

PRESENT STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE LYNX IN THE GERMAN ALPS

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ABSTRACT - The period 1995 to 1999 did not yield any confirmed lynx data in the German part of the Alpine Arc. Only from the area of Berchtesgaden, 6 Q3-data exist. Outside of the Alpine arc Germany hosts some areas with lynx evidence. For a better understanding of the real situation in the Alps it would be necessary to have a few skilled persons who could check any lynx signs quickly and/or interview people that suspect lynx presence. Because of possible lynx immigrations, especially from eastern Switzerland, and its central location, it would be important that Germany starts to play a more active role in lynx conservation in the Alps. Conservation strategies and possible actions need to be assessed in the near future.

Key words: *Lynx lynx*, monitoring, distribution, Germany.

INTRODUCTION

Compared to other countries Germany shares a very small portion of the Alpine arc of Central Europe. However, the potential lynx habitat of this most northern stretch roughly covers about 5140 km² and could play an important role in the long-term goal to re-establish lynx over the whole Alpine arc by linking the two existing populations in the East (Slovenia) and West (Switzerland/France).

The first status report about lynx described some hints of lynx presence in the area of Berchtesgaden (Kaczensky, 1998). This report updates the situation of the lynx in the German Alps and briefly considers other lynx occurrences in Germany.

PRESENT STATUS OF THE LYNX IN THE ALPS

Considering the classification of data (Molinari *et al.*, this volume) the German part of the Alpine arc only yields Q3 data so far. In the area of Berchtesgaden Nationalpark some reports were made during the period 1995 - 1999 (Fig. 1) but we still lack a sound verification of reported lynx presence. Up to now the closest verified lynx occurrence was a roadkilled lynx in neighbouring Austria, about

20 km away from the Berchtesgaden Nationalpark (Huber and Kaczensky, 1998).

From other parts of the German Alps only rumours could be heard concerning lynx presence. Some professional hunters claim to have seen lynx in the Chiemgauer Alpen (Fischer, personal communication). However, when interviewed it was not possible to receive more precise information on the timing and locality of these observations.

In the very western part of the German Alps we have a similar situation: rumours that lynx roam in the area were heard as early as 1997. However, even the education of some local people to verify lynx presence did not yield any satisfying results so far (Wölfl, 2000; Allgäuer Zeitung, 2001).

STATUS OF LYNX IN OTHER PARTS OF GERMANY

An established lynx population occurs in the border region between Germany, Czech Republic and Austria. The so-called Bohemian Forest Population hosts about 70 resident individuals (Wölfl *et al.*, 2001) and stretches as far north as the Fichtelgebirge (Müller and Hösch, 2001). In the period 1995 to 1999, 38 Q1-data were gathered on an international

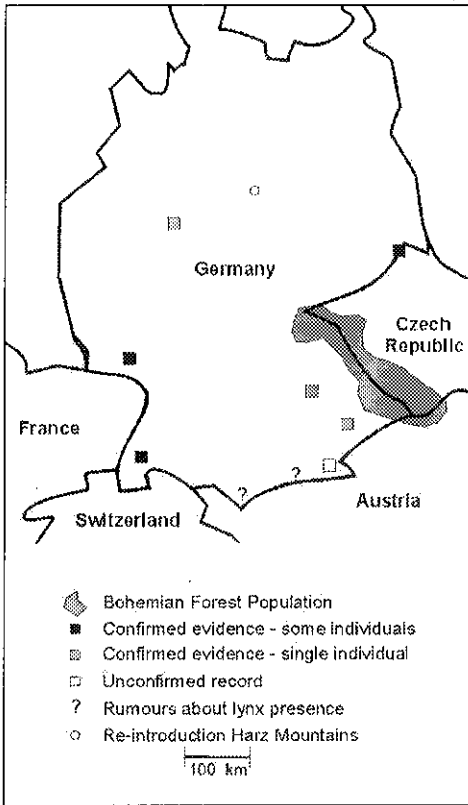


Figure 1 - Lynx evidence in Germany.

scale (Czech Republic 35, Germany 3, Austria 0). A linkage to the autochthonous lynx population of Slovakia seems to be possible and might represent a second large refuge of lynx apart from the Alpine arc (CELTIC: Central European Lynx; Management and Conservation; Wölfel *et al.*, 2001). Additional recent lynx evidence comes from the Erzgebirge (Bufka, Hösch, pers. comm.) and Elbsandsteingebirge (Riebe, 1994; Benda, 1996).

In the Black Forest 5 Q2-data could be gathered during the period 1995 to 1999 (Kaphegyi and Kaphegyi, 2000). In 2000, one Q1-data (photo) could be retrieved (Kaphegyi, pers. comm.).

In the Palatin Forest lynx presence were reported since 1980. The origin of the animals is unclear, however, natural immigration seems to be unlikely. In the region 4 Q1-data were reported so far (Ökolog, 1998). In 1998 a net-

work of trained people has been established, as well as international co-operation with lynx researchers and managers in the neighbouring France.

A single record of lynx presence could be gathered in Nordrhein-Westfalen in an area called Arnsberger Wald northeast of Cologne (Spittler, 1999). Tracks and hair were found and genetic tagging of the hairs by the University of Bremen proved the animal to be *Lynx lynx*. The origin of the animal is unclear.

In the Harz Mountains three zoo-born lynx were released in August 2000, and another four animals in June 2001. None was fitted with radiotags (Nationalparkverwaltung Harz 2001). In spite of harsh criticism by national (Eisfeld *et al.*, 2000, Wotschikowsky *et al.*, 2000) and international experts (Large Carnivore Initiative of Europe, in prep.), the project will continue.

DISCUSSION

So far no Q1 or Q2 data are available for the German part of the Alpine Arc. That means that lynx presence is not proofed yet. For a better verification of the occasional rumours of lynx presence it is necessary to have a few skilled persons who can check any lynx signs quickly and/or interview people that suspect lynx presence.

A linkage between the CELTIC and SCALP populations is not very likely to date. The river Danube and highways might serve as impassable barriers. However, recent Q1-data in the Mühlviertel and in the Nationalpark Kalkalpen of Austria (Zimmerhackl, pers. comm) indicate a slow expansion of both populations, being only about 100 km apart.

From the east and south lynx immigration might occur but seems to be unlikely to date as lynx in the Italian and Austrian Alps is still scarce and was not able to built up viable populations (Molinari *et al.*, this volume; Huber *et al.*, this volume).

However, the Swiss translocation of lynx into the cantons of Zürich and St. Gallen (Molinari-Jobin *et al.*, this volume) might lead to a natural immigration into the Western part of

the German Alps in the future and stresses the need of a more active role of Germany in the SCALP process.

For the future of the lynx in the German Alps it would be important to initiate a feasibility study to evaluate habitat suitability and public attitudes towards the return of lynx. Based on such a feasibility study, the best strategy to achieve the long-term goal of a vital lynx population in the Alps needs to be assessed. However, without public pressure or political lobbying by powerful interest groups it will be difficult to force German government to take a more active role in the conservation of lynx.

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