

# BALKAN LYNX RECOVERY PROGRAMME

*Newsletter*

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**ON THE RIGHT TRACK - WE ARE READY FOR 2024!**



# THE ROLE OF HUNTERS IN PROTECTING THE BALKAN LYNX AND ITS PREY

Written by  
*Melitjan Nezaj, Bledi Hoxha, Klaudja Koçi, Ilir Shyti*

As we all know, the conservation of the Balkan lynx, this majestic feline and its prey species, is of utmost importance for maintaining the ecological balance in the Balkan region. While conservation efforts are often associated with wildlife protection organisations and governmental bodies, hunters also play a crucial role in preserving the species.

Sustainable hunting practices are integral to the conservation of not only game species but also non-target wildlife, including the Balkan lynx. Hunters are key stakeholders in promoting sustainable hunting practices, as they have interest in ensuring that their activities do not negatively impact the long-term viability of wildlife populations. Additionally, their observations of wildlife populations contribute to decision-making regarding hunting quotas and seasons, further supporting sustainable hunting practices.

Hunters' societies from the lynx territories serve as important advocates for improving hunting laws and regulations to better align with conservation goals.

Recognising the importance of collaborative efforts in wildlife conservation, hunters actively seek partnerships with NGOs dedicated to protecting biodiversity. PPNEA has already established a long-term collaboration with the Albanian Hunters Federation.

A workshop, organised in Tirana on September 18, 2023, aimed to establish a collaborative relationship between PPNEA and the hunters' associations. More than 60 representatives from hunters' associations in Shkodra, Kukës, Lezha, Elbasan and Korça regions with high importance of lynx presence in Albania participated in the workshop. The main objective was to promote mutual support and understanding. This partnership would ensure the protection of the lynx population, the preservation of habitats, and the sustainable use of natural resources. We share several interests in the lynx territories. This includes the promotion of responsible hunting practices, eco-tourism and educating local communities about the value of the lynx and its habitats.

Both the hunters' associations and PPNEA can work together to monitor the lynx population and conduct more in-depth genetic studies. The hunters seek enforcing hunting regulations, establishing protected areas, and prosecuting those who engage in illegal hunting activities.







## BALKAN LYNX AT THE HEART OF #ALBANIAISBIODIVERSITY PUBLIC CAMPAIGN IN TIRANA

*Written by Klaudja Koçi & Lorena Pyze Xhafaj*

Every day, from 3-21 October, for three weeks in a row, PPNEA attracted the attention of Albanian citizens and foreigners visiting Tirana, with a massive mural installation at the main square. The mosaic “Albania is Biodiversity” carefully conceptualised by the internationally renowned artist Kadir Özman and designed by Kledi Eski, featured 38 of the most endangered and charismatic species in Albania, and at its center the emblematic Balkan lynx. Surrounded by “information towers” dedicated to birds and mammals, the mosaic served to attract visitors to the education and information corner, and a small shopping area.

PPNEA Education Expert, Klaudja Koçi designed especially for this public campaign an education tour, with numerous interactive activities themed around the Balkan lynx, Egyptian vulture, and other endangered species. The 1-hour education tour was an experiential event that took primary school children on a journey of learning about Balkan lynx characteristics, ecology, and threats, illustrated through real size 2D printed lynx and its prey, a lynx 3D statute, reproducing the lynx track with plasticine, storytelling with “Shpresa, Hope for Balkan lynx”, and videos from camera traps.

More than 900 primary school and high school students participated, from 17 schools of Tirana. A combination of education and play, the educational corner kept young visitors busy and entertained.

The education corner also brought together around 100 student participants in 4 dedicated events with University students focused on Balkan lynx and bio corridors management. Through engaging discussions by the PPNEA BLRP team and engaging exhibitions, it introduced fresh insights regarding this critically endangered species, based on recent studies to understand its status, programme accomplishments, and protection challenges.

#AlbaniaisBiodiversity campaign was a joint initiative between Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania and Heinrich Böll Stiftung Tirana supported by the Embassy of Switzerland in Albania, European Union in Albania, Embassy of Germany in Albania, Embassy of France in Albania, AICS Tirana, and Vodafone Albania, for the education on and conservation of some of the most peculiar and endangered species of Albania, as well as the natural assets of the country.

