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STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE LYNX IN THE GERMAN ALPS

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ABSTRACT - The lynx (*Lynx lynx*) had been eradicated in the German Alps by the middle of the 19th century. Since the early 1970s there have been several attempts to initiate the re-introduction of lynx into the German Alps, but none of the projects could be carried out because of the still very controversial attitudes towards the species, and because of competition between institutions. Natural recolonization of the German Alps by lynx can be expected sooner or later from Switzerland or Austria. Although lynx are already present in some parts of Germany outside the Alps, neither an organized monitoring system nor compensation regulations for losses of livestock exist. For a successful comeback of lynx into Germany, including the German Alps, more efforts than a year-round protection by the federal hunting law is needed. Initiative management actions and intensive public education are necessary to obtain and secure public acceptance of the lynx.

Key-words: *Lynx lynx*, status, distribution, Germany, Alps

INTRODUCTION

The German portion of the Alps is fairly small. With a maximum width of 30 km, the German Alps cover the southernmost part of the state of Baden-Württemberg to the west and the state of Bavaria to the east (Bätzing 1991, Fig. 1). The lynx disappeared from there around 1850, with one of the last lynx being killed in 1888 in Oberbayern, not far from Berchtesgaden National Park (Eiberle 1972). Even more than a century after its eradication, the attitudes towards this predator are still very controversial, with the main resistance coming from sheep farmers and hunters. Many project proposals to release lynx into the Alps and other parts of Germany - e.g. Berchtesgaden National Park (Cop 1988), Ammergauer Alps (Kluth et al. 1989), Bavarian Forest National Park (Cop 1988, Kleyen 1989, Wotschikowsky 1989), Black Forest (Gossmann-Köllner and Eisfeld 1990), Pfälzer Wald (Acken and Grünwald 1977, Berthold 1994) and Harz National Park (Anonymous 1994) - have been rejected or postponed. While scientists, farmers, hunters, and ministers are still arguing over the

pros and cons or the location of possible lynx re-introductions, the lynx has already started a quiet comeback into some parts of Germany - outside the Alps.

PRESENT STATUS OF THE LYNX IN GERMANY

No signs of permanent lynx presence have yet been registered in the German Alps. Several observations (16 direct observations and tracks, but no kills) have been collected in the area of Berchtesgaden within the last 10 years (Zierl, pers. comm.), but are difficult to confirm. It is possible that a single lynx might have moved from Austria as far as Berchtesgaden. The scattered distribution of the lynx in Austria, probably consisting of only single individuals, may have caused long-distance movements by animals in search of a mate. But not all observations are plausible, and the absence of lynx kills and the scarcity of tracks found suggest that so far only occasional dispersers have occurred in this area.

Outside the Alps there are four different a-

reas with confirmed lynx presence (Fig. 1): the Bavarian Forest (Linn 1994) and the Fichtelgebirge (U. Wotschikowsky, pers. comm.), where lynx move in from a re-introduced population in Sumava National Park (Czech Republic), the Black Forest (Hockenjos 1990) and the Pfälzer Wald (F. Berthold, unpubl.) where lynx presence probably resulted from illegal release of individual. Lynx are also believed to be present in the Elbsandstein area, but signs of lynx presence described by Riebe (1994) are of questionable reliability. No lynx are (permanently) present in the German Alps. Immigration of lynx from Austria, the area of Lungau (70 km from the border) being the next region with confirmed lynx presence (Huber 1995), is possible and should be expected sooner or later. The chances for a natural re-colonization of the German Alps by lynx will entirely depend on the expansion of the Austrian and the Swiss lynx population, because the lynx populations in the Bavarian forest and the Black Forest are isolated from the Alps by unsuitable habitat.

In German federal hunting law, the lynx is listed as a species with year-round protection, and permits for legal shooting cannot be issued (BJagdG, §2, Tierarten; BJagdG, §22, Jagd- und Schonzeiten). At present, there is no regulated compensation for damage caused by lynx. In a few places private organizations volunteer payment. For example, in one region of the Bavarian Forest the local hunters association is paying DM 100.00 for every wild ungulate killed by lynx - so far they have paid for two (U. Wotschikowsky, pers. comm.) - and for the planned re-introduction of lynx in the Black Forest the money for compensation is expected to be covered by sponsors (H. Dölle, pers. comm.). There is no systematic monitoring system in place. All information has been collected by interested people or organizations, and there are no standardized forms and no central data base on lynx observations in Germany.

DISCUSSION

The discussion about lynx in Germany is mainly focused on whether and where to re-introduce this feline. There is nothing wrong with re-introducing the species into suitable habitat - and large parts of the German Alps are suitable habitat - it is equally important to collect data on the status of existing populations (e.g. Bavarian Forest, Fichtelgebirge), and to develop management plans that include public education, damage compensation, and monitoring. Even if re-introductions will never take place in the German Alps, we need to prepare for the immigration of lynx from expanding populations in neighbouring countries (through expansion or future re-introduction). For the re-establishment of the lynx in the whole range of the Alps, it is important to close the gap between the eastern nucleus (Slovenia and Austria) and the western nucleus (Switzerland, France and Italy) in order to allow an exchange of genetic material by dispersing individuals. The small German portion of the Alps will not be critical for this purpose, but Germany signed the Bern Convention and therefore has the legal responsibility to support the re-establishment of this predator. To achieve long-term acceptance of large predators, not only by the urban but also by the rural population, much education is still required. For example, a step into the right direction has been taken with an even more controversial predator in Brandenburg. There, in collaboration with different interest groups, a management plan for wolves is being prepared before any problems have occurred (Ch. Promberger and D. Hofer, unpubl.).

