

Welcome to the fourteenth 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

Contents

First Iberian Lynx Reintroductions.....	1
Portuguese Breeding Centre Update.....	1
Situation for wild lynx in Andalucía.....	2
Challenging Predator Control.....	2
Volunteering for the Iberian Lynx.....	3

First Iberian Lynx Reintroductions

The first ever reintroductions of Iberian Lynx into new areas have taken place in December 2009 in Andalucía. This is a major achievement and *LynxBrief* congratulates all those involved in both the *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation programmes for their important current and previous work.

In all, six radio-collared lynx (three males and three females) have been reintroduced into the Guadalmellato area of northern Andalucía, in pairs, into purpose built “soft release” enclosures, where they will be monitored by CCTV. Once comfortable within these 4 hectare enclosures the lynx will then be released into the surrounding area. These lynx were all born in the wild in Sierra Morena and are: juveniles Elron and Eclipse, and adult pairs Diana and Cascabel, and Charqueña and Caberú.

Recent plans to also reintroduce some lynx this year into the Guarrizas area of north eastern Andalucía have been postponed until 2010 so that the area can be adequately prepared. However, it is planned that more lynx will be reintroduced into both Guadalmellato and Guarrizas in 2010, and in subsequent years, with the ultimate aim of creating stable populations of 40+ individuals in both areas, via releases and wild breeding.

Reintroductions, especially involving felines, are difficult to achieve and it is to be expected that some of the reintroduced lynx may disperse out of the target area and/or die prematurely because they are less well adapted to the area than local wild-born individuals would be. However, a lot of work has gone into preparing both Guadalmellato and Guarrizas for lynx reintroductions – including habitat recovery, surveys and education of the local people – and it is thus hoped that the now ongoing Iberian Lynx reintroductions will be successful.

The Iberian Lynx reintroductions in Andalucía are being managed under the current Lynx LIFE project (which includes the Regional Government, WWF/Adena, Ecologistas en Acción, Fundación CBD Habitat, hunting associations and others) in partnership with the *ex situ* conservation programme.

Iberian Lynx reintroductions will form an important part of the recovery of the species, assisting the recolonisation and reconnection of currently isolated and/or unpopulated areas. However, a lot more other work will also be needed to preserve and recover sufficient large areas of habitat and to remove existing threats, including from predator persecution (see below) and fast road traffic. In particular, a current proposal for a new motorway through the Sierra Morena, including Guadalmellato itself, will need to be withdrawn, otherwise the newly reintroduced lynx will be threatened and their habitat fragmented. **For details see:** [WWF/Adena press release](#).



©Ex-situ conservation programme

Portuguese Breeding Centre Update

Two more lynx, Calabacín and Eón, were transferred to the new Lynx Breeding Centre at Silves, Portugal, on December 2, thus completing the planned transfer of 16 lynx from Andalucía. These lynx contain both wild born and captive bred individuals, and are formed of 11 males and 5 females.

This development is important for two reasons. Firstly, a new breeding centre (the first outside Andalucía), is now fully functional, in addition to those that already exist in Doñana, Zoo Jerez and La Olivilla, thus helping to spread expertise, minimise risks and build capacity in the breeding programme. Secondly, this centre represents the first confirmed presence of lynx in Portugal (albeit in captivity) for several of years.

Wild lynx may still survive in Portugal, either as remnants of past populations or crossing over from known populations in Spain. Similarly, and contrary to some recent media reports, the IUCN considers the Iberian Lynx to only be “Critically Endangered (possibly extinct in the wild)” in Portugal – and not officially extinct – given the lack of sufficient evidence to be sure that no individuals are present, along with continued unofficial reports of lynx sightings. Nonetheless, the presence of captive lynx in Portugal is an important political and scientific achievement that should help to raise the profile of this species, and contribute towards its future recovery.

As reported in *LynxBrief* No. 13, the lynx at Silves will form part of the unified management of the Iberian Lynx breeding programme and as such their descendants may be reintroduced into areas of Spain or Portugal, depending upon progress made in *in situ* conservation measures, including rabbit recovery, habitat restoration and preventing predator persecution. Moreover, under an agreement with Spain, Portugal is not only responsible for creating and managing the new breeding centre at Silves, but also must create at least one area in the country, adequate for lynx reintroductions, within three years. However, the new state-of-the-art, and now fully stocked, Silves breeding centre is in itself an important achievement and *LynxBrief* thus congratulates all those individuals and organisations involved in its creation and management, and looks forward to the first captive breeding success in the coming months and years.

