

Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats



Standing Committee

Recommendation No. 19 (1991) on the protection of the pardel lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) in the Iberian peninsula

(Adopted by the Standing Committee on 11 January 1991)

The Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, acting under the terms of Article 14 of the convention,

Having regard to the aims of the convention to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats;

Considering that the pardel lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) is a fundamental part of the European natural heritage on account of its symbolic, scientific, ecological, educational, cultural, recreational, aesthetic and intrinsic value;

Recalling that Article 1, paragraph 2, of the convention requires that Contracting Parties give particular emphasis to the conservation of endangered and vulnerable species;

Recalling that the pardel lynx is listed in Appendix II to the convention as a strictly protected fauna species;

Considering that the pardel lynx is seriously threatened, having become extinct in two-thirds of the territory it occupied thirty years ago;

Considering that habitat loss, a reduction in rabbit populations, progressive fragmentation of its populations and human-induced mortality have been the main causes of the sharp decrease in lynx populations;

Considering that the areas where the pardel lynx lives and also those areas where recolonisation by the species could take place and stable populations be sustained (hereinafter referred to as « lynx areas ») are of great biological importance;

Referring to Recommendation n° R (85) 15 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the reintroduction of wildlife species;

Referring to the IUCN (World Conservation Union) position statement on the translocation of living organisms, approved at the 22 nd meeting of the IUCN Council in 1987,

Recommends that Spain and Portugal take the following measures:

1. Increasing public knowledge of the practical problems of the pardel lynx in the areas it occupies at present

A data bank should be created which would gather information on relevant aspects of the areas occupied by pardel lynx, such as their habitat types, the use of land where they occur, their economic viability, the powers of the authority to influence their management, the projects that may alter them, the presence and number of potential prey populations, etc. This information should permit appropriate solutions to be found for pardel lynx survival in specific areas before problems worsen or become insoluble.

Preventing regression of the species

2. The following measures are proposed:

2.1. Habitat protection: it is suggested that the impact on the pardel lynx populations of projects for public works, reafforestation, touristic use and any other development that may affect the habitat of the species should be assessed. It is also suggested eliminating or limiting any unwanted negative effect on the pardel lynx populations when such projects are being carried out.

2.2. Elimination of non-natural causes of mortality: removing the risk of death by trapping would eliminate a high proportion of non-natural mortality. This would imply:

- banning the use of leg-traps or snares in the commercial exploitation of rabbits. Where rabbit farming is an important livelihood, preference should be given to alternative methods (netting for example) that do not increase the rate of mortality among pardel lynxes;

- refusing permission to use leg-traps or snares to capture predators. In regions where social pressures are still strong, other measures need to be applied in controlling fox populations (shooting or digging out the dens);

- reminding hunters of the total ban on shooting pardel lynxes during battues and of the heavy fines imposed on offenders;

- limiting tourists' access to the most sensitive areas, in order to reduce disturbance to the pardel lynx;

Public authorities should have the means of keeping a close watch on private hunting ; at least one stateemployed gamekeeper (or someone similar) would be needed for every 10 000 hectares of territory.

2.3. Encouraging local support : the authorities should look for ways to ensure and encourage pardel lynx conservation on private land, through tax reductions for instance or other measures such as economic or moral compensation.

Increasing the density of rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) populations throughout the range of the pardel lynx

The following measures are proposed:

- building up new rabbit populations in places where they have disappeared or diminished, and taking measures to ensure their successful survival (for example by protecting warrens against excavation by predators);

- public authorities could purchase private hunting rights for small game in important pardel lynx areas in so far as their resources allow, in order to organise the rational exploitation of game and so improve rabbit population densities;

- transforming the vegetation cover, wherever practicable, in order to increase rabbit populations.

Management practice needs to include the clearing of zones of dense scrub and the plantation of crops on plots accessible to rabbits. Allowance must be made for the fact that the pardel lynx needs very dense scrub for use as a refuge and open areas for hunting.

Encouraging research on the situation of the pardel lynx

The following research is necessary in order to supplement the information already available:

- monitoring the status of the different populations, especially the numbers and distribution of the species in its most important areas, so as to know population trends and the basic ecological needs of the pardel lynx in each region;

- a telemetric study of the pardel lynx in important lynx areas in Portugal and Spain, to obtain the necessary data on density, territorial requirements, juvenile dispersal, mortality and the impact of major public works and afforestation programmes;

– research into the reasons for the reduction in rabbit populations, especially in the south–western quarter of the Iberian peninsula, and on the most appropriate methods for restocking and vegetation management. It would be advisable to include epidemiological research on the wild rabbit pests - especially myxomatosis and viral haemorrhage - and the response of rabbit populations to them.

Environmental awareness

Campaigns to increase environmental awareness could be extended to cover the whole of the present range of the pardel lynx. It should be emphasised that the extinction of the species in Portugal and Spain would result in world extinction.

Other measures

- centralising the information at present available on the pardel lynx and that which will be obtainable when the « recovery plans » are implemented;
- preparing an enclosure for the care of wounded or sick lynx;
- exploring the possibility of starting a reproduction programme for the pardel lynx in captivity, with a view to a possible reintroduction into the wild.