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Abstract: From the first country-based status reports, which delineated the situation in 1995 to the second series of status reports five years later and the trends in recent years (see updates presented at the 2nd SCALP conference), the development of the lynx across the Alps is ambivalent. Some areas with new or increasing presence of lynx cannot counter-balance the fact that local occurrences went extinct. Lynx presence has particularly decreased in the area between the only two reproducing populations in the north-western and in the eastern Alps, thus reducing the chance that the two populations may merge in the foreseeable future.

The Situation of the Alpine Lynx Population – Conclusions from the 2nd SCALP Conference, Amden 7-9 May 2003

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There is no Alpine lynx population – yet. What we observe, thirty years after the reintroductions in Switzerland, Italy, Austria, and Slovenia, are two local populations with a limited expansion, and some individuals scattered across the Alpine arc. Local occurrences fluctuate, sometimes causing trouble because there are – according to the judgment of local people – too many, sometimes because there are too few and the species locally disappears again. From the first country-based status reports, which delineated the situation in 1995 (Breitenmoser *et al*. 1998, Cop and Frkovic 1998, Huber and Kaczensky 1998, Kaczensky 1998, Molinari 1998, Ragni *et al*. 1998, Stahl and Vandel 1998) to the second series of status reports five years later (Fasel 2001, Huber *et al*. 2001, Molinari *et al*. 2001, Molinari-Jobin *et al*. 2001, Stahl and Vandel 2001, Stanisa *et al*. 2001, Wölfl and Kaczensky 2001) and the trends in recent years (see updates presented at the SCALP conference in this document), the development of the lynx across the Alps is ambivalent (Fig. 1). Some areas with new or increasing presence of lynx cannot counter-balance the fact that local occurrences went extinct. Lynx presence has particularly decreased in the area between the only two reproducing populations in the north-western and in the eastern Alps, thus reducing the chance that the two populations may merge in the foreseeable future.

When, three decades ago, lynx reintroduction programmes where initiated in several Alpine countries, all projects where small-scale and not co-ordinated. This may be explained through the lack of understanding of lynx ecology and reintroduction processes at that time. Since then, however, we have developed both the legal framework and the science and methods for the conservation of large carnivore populations. Examples of our advanced understanding and the pan-Alpine approach on the technical level have been presented at the conference in Amden and are summarised in this volume. Above all, we have understood that viable large carnivore populations need huge spaces, especially in a human-dominated world, where, for reason of conflicting interests, we do not allow the populations to reach the carrying capacity of the living space. This urges the Alpine countries for a close co-operation, as eventually they will all share one large population. The prime aim of the project "Status and Conservation of the Alpine Lynx Population" (SCALP), started ten years ago by experts from France, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria, Germany, and Slovenia, was to develop a common concept and monitoring, and to advance the co-operation across the Alps (Molinari-Jobin, this volume).

The goal must be to create a viable, self-sustaining and manageable lynx population covering the whole of the Alps. The justification for this goal is idealistic and ecological, but also formal: International treaties and agreements and national laws oblige us to maintain or to recreate viable populations of our indigenous species and their habitat. The Pan-Alpine Conservation Strategy for the Lynx (PACS; Molinari-Jobin et al. 2003), drafted by the SCALP expert

