

Welcome to the thirteenth 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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Update on the Captive Breeding Programme

A total of 16 lynxes have been successfully raised in captivity in 2009, with 9 raised in the El Acebuche centre in Doñana, and 7 raised at the La Olivilla centre in north-east Andalucía.

These new births, combined with captive breeding in previous years, and the incorporation of wild-born founder individuals, brings the current captive population to 76 Iberian Lynx. This number exceeds that set out in the 2004 captive breeding strategy and also stretches the capacity of the current breeding centres in Andalucía (El Acebuche, Zoo Jerez and La Olivilla)

Fortunately, however, this breeding success is well timed to enable both the planned reintroduction of lynxes into prepared areas of northern Andalucía (Guadalmellato) in 2010, as well as the provision of lynxes to a recently-opened captive breeding centre in Portugal; the first to be opened outside of Andalucía.

New Breeding Centre Opened In Portugal

The Silves centre in the Algarve region of southern Portugal was officially inaugurated in June 2009 by the Portuguese Environment Minister. The centre has a capacity for at least 16 lynxes to be held in state-of-the-art enclosures, designed in line with current practice in Andalucía, which include 24-hour video surveillance, on-site veterinary care and enclosures specifically designed to maintain wild behaviour whilst permitting management and intervention by staff, as necessary.

Lynxes kept and raised at Silves will be part of the unified management of the captive breeding programme, which foresees regular transfer of individuals between centres and (ultimately) reintroduction sites. As such, lynx raised in Portugal may be reintroduced into Portugal or Spain, depending upon the suitability of reintroduction sites (see below).

An agreement signed between the Spanish and Portuguese governments in June officially paves the way for the first lynx to be supplied to the new centre from Andalucía in autumn 2009. Such a move will be highly symbolic of the recovery of Iberian Lynx in Portugal, following years of decline and the near-extinction of the species in the country; the last official confirmation of lynx being in 2001, although some lynx may still survive as remnants of past populations or crossing over from current populations in Andalucía. The new centre will also increase the capacity of the breeding programme and will spread expertise in captive breeding outside Andalucía. Finally, the bilateral agreement also commits Portugal to prepare at least one area suitable for lynx reintroductions within 3 years.



©Ex-situ conservation programme

As with other species, however, it should be noted that captive breeding – and ultimately reintroductions – in Portugal will only be a small part of the recovery of the Iberian Lynx in the country, and a lot more work is also needed to recover habitat and prey, and to reduce predator persecution, as is also the case in Spain. In particular, it will be important to address causes of non-natural mortality for lynx, and other endangered predators, including the widespread and illegal use of poison (see below).

Proposals for Iberian Lynx Reintroductions

As reported in previous editions of *LynxBrief* (see no. 11 and 12), the area of Guadameillato, close to Cordoba in northern Andalucía has been chosen as the first site for lynx reintroductions to take place, planned for 2010. If all goes well, in subsequent years, lynx will also be reintroduced into the area of Guarizas in north-eastern Andalucía, with the long term aim of creating a stable population of around 40 lynx in both areas.

Guadameillato is well-suited for Iberian Lynx reintroductions with optimal habitat and high rabbit densities, as was found in surveys of candidate sites in previous years by the current LIFE programme. Moreover, both Guadameillato and Guarizas have been shown in more recent surveys to contain a human population that is supportive of future lynx reintroductions.

Surveys reported in June 2009 showed that 68-69% of people in both Guadameillato and Guarizas consider that lynx reintroductions would be positive in terms of encouraging more tourism in the area; tourism being one of the main components of the Spanish economy. Moreover, 91% of people surveyed in Guadameillato and 85% of those surveyed in Guarizas stated that they were broadly supportive of lynx being reintroduced.

Given these positive conclusions, and the fact that the current captive breeding population exceeds initial targets, **it is thus hoped that proposed lynx reintroductions of between 20-40 individuals per year can begin in 2010**. Such reintroductions would be important to help safeguard the species and to help connect up currently isolated wild remnant populations.

Successful reintroductions, however, are often hard to achieve – especially with felines – and high initial mortality and dispersal from the target area are to be expected, given that captive bred animals will not be familiar with the area, and will likely be less well-adapted to the wild than wild-born individuals. This was the case with Canadian Lynx reintroduced into parts of North America (ref. – presentation by Tanya Shenk at the Iberian Lynx conference held in Huelva in December 2008) and initial experience with Iberian Lynx translocated from Sierra Morena into Doñana, where one lynx (Caribú) travelled over 200km from the reintroduction site.