For more information on plans for Iberian Lynx recovery in Portugal, and captive breeding in general, please see:

[ICBN Iberian Lynx website \(in Portuguese only\)](#)

[Ex-situ conservation website \(in Spanish only\)](#)



©Ex-situ conservation programme

Situation for wild lynx in Andalucía

Provisional figures have recently been announced by the Regional Government of Andalucía, which suggest that the number of lynx living in the wild has increased further in 2009 to 220 individuals, including both adults and cubs born this year. This compares with 209 individuals, reported by the Regional Government, for 2008 (see *LynxBrief* No. 13), and around 154 individuals in 2004 (reference: [Gato Clavo No. 5](#)).

Of the two known wild breeding populations, the Sierra Morena lynx population remains much the larger, with 160 individuals estimated this year, which is almost identical to the 163 individuals (101 adults, 62 cubs) estimated for 2008. This is good news as it shows that the population here is stable, and that the continued capturing of individuals from the Sierra Morena for both the captive breeding programme and the reintroduction of lynx in Guademellato (see above) is justified.

In Doñana, the current lynx population is estimated to be around 60 individuals (21 cubs and 39 adults), which compares with around 52 individuals (11 cubs and 41 adults) in 2004 (reference: [Gato Clavo No. 5](#)). It thus seems that the number of cubs is higher than in previous years, but that the number of adults has changed little over recent years. There has, however, been some confusion over the precise number of lynx in Doñana in recent years, with different organisations at different times publishing conflicting data. For example, the Regional Government stated in a recent announcement that there were just 42 lynx in Doñana in 2004, despite having themselves previously published data showing that there were 52 lynx that year. It is thus hard to be confident about precise trends.

Despite this confusion, nonetheless, it does seem that in both Doñana and the Sierra Morena the lynx populations have stabilised and may have increased in recent years. Moreover, this is in no doubt due to work that has been carried out by a number of organisations in habitat conservation, environmental education, hunting surveillance and rabbit recovery. However, much more work is still needed and many threats remain.

Firstly, as referred to on page 1, the Sierra Morena area is threatened by a number of proposals for new development, including for a new motorway, which would fragment and destroy lynx habitat. Secondly, the Doñana National and Natural Parks continue to be protected as virtual “islands”, with road improvements, intensive agriculture and urbanisation increasing in the immediate surrounding area. Moreover, as most lynx in Doñana now live outside of the protected area, they are vulnerable to threats, especially from fast traffic, **which has killed at least three lynx in 2009, the latest being run over on December 4 near Villamanrique**. Thirdly, as described opposite, lynx and many other species in the Iberian Peninsula continue to be threatened by persecution by hunters.

Challenging “Predator Control”

The killing of predators and vultures by poison, traps, snares and shootings has been one of the main causes of declines in many species, including the Iberian Lynx. For example, Iberian Lynx disappeared in the 1990s from the Montes Toledo region of central Spain – where good habitat and rabbit populations still exist – due largely to widespread, and often illegal, use of traps and snares by hunters and gamekeepers. Similarly, as reported in *LynxBrief* No. 13, poison use in particular has contributed to the decline of many predators and vultures and continues to undermine both conservation and recovery efforts.

The widespread use of poison, traps, snares and shotguns to kill predators in Spain and Portugal is often misleadingly referred to as “Predator Control” even though it is usually unjustified and/or excessive. Firstly, in many areas where predators are deliberately killed there is little or no data available to show that predator numbers are excessive or that natural predation is having a prejudicial impact upon game populations. Secondly, where data is available it often in fact shows the opposite – i.e. that predators have largely declined in recent decades and that they do not have a prejudicial impact upon prey populations. Thirdly, even where some predation problems may actually exist, the response of the hunting community has been excessive, seemingly aiming to, and succeeding in, eradicating entire species from whole regions rather than just “controlling” predator numbers at lower and more sustainable levels.

Such excessive and unjustified actions should thus rather be referred to as “predator persecution” instead of the more commonly used “predator control”. This applies particularly to rabbit predators such as the Iberian Lynx and Iberian Imperial Eagle, both of which have been killed and continue to be killed (see *LynxBrief* No. 13) by the hunting community, even though they have in no way caused rabbit decline and may actually aid rabbit recovery by naturally controlling more common rabbit predators such as foxes and mongoose. Moreover, even though rabbit decline has not been caused by predators at all but rather by introduced diseases, habitat change and excessive human hunting, the killing of predators by hunters has been a common and widespread response to rabbit declines in recent decades.

A lot of work has been carried out in recent years to combat predator persecution, including in current Iberian Lynx areas, and particularly to address the widespread use of poison (e.g. in Andalucía: see *LynxBrief* No. 13). However, a lot more work is needed as lynx continue to be killed and injured by illegal hunting activities in both Doñana and Andújar. Moreover, in areas into which lynx populations may naturally expand, such as Castilla – La Mancha (where lynx may even already be present – see *LynxBrief* No. 12), both legal and illegal predator persecution continues to be common. For example, the government of Castilla-La Mancha regularly grants permission for the use of box traps to kill foxes, even though foxes may constitute as little as 3% of the catch from such traps whilst as many as 50% of the animals caught may be protected species such as the Wildcat (and potentially: Iberian Lynx). Moreover, the hot climate and generally lax hunting controls in this region mean that, once caught, such predators probably perish in box traps without being released in time as they should, legally, be.