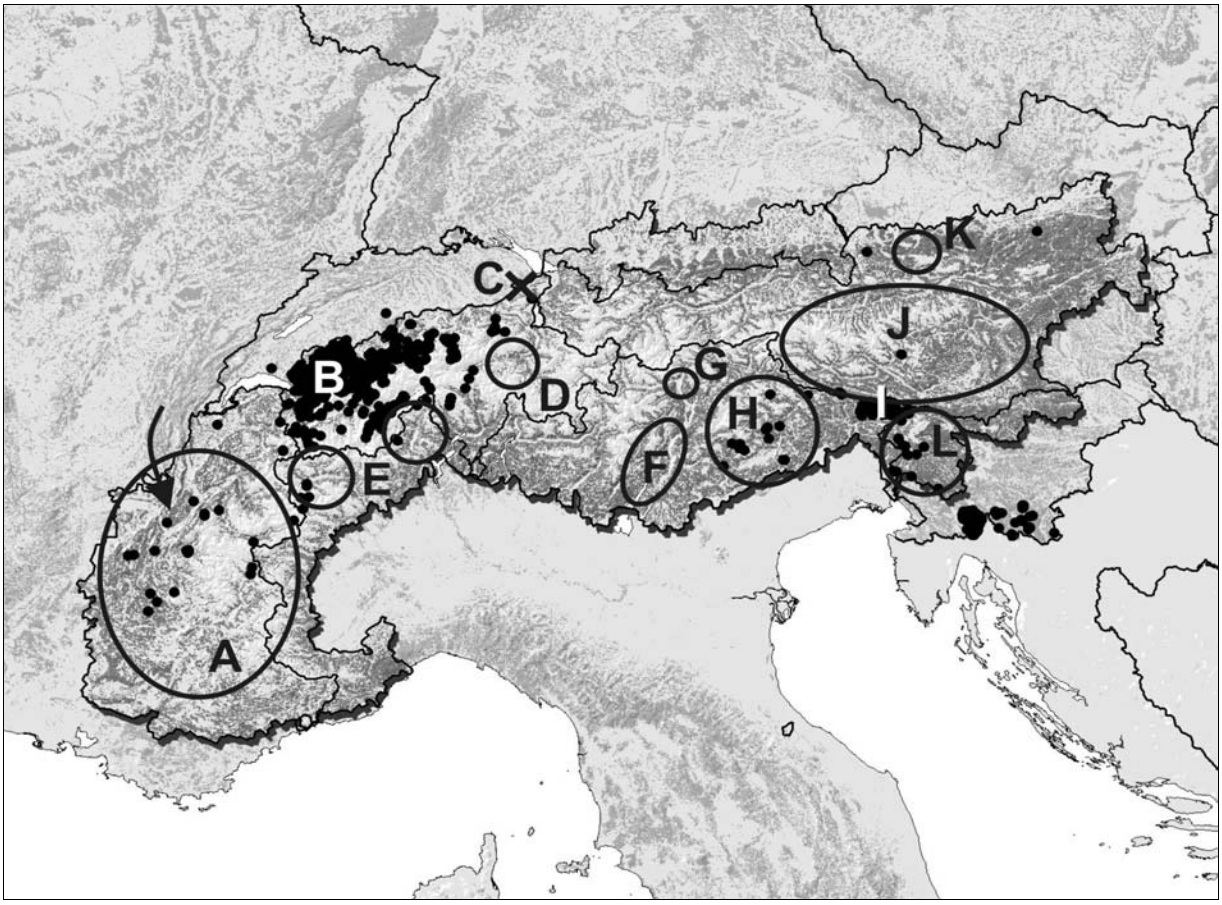

Figure 1. Recent development in lynx distribution in the Alps. The map presents the quality 2 observations (black dots) from the 1999 status report updates (references in text) as compiled in the pan-Alpine conservation strategy for the lynx (Molinari-Jobin et al. 2003). Circles and letters indicate areas of recent development or significant changes compared to the 1995 status reports (references in text): A – French Alps: Recent increase of observations also in the southern French Alps, where, however, the monitoring system is not yet as well established as in the northern part. Immigration from the Jura population probable (arrow). B – north-western Swiss Alps: High population density from 1995-1999, but no corresponding expansion of the population. C – eastern Swiss Alps: Release of nine lynx translocated from the north-western Alps (6 animals in 2001) and the Jura population (3 animals in 2003). D – Vorderrhein, Grisons: New local observations since 1998. E – Val d'Aosta and Valle d'Ossola, western Italian Alps: Increasing frequency of observations after 1995, but no confirmation since 1999. F – Trentino, Italian Alps: Occurrence extinct after 1995. G – Südtirol, Italian Alps: Lynx photo taken in 2001. H – Bellunese, Italian Alps: Observations after 1995, but no confirmation in recent years. I – Tarvisiano, Italian Alps: Increasing number of records in the past two years. J – Kärnten and Steiermark, Austrian Alps: No more reports in recent years. K – Kalkalpen, Austrian Alps: Observations (including photo) of maybe a single individual in the past two years. L – Slovenian Alps: Decreasing frequency of records since the 1999 status report.

group and endorsed by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention in 2001, provides a framework for the conservation of the lynx in this largest European mountain range. The PACS reviewed the status of the species, assessed the Alps as a living space for the lynx, and listed actions recommended for each Alpine country. The PACS is an expert document, based on the principles of the Action Plan for the Conservation of the Eurasian Lynx in Europe (Breitenmoser *et al*. 2000). These strategies need to be implemented by the single countries, among others through the development of specific conservation action plans (Boitani, this volume). So far, Switzerland is the only Alpine country, which has implemented a management plan (Blankenhorn, this volume). Undoubtedly, lynx conservation problems were more pressing in Switzerland than elsewhere.

Why, given all the new insights and instruments we have developed over the past years, did the recovery of the Alpine lynx population not further advance since the first SCALP conference in 1995 (see Fig. 1)? There are several biological, organisational and political constraints hampering the spontaneous or human-supported spread of the lynx:

