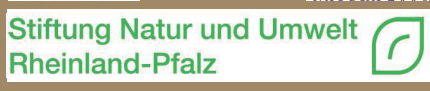


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The Eurasian lynx in Continental Europe





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Original contributions and short notes about wild cats are welcome

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Cover Photo: Camera trap picture of two Eurasian lynx kittens in north-eastern Switzerland. 11 December 2014 (Photo KORA).

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Challenges in the conservation of Eurasian lynx in continental Europe – an introduction

The Eurasian lynx *Lynx lynx* once colonised all Continental Europe but was ousted gradually with the decrease of forests and wildlife on the one hand and the growth of the human population, the expansion of cultivated land and the increase of livestock. The final eradication of the remnant populations happened in the course of the 19th century. The exceptions were the populations in the north-eastern European lowland, the Carpathians and the southern Dinaric Range, which all reached a minimum in the late 1940s, but eventually survived (for a review of the historic downfall and the source literature see Breitenmoser & Breitenmoser-Würsten 2008). Reintroduction programmes started almost 50 years ago, mostly, but not exclusively using funder animals from the Slovakian population. To date, Eurasian lynx were reintroduced in Continental Europe in France, Switzerland, Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Italy, Austria, and Slovenia (see contributions in this Special Issue). Some reintroduction projects failed at an early stage, and all emerging reintroduced populations are still relatively small, mostly isolated and show a rather high degree of inbreeding, inter alia because of the limited number of funder individuals (Breitenmoser & Breitenmoser-Würsten 2008).

At present, Continental Europe hosts 3 small to medium-size autochthonous and 11 tiny to small reintroduced populations distributed over 23 countries (von Arx et al. 2021). In recent years, new reintroduction projects were initiated (e.g. Idelberger et al. 2021, Tracz et al. 2021), efforts to connect distinct populations were made (Molinari

et al. 2021) and the genetic remedy of earlier reintroduced populations was discussed and – in one case (Fležar et al. 2021) – already launched. Such projects require access to adequate source animals and the transport of translocated lynx across international borders. According to the IUCN Guidelines for Reintroductions and other Conservation Translocations (IUCN/SSC 2013), but also to EU and/or national legislation, such conservation interventions require the identification of the adequate source population, an evaluation of the conservation status of the source population, and veterinary health precautions to prevent the transmission of pathogens. However, the “traditional” source population of the Carpathian Mountains and mainly from Slovakia has its own conservation issues (Kubala et al. 2021), which triggered (again) the discussion on the use of conservation breeding programmes as a source for reintroductions (Lengger et al. 2021). Eventually, all these now isolated populations should be merged into few large and viable metapopulations to mitigate the negative effects of habitat fragmentation (Premier et al. 2021). But to complicate the picture, continental Europe hosts three phylogenetically distinct lines of Eurasian lynx, recognised as valid subspecies (Kitchener et al. 2017). Hence, is any lynx welcome anywhere? How shall we delineate areas of subspecies in regions where we have no information on the original inhabitants?

Such questions and the complex situation call for a consensual strategy for the long-term goals for the recovery of the Eurasian lynx, for agreed standards and protocols fa-



Fig. 1. The “Bonn Lynx Expert Group” – participants of the Bonn workshop 16–19 June 2019 (Photo A. Prüssing).

ilitating the international and interregional cooperation, and for common guidelines and a coordinated approach to lynx conservation in Continental Europe. Topical challenges are e.g. (1) the delineation of conservation units, (2) the genetic remedy of inbred populations, (3) the source populations for further translocations, (4) the connectivity of small populations, and (5) the management of lynx populations with regard to their coexistence with people. On 16–19 June 2019, some 50 lynx experts (Fig. 1, Appendix I) gathered in Bonn to discuss the conservation of the Eurasian lynx in Continental Europe. The participants of the workshop aimed (1) to review the conservation status of continental lynx populations and the implementation of conservation projects, (2) to discuss recommendations for a coordinated long-term approach to lynx reintroduction and conservation across Western and Central Europe, and (3) to agree on the development of standards and shared protocols for the practical conservation work. The proceedings of the symposium are compiled in this Special Issue. After the review, the participants developed Recommendations (Bonn Lynx Expert Group 2021) to help coordinating the conservation of the lynx in Continental Europe. The results from the Bonn Workshop were submitted to the Secretariat and the Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) of the Council of Europe, which on 6 December 2019 adopted the Recommendation No. 204 (Standing Committee 2019), which are congruent to the Recommendations presented at the end of this Special Issue (Bonn Lynx Expert Group 2021,).

Continental Europe, in the context of the following Proceedings and Recommendations, refers to the historic and present distribution range of the Eurasian lynx south of the large autochthonous populations of Fennoscandia and Russia. The Bonn conference concentrated on the biological and ecological aspects with regard to the recovery of viable lynx metapopulations in this region. Although we are fully aware of the importance of the human dimension aspects of such an endeavour, we were, for practical reasons, not able to address also the social science aspects of lynx conservation. However, all participants agreed that the discussions in Bonn should be continued and that further topics of lynx conservation in Continental Europe need to be addressed in the future.

The Bonn lynx conference was jointly organised by the HIT Umwelt- und Naturschutz Stiftung, the Stiftung Natur und Umwelt (SNU) Rheinland-Pfalz, the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group, and the Foundation KORA. Financial support was generously provided by the HIT Umwelt- und Naturschutz Stiftung, the SNU, and the Council of Europe (Bern Convention).

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