in the country.

New Captive Breeding Centre in Portugal

A new captive breeding centre, covering 44,000 m² and capable of housing up to 16 lynxes, is currently under construction at Silves in the Algarve region of Portugal. The centre is planned to be finished by December 2008 so that the first young captive-bred lynx could be transferred from Spain as early as January 2009, subject to continued ongoing success in the captive breeding programme in Spain (see above).

The new Portuguese centre is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it will likely be the first operational breeding centre outside of Andalucía, although centres are also planned in the Spanish regions of Extremadura and Castilla-La Mancha. Secondly, the centre will be a high profile symbol of the recovery of the Iberian Lynx and wider nature conservation in Portugal. Thirdly, the centre, and the wider lynx recovery programme in Portugal, represents one of the first times that the EU has forced a member state to recover a species that may be nationally extinct and not just vulnerable or endangered.

The Portuguese breeding centre is being constructed and paid for by the public water company Aguas do Algarve as part of a series of “environmental compensation measures” stipulated by the EU for the controversial Odelouca dam, also being built by Aguas do Algarve in the region. Construction of this dam had been held up for a number of years by environmental campaigning and EU intervention, partly due to the impact that the dam will have upon potential Iberian Lynx habitat. It is thus important that Aguas do Algarve is constructing an Iberian Lynx breeding centre and will also implement rabbit recovery, habitat recovery and environmental education measures.

The Odelouca dam, however, will still consume a lot of valuable habitat, and the recovery of the Iberian Lynx in Portugal will only be possible with a lot of additional work to promote sustainable development, recover habitat and prey and educate the general population as well as key groups including hunters, policy makers and landowners. In particular, work to recover the Iberian Lynx will need to be well-planned, and also co-ordinated with others in Spain, as described below.

Portuguese Action Plan for the Lynx

The fledgling Portuguese Breeding Centre is just one part of the recently approved Portuguese Action Plan for the lynx, which also stipulates the following important measures:

1. **Create a Portuguese Captive Breeding Centre, and a bank of genetic material for the species.**
2. **Conserve areas containing important Iberian Lynx habitat and prey (i.e. rabbit) populations.**
3. **Reduce causes of non-natural mortality (i.e. road kills and illegal/inappropriate hunting methods).**
4. **Education, particularly of foresters, hunters, landowners, policymakers and children.**
5. **Prepare areas for future reintroductions, and create an experimental reintroduction centre.**
6. **Research and monitoring of the species.**

The plan is an important strategic document and is in line with similar plans and strategies already formulated and approved in Spain. The implementation of the Portuguese plan, however, will require significant extra funding beyond that already available, as well as the active participation of NGOs, governmental agencies and inter-governmental organisations, not least because the Portuguese Environmental Ministry is extremely under-funded at present for nature conservation in general. Nevertheless, the plan is an important achievement and provides a useful “road map” for hoped-for future success.



Improved Spanish-Portuguese Cooperation

One other important area of recent progress in Iberian Lynx recovery in Portugal is improved cooperation between Portugal and Spain. This is represented in particular by Portugal joining with Spanish regional governments and the Spanish national government in the “Iberian Lynx Pact” (agreed in November 2007), and also the signing of formal agreements between Spain and Portugal regarding the provision of Iberian Lynx bred in Spain for the Portuguese Breeding Centre (see above). Just as importantly, however, are improved and growing contacts between key individuals and organisations in Spain and Portugal, and the possible formation of joint conservation projects for the lynx, e.g. under the EU’s InterReg funding scheme between neighbouring areas of the two countries.

Improved Spanish-Portuguese cooperation, and a shared vision, for the Iberian Lynx is an important achievement not least because the two countries do not have a long history of cooperation in nature conservation or other policy areas. Moreover, as within Spain itself, poor inter-regional co-operation has held up Iberian Lynx conservation in the past, whereas improved inter-regional co-operation now offers hope for significant advancements in the future. The Third International Lynx Seminar planned for November 2008 (see page 4 below) is a particular initiative that will hopefully serve to cement Spanish-Portuguese and other inter-regional co-operation, and a shared vision, in Iberian Lynx conservation.

Spanish Natura 2000 Proposals

Natura 2000 is a programme created by the European Union (EU), under which member states must identify and protect wildlife areas containing the habitats and species listed in the 1979 Birds Directive and the 1992 Habitats Directive. This includes areas for “priority species”, such as the Iberian Lynx.

The current Spanish Natura 2000 proposal designates a lot of areas as important for the Iberian Lynx as well as other priority species (see map below). These areas will benefit the species as well as other flora and fauna that live there – allowing the Iberian Lynx to function as a true “umbrella species”.