A lot more work is thus needed to combat predator persecution. Tighter legal restrictions are required on some currently permitted practises – such as the use of box traps in Castilla – La Mancha – and practises that are already illegal (such as the use of poison and snares) need to be more actively controlled. Finally, both the hunting and conservation communities need to recognise the extent of the problem of *predator persecution* in Spain and Portugal, and need to avoid misleadingly referring to – and thus tacitly justifying – such actions as *predator control*.

Volunteering for the Iberian Lynx

A lot of different people have undertaken a lot of different, and often difficult, work in recent years and decades to try to safeguard the Iberian Lynx and bring it back from the edge of extinction. These have included paid employees of several organisations and administrations, including WWF, Fundación CBD Habitat, SOS Lynx, Regional and National Governments and the EU. However, also, and maybe just as important has been the work of another group of people: the volunteers.

Several organisations, including WWF, SOS Lynx and Ecologistas en Acción have relied heavily upon the work of dedicated volunteers, especially in environmental campaigning, education and awareness raising. Similarly, volunteer weeks have been organised both by Ecologistas en Acción and the Andalusian Regional Government, in which international and local volunteers have undertaken projects in current lynx areas in Andalucía to benefit the Iberian Lynx and its habitat.

One such volunteer week was organised by Ecologistas en Acción from 21 to 30 August 2009, in the Viñas de Peña area, immediately south of the Sierra de Andújar Natural Park in northern Andalucía. In all, 14 volunteers, from various parts of Spain, as well as Portugal, France and Colombia, participated in the week, supervised by Ecologistas en Acción personnel.

Activities undertaken by the volunteers included: building ten refuges for wild rabbits in a nearby lynx area; being educated about the Iberian Lynx, the Wild Rabbit and the Mediterranean scrubland, and; designing and conducting a survey of the attitudes and knowledge of local residents towards the lynx and the Lynx LIFE programme, supported by experts from IREC, the Andalusian Government and Fundación CBD Habitat.

The students' survey involved visiting 257 local properties and interviewing a total of 151 people – 90 men and 61 women. Moreover, as a follow-up of a previous survey conducted in 2004, this survey was particularly important for showing trends in attitudes in the last 5 years, including the impact of recent environmental education work aimed at local people.

Firstly, and unfortunately, the survey showed that a majority of local people in Viñas de Peña (53% of women and 66% of men) are still ignorant of the lynx LIFE programme, despite the large amount of work carried out in the Sierra de Andújar area, including awareness raising. Secondly, and also unfortunately, the survey showed that a majority of local people also remain unaware of the conservation actions required to conserve the lynx. Thirdly, however, and more positively, the survey showed that a majority (90%) of local people view the Iberian Lynx as important for their area, and that fourthly, more people in the area are now aware of the threats to the Iberian Lynx than was the case in 2004 (e.g. rabbit decline, illegal hunting activities, habitat loss and being killed by fast road traffic). Thus, although a lot more environmental education work is still required, it has already had some impact on local attitudes.

Those interested in participating in such important volunteer work in the future should email: life_lince_2@yahoo.es

Report on Predator Persecution

SOS Lynx is currently drafting a new report focusing on the challenge of preventing predator persecution in Spain and Portugal. The report is due to be published in early 2010. If you have any information, comments or concerns about the problems of predator persecution in the Iberian Peninsula, please email: news@soslynx.org

Conclusions

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

In this edition of *LynxBrief*, particular attention has been paid to the problem of predator persecution in Spain and Portugal, and how this threatens both the recovery of the Iberian Lynx and the conservation of many other species. Moreover, although *LynxBrief* strongly welcomes significant recent achievements in both captive breeding and the first ever Iberian Lynx reintroductions, more work needs to be undertaken to ensure that lynx recovery efforts are not undermined by hunting activities, such as occurred with the high profile recent reintroduction of Bearded Vultures into Andalucía, which failed due to individuals being shot and poisoned by local people. In particular all those interested in the conservation of the Iberian Lynx and other predators should avoid, and discourage others from, referring to – and thus tacitly justifying – the widespread, illegal and unjustified use of poison, traps and snares as *predator control*, when it is in fact more accurately described as *predator persecution*.

Finally, *LynxBrief* would like to send best wishes to all those interested and/or working in Iberian Lynx conservation and wishes you all the best for 2010!!

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 and the [lynx news blog](http://lynxnewsblog.com).

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