Widespread dispersal from a target site is problematic because surrounding areas will likely be less well-protected from predator persecution (i.e. poison, traps, snares and shootings), and will likely be less optimal in terms of prey, habitat and a supportive human population. Thus, although the creation of new Iberian Lynx populations, through reintroductions, is a welcome and important initiative, it may prove hard to achieve. It is therefore important to carefully plan reintroductions, in co-ordination with all relevant groups, as has not yet been done.

For more info on captive breeding and reintroductions, see:
[Website of Captive Breeding Programme \(in Spanish\)](#)
[Website of Lynx LIFE Programme \(in Spanish & English\)](#)

The Illegal Use of Poison in Spain

Illegal poison use is widespread and continues to have a devastating impact upon wildlife in Spain, as highlighted by two recent reports (Ecologistas en Acción 2009 and WWF/Adena 2008), and a dedicated conference organised by Ecologistas en Acción in Cordoba, Spain on 20 May 2009.

Illegal poison use affects many predators (including the Iberian Lynx) as well as all four vulture species in Spain. Overall, endangered and protected species make up 50% of reported poisonings. Moreover, although poison use has been illegal in Spain since 1984, it has actually increased in recent years. In addition, the actual level of poisonings is probably much higher than that which is reported, and some reports have claimed that reported poisonings are only 5% of poisonings that occur.

Poison use is associated both with the protection of livestock (especially from bears and wolves in northern Spain) as well as the protection of game, especially in the large private hunting estates spread across much of central and southern Spain. However, poison use is also motivated by a lot of myths and misunderstandings, particularly regarding vultures and the supposed role of predators in recent declines of small game.

Vultures are particularly vulnerable to poison because they eat only dead meat, forage over large areas and reproduce slowly. Even if they nest in protected areas, vultures may be killed by poisoned baits left tens or hundreds of kilometres away in unprotected areas, and, if affected by poison, a vulture colony will only recover very slowly because most vulture species only lay one egg per pair, every 1 or 2 years, at most.

Vultures are targeted by poison due to the mistaken belief that they pose a risk to livestock or game, or due to superstitions regarding their presence. Moreover, vultures are often killed unintentionally by poison left for predators. Poison has been the main cause of the extinction of Bearded Vultures and Black Vultures in many Spanish regions, and has been the main cause of decline in Griffon and Egyptian vultures. In addition, poison continues to kill many vultures each year (e.g. in the year 2000, at least 178 Griffon Vultures), and at least 2 of the 10 Bearded Vultures reintroduced into Andalucía have been poisoned.

Many predator species have also been affected by poison use, including Iberian Wolf, Red Kites, Iberian Imperial Eagle and Iberian Lynx. For example, an Iberian Lynx was killed by poison in the “Las Viñas” area directly bordering Andújar Natural Park in November 2008, and three Imperial Eagles were poisoned in Doñana in July 2009. Moreover, beyond direct impacts, poison use is also relevant to the recovery of the Iberian Lynx because Andalucía is one of the regions of Spain where poison use has been most prevalent. This demonstrates that there are still many people in the region who have a disregard for the law and nature conservation. This in turn is particularly relevant to planned lynx reintroductions, and the current and future dispersal of lynx outside protected areas.

Despite a decline in poison use in the 1980s – due to the complete prohibition of poison for killing predators or vultures – poison use increased in the 1990s due to an increase in the availability of toxic compounds, and a growing frustration with rabbit and partridge decline in the hunting community (e.g. the number of animals reported poisoned per year increased from <100 in 1990 to 1000 in 2003). Toxins deadly to predators and vultures – particularly mixtures of agricultural insecticides (e.g. Carbofuran and Aldicarb) – have become widely available and are legally obtainable for supposed agricultural use. Similarly, hunters and gamekeepers – particularly in southern Spain – have wrongly blamed predators for small game decline (which is actually caused by habitat loss, over hunting and rabbit diseases), and have thus increased poison use, along with the use of snares and traps, to kill many predators, including protected species such as Wild Cat, Iberian Lynx and eagles.