As highlighted in a recent report by WWF Spain, however, the current Natura 2000 proposal, whilst important, is not sufficient for lynx conservation. In particular, a number of key areas are absent from the proposal, affecting both the shorter term conservation of remnant populations as well as the longer term goal of re-creating a viable metapopulation of inter-connected lynx areas across Spain and Portugal.

As shown in the map below, the most important areas that need to be added to the current Natura 2000 proposal are:

1. **Las Viñas de Peñallana** (approx. 1000 ha), which borders the south of Sierra de Andújar Natural Park, and is the site of current lynx breeding and feeding. Although recent successful campaigning prevented this area from being re-classified as urbanised (see *LynxBrief* no. 1 and 9), a lot of illegal construction and habitat loss has occurred in this area in recent years, and pressures continue. Moreover, as it contains part of the largest remaining lynx population, this area should be included and protected within the Natura 2000 system.

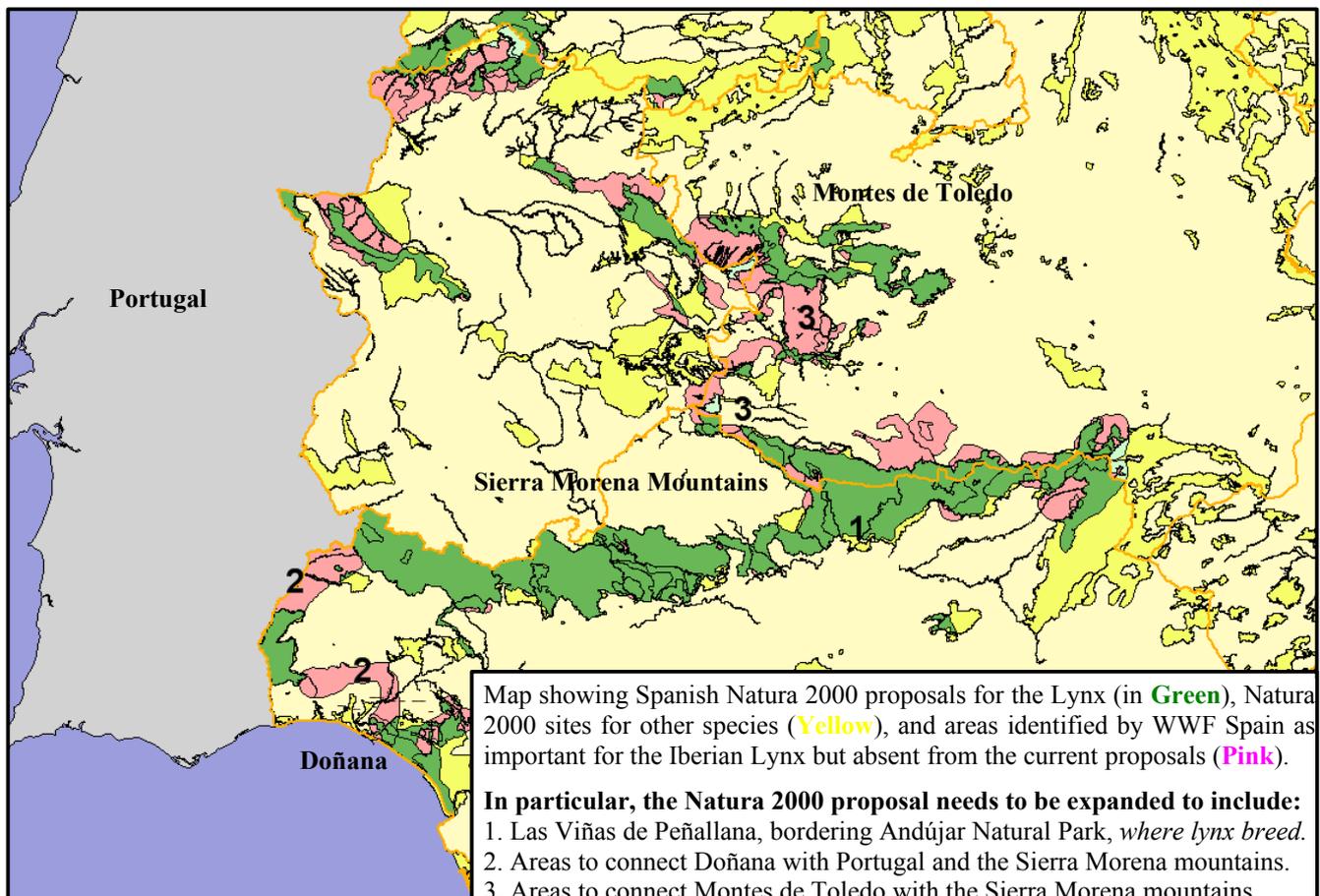
2. Areas to link up Doñana with Portugal and the Sierra Morena Mountains. The Doñana lynx population (now around 25 adults) has long suffered from being small and isolated. Whilst translocations can help to increase the genetic viability of this population in the shorter term (see page 4), the longer term survival of the Doñana lynx population will require connection to other expanded and re-created populations in Portugal and/or along the Sierra Morena mountains. Unfortunately, areas to make this connection are not included in the current Natura 2000 proposal, and, without such protection, existing and expanding pressures for unsustainable development will likely permanently isolate Doñana’s lynxes.