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# LIFE LYNX / EUROLYNX MEETING IN ZADAR, CROATIA

*Written by Aleksandar Pavlov*

Meeting so many fellow lynxers in one place always brings joy and satisfaction. And the vibrant, picturesque Zadar, where the venue took place, was but an added value to the four-day experience!

The first two days (26 and 27 September) were reserved for the LIFE Lynx International Conference. Titled “Together for Lynx”, the event brought together all people somehow involved in the project activities. We were presented with the results and achievements from the conservation and reinforcement efforts aimed at the Dinaric SE Alpine lynx population. Topics varied from historical overview of the lynx status, ecological aspects, tackling habitat suitability and connectivity, conservation, management, and communication, to genetic erosion and reinforcement of the population. Besides the “indoor” part, participants had the opportunity to see the enchanting Paklenica National Park, the release site of a Carpathian lynx.

The other two days (28 and 29 September), the venue almost seamlessly transitioned into the 5th Eurolynx Meeting. Some same and some different faces, but the identical buzz around research and novelties on the lynx. Here, once again, we saw the perks of being a member of such a fine community promoting collaborative science, with 51 members from 21 countries.



Since most European lynx researchers are already part of this network, we had rare occasion to find out, first-hand, about the latest research in lynx movement ecology in Europe and explore scientific-collaboration opportunities.

Overall, the BLRP team was thrilled to be part of these two events, as they offered a forum for sharing knowledge and know-how – something we will definitely need as we are opening a new chapter of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme, focusing on the genetic aspects of this elusive cat.





# THE BALKAN CHAMOIS (*RUPICAPRA RUPICAPRA BALCANICA*) PHOTOGRAPHED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MALI I THATË, INSIDE OF PRESPA LAKE NATIONAL PARK

*Written by*

*Bledi Hoxha, Adnand Bego, Emir Gjyzeli, Klaudja Koçi, Melitjan Nezaj, Ilir Shyti, Aleksandër Trajçe*

Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA) and the administration of Prespa Lake National Park, conducted a joint monitoring of the Balkan chamois in Mali i Thatë, on November 1, 2023. During the expedition, the observation and photography of the Balkan chamois was realised for the first time in the northeastern part of Mali i Thatë at an altitude of 2'044 m above sea level.

The observers managed to identify a small herd of Balkan chamois consisting of 4 mature individuals (1 male and 3 females). These data show that a chamois occurrence lives in the habitats of Mali i Thatë, which finds suitable habitat conditions for shelter and reproduction. Considering the ecology of the species, observation and photography of the chamois took place early in the morning as the period of the highest activity. Also, the autumn season is the most suitable period for Balkan chamois monitoring as it coincides with the breeding season which allows collecting more data about the structure within a chamois population. All chamois are very active during this period.

The mountain massif of Mali i Thatë in Albania and Galičica in North Macedonia contains important habitats such as Alpine pastures and rugged rocky terrains necessary for the species to graze and shelter during different seasons of the year.

The Balkan chamois is protected by Albanian legislation, and classified as Vulnerable in the Red List of Flora and Fauna in Albania. The presence and further protection of chamois and its habitat in the Prespa National Park will positively affect the recovery of the Balkan lynx population as it is one of the main prey species of this carnivore.

The successful completion of the chamois survey in Mali i Thatë was achieved step by step by going through all the monitoring processes, starting from the drafting of a unified protocol for the monitoring of chamois at the cross-border level and theoretical and practical training carried out by the Balkan Chamois Society in Greece. Also, the transects and viewpoints were defined in the specific chamois habitat. The increased capacity of the research group at PPNEA, Korça's Regional Agency of Protected Area and Galičica National Park staff from the PONT will aid the organisation of joint cross-border monitoring to collect data which will influence the taking of further measures in protection and management of this population. Also, further monitoring of chamois in the areas where the Balkan lynx is present, such as Polis-Valamara and the Munella region, is planned to be conducted during the year 2024.



