

The IUCN/ssc Cat Specialist Group's website (www.catsg.org) presents each month a different cat conservation project. Members of the Cat Specialist Group are encouraged to submit a short description of interesting projects. For application use this [standardised form](#) (an editable word document)

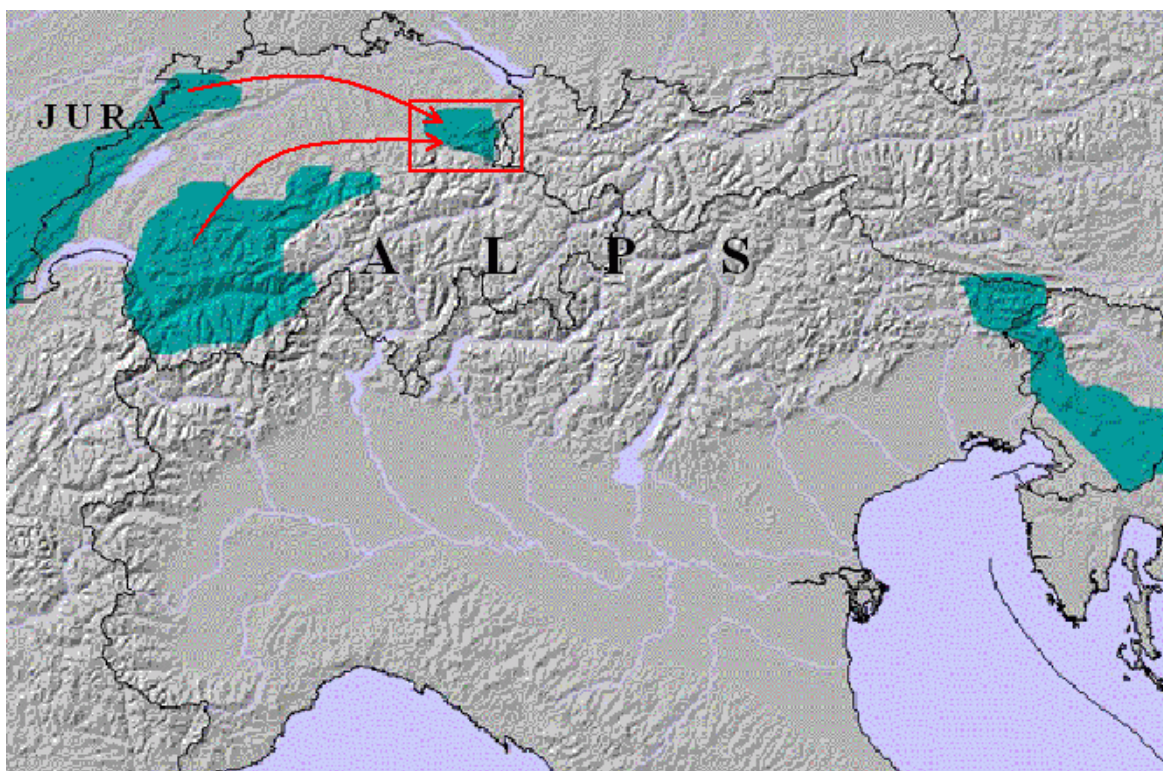
Lynx translocation to the eastern Swiss Alps (LUNO)



Two reintroduced populations of the Eurasian Lynx (*Lynx lynx*) exist in the Alps, one in the north-western Alps of Switzerland and France and one in the eastern Alps, in the triangle of Slovenia, Austria and Italy. But up to now, they are separated and isolated. To support the spread of the elusive species across the Alpine Arc, the authorities of some cantons in eastern Switzerland decided to reintroduce lynx and so to create a stepping-stone between the western and eastern occurrence. Nine lynx were so far released in the northern Alps south of the Lake of Constance.

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Lynx are not new to the Alps. They once roamed all over the world's most intensively used mountain range, but were eradicated by the end of the 19th century. In the early 1970s, Europe's largest cat was reintroduced in several regions of the Alps. Two populations emerged, one in the north-western and one in the eastern Alps. However, the good lynx habitats of the Alps are fragmented, separated by high alpine ridges and densely populated valleys. In the late 1990s, an increasing local lynx density in the north-western Swiss Alps triggered a conflict with local hunters and sheep breeders. This coincided with an initiative to reintroduce lynx into the eastern Swiss Alps, so that the Swiss Agency for Environment and the cantons agreed on a translocation project. Lynx from high-density areas should be translocated into areas with no or little lynx presence, so helping the species to spread across the Alps and eventually allowing the western and eastern occurrence to merge. In a region such as the Alps, where wild animals must share the space with an intensive human land use, only a large and widespread population can guarantee the long-term survival of species such as the lynx.