3. Areas to link up Montes de Toledo with the Sierra Morena mountains. Montes de Toledo is an important, large area of habitat where lynx survived until recently and may still survive. Whilst Montes de Toledo is included in the Natura 2000 proposals, areas to connect it with the Sierra Morena mountains are not. This will prevent the natural recolonisation of Montes de Toledo and will also isolate any Iberian Lynx that might still survive or be reintroduced there in the future.

In order to improve Natura 2000 to more adequately meet the long term needs of Iberian Lynx, individuals and organisations are called upon to write letters or emails to both the EU Environment Commissioner and the Spanish Environment minister, using the details below. A model lobby letter is provided on the next page. However, be sure to add your own name and address, and include your own words and thoughts.

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

**Excma. Sra. D^a. Elena Espinosa
Ministra de Medio Ambiente
Paseo Infanta Isabel 1, 28071 Madrid, SPAIN**



The WWF Spain report about Natura 2000 is available at:
http://assets.wwf.es/downloads/informe_lince_y_natura_2000.pdf

Dear (Mr Davos / Excma. D^a Elena Espinosa)

I am writing to you concerning the current Spanish Natura 2000 proposals for the Iberian Lynx – the most endangered feline species in the world, native to just Spain and Portugal.

Although the current Natura 2000 proposals do protect a lot of areas for the Iberian Lynx, they are not sufficient. In particular, areas need to be added including: Las Viñas de Peñallana, bordering Andújar Natural Park, where lynx breed; areas between Doñana, Portugal and the Sierra Morena, and; areas between Montes de Toledo and the Sierra Morena mountains.

These additions are important to allow for both the shorter term survival and the longer term recovery of the species, and I thus hope that your administration will move quickly to ensure that these missing areas are included in the Natura 2000 network.

Yours sincerely

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Successful Lynx Translocation

As reported in *LynxBrief* No. 10, a male lynx (Baya) was translocated from the Sierra Morena into Doñana in December. Although controversial, this translocation has proven to be successful with recent tests confirming that 4 cubs born to Viciosa and Wari in April were fathered by Baya. In addition, Baya is suspected to be the father of a cub born by Rayuela.

This successful translocation is an important achievement as it represents the first wild interbreeding between the Doñana and Sierra Morena populations in over 50 years. This will help increase the genetic diversity of the current Doñana population, and also – along with the captive breeding programme – help maintain the genetic diversity of the species. *LynxBrief* thus congratulates all those involved in this translocation.

Despite this important achievement, however, the Doñana lynx population remains extremely threatened. Only 30 lynx live in Doñana and they are still at risk from fast road traffic and disease, even though a lot of work has been done to address both threats. Moreover, rabbit densities remain low and some local people have attitudes that contradict lynx conservation; e.g. ignoring warning signs and continuing to drive very fast through lynx areas. Finally, a lot of valuable lynx habitat has been lost in recent years, particularly to intensive agriculture, reducing and isolating the viable lynx area. An expanded Natura 2000 network and more environmental education work are thus important requirements (see pages 1 and 3 above).

III International Lynx Seminar

Nature conservation seminars and conferences are important to improve working relations between key individuals and organisations, overcome any areas of conflict and help create a shared “vision”. This is particular true in Iberian Lynx conservation and so far two international lynx conferences have been organised – one in Andújar in 2001 and the second in Cordoba in 2004, both in Andalucía. A third international lynx conference is now being organised in Andalucía, as part of the Lynx LIFE project, and is planned for November 2008. A particular task of the conference will be to agree a shared vision for the future reintroduction of the species.

Those interested in learning more about the conference should contact: miguelangel.simon@juntadeandalucia.es

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* calls upon individuals and organisations to write to both the Spanish Environment Minister and the EU Environment Commissioner, asking them to work to revise the current Spanish Natura 2000 proposal to include: areas between Doñana and Portugal and the Sierra Morena; areas between Montes de Toledo and the Sierra Morena, and; the important area of “Las Viñas de Penallana” adjacent to Andújar Natural Park.

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: 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 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