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# STAKEHOLDERS MEET LARGE CARNIVORE EXPERTS FROM THE LARGE CARNIVORE INITIATIVE FOR EUROPE (LCIE)

*Written by Dime Melovski*

The Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE) is an expert-based network of large carnivore scientists and researchers from all Europe. Since 1995, when LCIE was funded, it has been gradually increasing and it's currently spread over 32 European countries involving 55 members. Since 2010, LCIE status has changed to a Specialist Group within the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

This year, the annual LCIE meeting took place in Ohrid, North Macedonia. A great opportunity for the Balkan lynx team to invite relevant stakeholders from all three range countries and reveal the poor genetic status of the Balkan lynx and need for reinforcement. Members from the Environment and Forestry Ministries, Hunting federations, National Agency for Protected Areas in Albania as well as National Parks "Mavrovo" (North Macedonia) and "Bjeshkët e Nemuna" (Kosovo) had the opportunity to discuss large carnivore issues face to face with experts from the region. Besides the Balkan lynx reinforcement plan and the prevailing threat of inbreeding depression, we presented the perils that the wolf and brown bear populations are facing in the south-western Balkans. More concretely, the unfavorable legal status of the wolf in North Macedonia is a dragging topic that needs a quick change since there are indications that the population is declining.



Contrary, the brown bear population in North Macedonia is very likely on the rise and in combination with the scarcity of natural food this year, has caused the bears to venture into the mountain villages and cause fear and disarray. Addressing these issues was of great importance for the stakeholders to get a better and bigger perspective of the management opportunities conducted in other European countries.

All in all, the meeting was successful not only for the LCIE members for finishing their yearly chores, but also for the Balkan lynx team for introducing the experts to the most relevant people working in nature protection and management in the Balkan lynx range.







## REFORESTATION OF MUNELLA NATURAL PARK, AN INITIATIVE TO GIVE HOPE TO THE CRITICALLY ENDANGERED BALKAN LYNX

*Written by Xhemal Xherri, Ilir Shyti*

In a bold move to counteract deforestation and safeguard fauna and flora species, a group of youngsters, in coordination with PPNEA experts, has gathered again on the ongoing ritual of the tree-planting campaign in the Munella Natural Park and the connecting bio-corridors such as Albanian Alps National Parks and Korab-Koritnik Nature Park, Iballe-Flet and Skavica. This initiative has the noble mission of restoring the ecosystem's balance by planting native trees and creating a sustainable environment for wildlife, especially for the critically endangered Balkan lynx.

On 23 December, locals and volunteers along with environmental organisations and governmental support, such as Fushe-Arrez Municipality and RAPA, will join forces and plant over 3500 pine trees (*Pinus nigra* Arn.) in the degraded areas of Munella Natural Park and around 200 nut trees (walnuts and chestnuts of the area) near residential areas in coordination with the community. The campaign will continue in January and February.

Munella region and its surroundings have faced increasing threats over the decades due to human activities and overexploitation. The main threats are illegal logging and poaching, overgrazing as well as deliberate fires. Such damages are calculated in thousands of hectares of degraded forests that pose a risk to the natural system itself and the wildlife living in this area.

In addition, such phenomena pose a huge risk for local communities, by losing timber, and high mountain erosion that increases the risk of natural damage and negative impact on the micro-climate.

This initiative is a hope for the recovery of the Munella region, hope for the recovery of the critically endangered Balkan lynx, and an incentive to foster eco-tourism and create sustainable livelihoods.

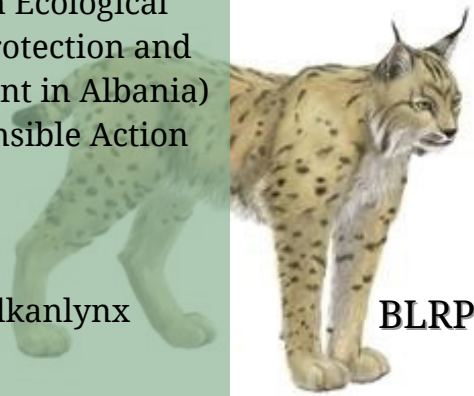


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# Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme

The Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme (BLRP) is jointly implemented by EuroNatur Foundation, KORA (Carnivore Ecology and Wildlife Management), MES (Macedonian Ecological Society), PPNEA (Society for the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania) and ERA (Environmentally Responsible Action Group, Kosovo).

More Information:  
<https://www.facebook.com/balkanlynx>



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