In recent years, a lot of work has been undertaken to combat poison use, by both administrations and NGOs, particularly in Andalucía. This has included the use of specially trained dogs to detect poisoned baits, education campaigns and an increase in legal sanctions against those convicted of using poison. However, although some progress has been made, a lot more still needs to be done. **In particular, the conference held in Cordoba on 20 May concluded by recommending that:**

- Spanish regions that have not yet done so immediately approve regional plans/strategies against the illegal use of poison, and provide sufficient means and co-ordination for their implementation.
- The Spanish Environment Ministry: implement and finance the national strategy against poison use; co-ordinate the work of the Spanish regions, and; create an up-to-date and accessible register of poison cases.
- Judges, lawyers and police be increasingly involved (in co-ordination with regional governments), some regional legislation be improved, and the legal code be reformed to toughen penalties in article 336.
- Surveillance campaigns be permanently maintained, and intensified in areas of high risk of poison use, and specialised teams be created at the provincial level, to research and combat illegal poison use.
- The management of predation be improved by: developing common criteria for administrations; reducing the focus on the control (i.e. killing) of predators; ensuring compliance with existing laws concerning the granting of “exceptional” permits to kill predators; improving the management of habitat; increasing awareness campaigns, and; making those officially responsible for managing or killing predators independent of the hunting community.
- Existing administrative and legal sanctions, and the suspension of subsidies and permission for activities, be publicised and used to punish illegal poison use.
- More awareness campaigns be conducted: aiming at hunters, farmers, vets, local/regional governments, chemical companies and local environment users; highlighting the risk of poison use, solutions to the causes of poison use, and the uselessness of indiscriminate predator control, and; identifying individuals and organisations to co-operate with.

For more information about the illegal use of poison in Spain and its devastating impact on wildlife, please see:

[Report by WWF/Adena](#) [Report by Ecologistas en Acción](#)
[Conclusions of Conference on 20 May 2009](#)



Numbers of Lynx Living in the Wild

The number of Iberian Lynx living in the wild in Andalucía increased in 2009 to over 200 individuals, according to data released by the Regional Government in April 2009. This is a significant increase, and is the result of good work in field conservation, particularly in the Sierra Morena area.

The Sierra Morena lynx population was found to contain 163 individuals in a survey conducted in December 2008, of which 62 were new cubs born that year. This represents an increase on 2007, when the population contained 150 individuals, including 55 cubs, and an ongoing yearly increase from 2002, when the population contained just 60 individuals, including 22 cubs.

The Doñana population, however, contains just 46 individuals (including adults and cubs) and is much more dispersed than the Sierra Morena population, and much more threatened. Ongoing threats include road traffic and illegal hunting activities. For example, a pregnant female lynx found dead in March 2009, south of Villamanrique on the edge of the national park, had been killed by a vehicle after previously being injured by shotgun fire. Moreover, the small size and isolation of the Doñana lynx population means that even without further mortality it is already too small and inbred to be viable in the long-term. Thus, further translocations of lynx from Sierra Morena and/or the reintroduction of captive bred individuals will be required, as well as action to counter existing threats.

Overall, the increase in the number of Iberian Lynx living in the wild is very good news for the species, especially taken in conjunction with the growing captive breeding population and plans for future reintroductions. Many people and individuals deserve credit for these achievements, and it is hoped that good work can continue in: rabbit and habitat recovery; the removal of threats from hunting and road traffic; surveillance and control of diseases; environmental education, and; the captive breeding, translocation and reintroduction of Iberian Lynx. However, a lot more work is needed, particularly to counter some incompatible public attitudes, behaviours and official policies, e.g. in hunting, transport, intensive agriculture and urbanisation. In addition, the Iberian Lynx remains Critically Endangered with Extinction and still retains the dubious honour of being the most endangered feline species in the world.

Iberian Lynx News Blog

SOS Lynx, in partnership with Ecologistas en Acción – Andalucía, has recently launched a news blog in English to help increase the flow of information about the Iberian Lynx and associated prey, predators and habitat. **To view, comment on or subscribe to the news blog, please visit: <http://lynxnews.blogspot.com/>**

news@soslynx.org

Conclusions

The successful conservation and recovery of the Iberian Lynx, and other predators and wildlife in Spain and Portugal, requires effective co-ordination between many different individuals, organisations and administrations to address a number of inter-related political, ecological, scientific and sociological problems.

In this edition of *LynxBrief*, particular attention has been given to the problem of illegal poison use in Spain, which threatens the Iberian Lynx as well as many other predators and vultures. Those concerned with the Iberian Lynx, and wider nature conservation, in Spain are thus urged to educate themselves, and others, more about this important issue, and to petition the regional and national administrations to do more to address the problem.

Particular recommendations for addressing the problem, made by a conference of experts in May 2009, include: improving awareness and surveillance campaigns; developing and implementing regional and national strategies; improving the management of predation, and; increasing the involvement of police, lawyers and judges.

Finally, *LynxBrief* would like to send best wishes to all those interested and/or working in Iberian Lynx conservation and wishes you well with your work, particularly regarding the new captive breeding centre in Portugal and the proposed reintroductions in Andalucía.

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/opl