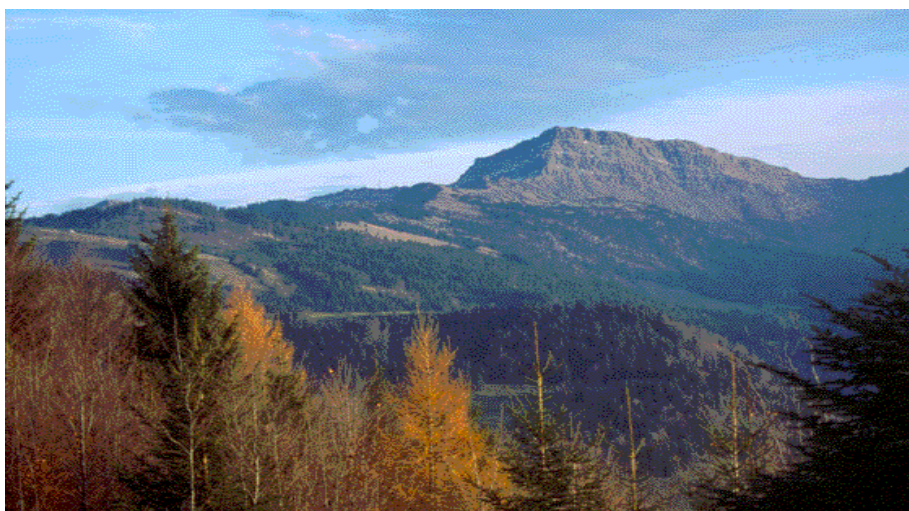


The reintroduction area in eastern Switzerland (red box), a stepping-stone to merge the lynx population in the western and eastern Alps (blue).

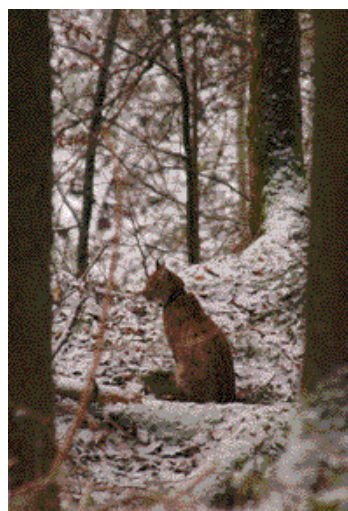


In 2001, six lynx - three females and three males - were caught in the north-western Alps and brought to the foothills of the Alps in the cantons St. Gallen and Zurich. Two years later, three more lynx (an adult female and her daughter and an adult male) were translocated from the Jura Mountains to broaden the genetic base of the new population. Between the capture and the release, the lynx had to undergo a quarantine of some weeks, not only to reduce the risk of disease transmission, but also to prevent a possible homing behaviour. All lynx released were fit with radio collars and their movements observed by means of radio-telemetry, allowing to inform not only the wildlife agencies of the cantons concerned, but also the public. Special meetings took care of the concerns of local interest groups such as hunters or livestock breeders. The surveillance of the translocated lynx was completed by side programmes observing possible changes in the prey populations and in rare, threatened species such as the capercaillie. Experiences of earlier field projects suggested that roe deer and chamois would form the staple prey of the lynx. However, the translocation project allowed for the first time observing the behaviour of lynx in a newly settled area.

M-P. Ryser-Degiorgis preparing a wild caught lynx for the transport (Photo C. Angst)



The Toggenburg, where the translocated lynx settled down (Photo A. Ryser)



Male lynx Turo near the release site (Photo A. Ryser)



The first six lynx translocated from the north-western Alps behaved as if they would have read the textbooks. The three females all gathered in the south part of the release area and established neighbouring home ranges of 83-122 km². The males, after strolling for some time, found the females and occupied home ranges of 155-190 km² overlapping with those of the females. One male controlled two females, another male one, and the third male established a home range next to this group. He shifted his range into the females' area when one of the other two males disappeared. In 2002 and 2003, three, possibly four litters were born. Also regarding prey the lynx behaved as predicted: Among the 158 kills found in the first three years, 110 were roe deer and 40 chamois. Only one domestic animal was killed - a goat - although free ranging livestock is very frequent in the warm seasons. The three lynx translocated from the Jura Mountains in 2003 however behaved quite differently. The young female took a home range adjacent to the already occupied area, but she was killed in a traffic accident. The adult female made a long voyage and finally settled in the Alps south of the release area. The adult male took off in direction to the Jura Mountains, but was held up by the city of Zurich. He lived for more than a year in a intensively used forest at the border

Kuno von Wattenwyl tracking a lynx
(Photo A. Ryser)

of Zurich and then returned to the release site, where he finally got into contact with the other lynx. The future of the project and the decision on further translocations now depends on the development of the newly created nucleus, which now, after most of the radio-collars fell silent, is monitored by means of track transects and photo-trapping.

Duration: 2001-2006

Location (see map): Pre-Alps of eastern Switzerland

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