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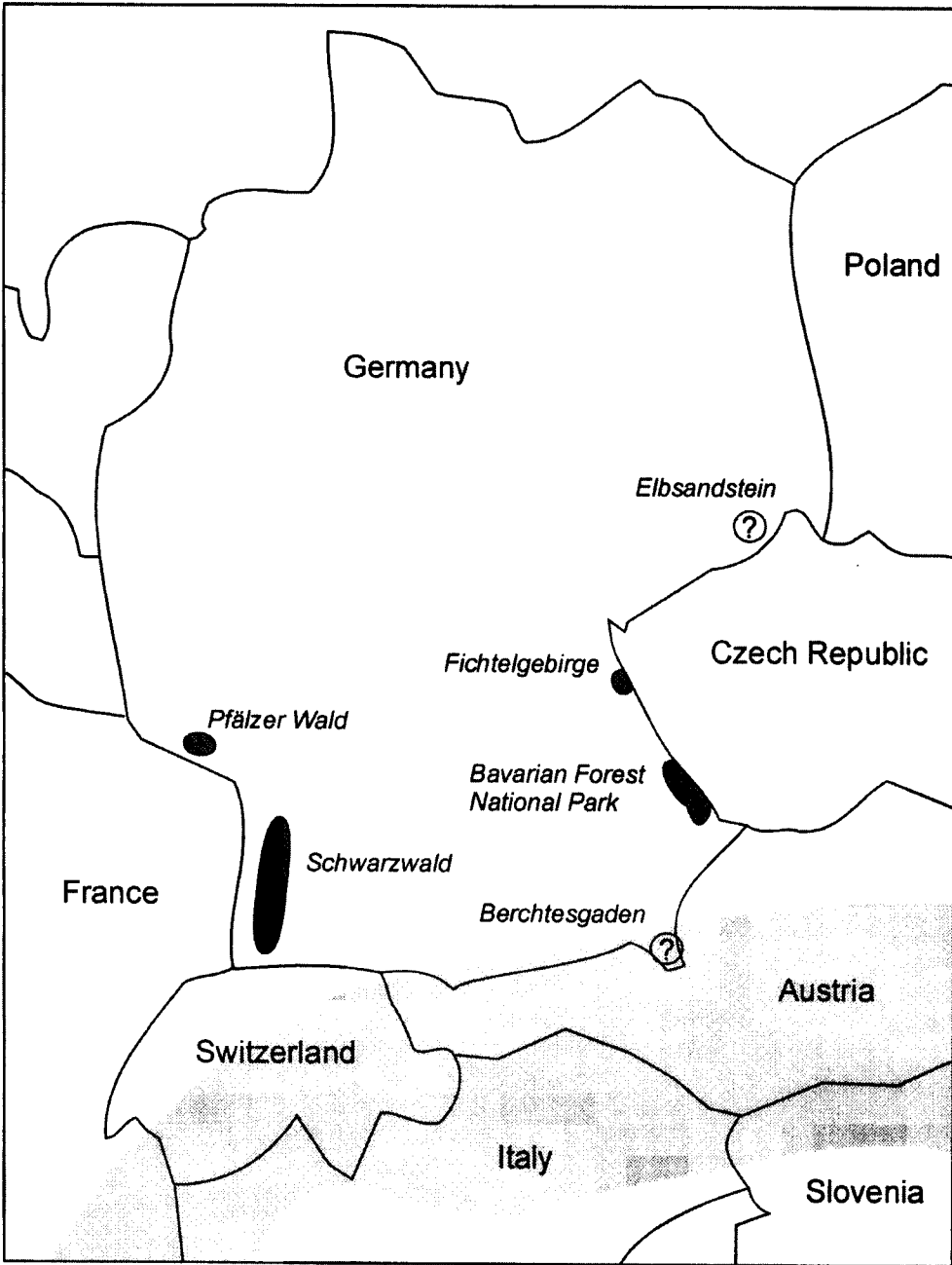


Figure 1. Lynx distribution (dark shaded areas) in Germany relative to the Alps (light grey area). Question marks represent uncertain lynx presence.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Luchs wurde im Deutschen Alpenraum Mitte des letzten Jahrhunderts ausgerottet. Seit den siebziger Jahren gab es zahlreiche Bestrebungen, den Luchs wieder anzusiedeln, die bisher jedoch am Widerstand der Bauern und Schafzüchter und am Kompetenzgerangel zwischen verschiedenen Institutionen scheiterten. Auch wenn es zu keiner Luchswiedereinbürgerung kommt, sollte mit dem Einwandern von Luchsen aus der Schweiz oder Österreich gerechnet werden. Doch obwohl der Luchs bereits in einigen Gebieten Deutschlands - ausserhalb der Alpen - wieder vorkommt, gibt es in Deutschland bisher kein wirkliches Monitoring und keine (einheitliche) Schadensregulierung. Für die erfolgreiche Wiederkehr des Luchses nach Deutschland - einschliesslich des Deutschen Alpenraumes - ist es aber nicht damit getan, dass der Luchs ganzjährig geschont ist. Aktives Management und eine gute Öffentlichkeitsarbeit sind notwendig, um die Akzeptanz des Luchses sicherzustellen.

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