- The lynx is, by its life history, a relatively bad coloniser. The Alps are naturally and artificially fragmented (Zimmermann *et al*., this volume). For the species to spread across a barrier and to found a new (sub)population, a relatively high input is needed, requiring a strong demographic pressure (emigration) from the source population. However, a high local lynx abundance results generally in a hefty controversy, as local people do not accept peak lynx densities.
- The administrative level of the legal protection (European Union Habitat Directives, Council of Europe's Bern Convention, national laws) and of wildlife management is not the same. Although international conventions and national legislation is binding for the entire country, wildlife management is often within the competencies of the regions. Regional authorities fear the conflict between harvest (hunting of ungulates) and ecosystem conservation (recovery of carnivore populations).
- Lynx is removed from the influence of local institutions and people. Local interest groups, mainly hunters and sheep breeders, do however not welcome the return of the lynx. This restrains local and regional authorities to actively promote the return of the species.
- Regional authorities often claim to welcome the "natural" return of the lynx, but reject "artificial" reintroductions. This is of course semantic, as all lynx in the Alps were eradicated and spontaneous recolonisation is practically impossible. But most authorities are afraid to take the responsibility for a reintroduction, as the return of a large carnivore generally leads to a controversy between different NGOs and interest groups and often gets into local politics.
- Across the Alps, national and local authorities – as good as NGOs and scientists – have different priorities regarding large carnivore management. Wherever the return of the wolf or the brown bear dominates the public discussion, lynx conservation has a low importance.

Some important scientific questions remain to be solved – we do, for instance, not yet under-

stand the long-term effect of fragmentation (Zimmermann *et al*., this volume) or genetic isolation (Breitenmoser-Würsten and Obexer-Ruff, this volume) – we have the theoretical knowledge to do good conservation. Furthermore, the SCALP expert group has established common monitoring principles, and, though the monitoring must be improved in several parts of the Alps, we have a continuous surveillance of the Alpine lynx population. What we lack, however, is the favourable political milieu to advance lynx conservation across the Alps. National and regional GOs must play a significant role in lynx conservation, but in order to get active, they must be assured that the local population agrees. In our democratic civil societies, a formal legal obligation is often not enough for local authorities to act; there must be a strong commitment from the interest groups and the public. On the other hand, recreating a continuous population within reasonable time requires active management of the species across the Alps according to a general plan, so co-ordination on an international level. Clearly, it is a difficult endeavour to co-ordinate actions on an international, national and regional level. In order to advance the Alps-wide co-operation in and co-ordination of the lynx conservation, we need both, a top-down and a bottom-up process, and we have to address several tasks at the same time:

- To continue monitoring: A consistent monitoring is important to produce baseline data for any decision regarding conservation or management measures. The monitoring system can differ between the countries, but the interpretation must be compatible in order to allow for an Alps-wide assessment of the population status.
- To establish a lasting co-operation and co-ordination among national and regional GOs in charge of wildlife conservation and management. It is not enough to just accept a general goal as formulated above; the agencies should closely co-operate not only in lynx conservation, but also in regard to the spreading wolf and bear populations, and they must agree on common management principles (because all will eventually have to manage these populations). A multi-species approach, also including the ungulate populations, allows balancing between regional priorities and the shared goals for the whole of the Alps.
- To create a foundation of trust between conservation NGOs, interest groups and local people. The key to the long-term survival of the lynx in the Alps is not the enforcement of its legal protection (repressive measures are not only an illusion in the practical context of the hunting in the Alps, but also against the principles of public involvement), but a fundamental agreement about principles of coexistence with large carnivores in a cultivated landscape. In regard to the lynx, which causes only minor damage in livestock, but can have a considerable impact on local roe deer populations (Molinari and Molinari-Jobin, this volume), the most important partners in this discussion are the nature conservation organisations and the hunters. If they can work out a compromise regarding lynx conservation and management (including hunting of lynx), they could create the socio-political atmosphere for the national and regional wildlife management agencies to become active.

The SCALP conference in Amden was one more time a meeting of insiders. There were the experts, the GOs and the NGOs already present at the first conference in 1995. Three hunter's associations and two nature conservation organisations attended the conference, but no other interest groups did come. At the moment, the discussion about the conservation and

management of the Alpine lynx population seems to idle, leaving us with three groups: those who agree and know, those who do not agree, and those who do not want to know. The translocation of lynx from the western to the eastern Swiss Alps (Robin and Ruhlé, this volume, and Ryser *et al*., this volume) was a good example of a combined conservation and management project, but has already become a controversy in local politics. What can we do to overcome this deadlock? I see the need for action from all partner groups involved, the governmental agencies, the private organisations, and the scientists.

The GOs, both on national and regional level, need to organise their co-operation. They must agree on common goals and management and conservation principles and they need to implement those. This cannot be achieved in one meeting, but only in an ongoing, established process, through regular exchange of information and meetings to discuss actual problems. This discussion must include all large carnivore species, as a fact all wildlife populations requiring cross-border management and conservation, and must base on the principle that the whole of the Alps, and not only a part or a region, is the living space for these species.

The private organisations, NGOs and interest groups, must start to directly communicate and to work towards a practical compromise regarding the coexistence with large carnivores. As long as a theme such as lynx conservation is directly linked to fundamental views and is used to defend the own position, it will be hard to find a common solution. The organisations and the associations have a high responsibility to work towards a co-operation, in order to avoid that their groups become more and more polarised.

The experts, finally, must continue to produce baseline data and to assess the situation of the lynx in the Alps (and to do so, they need the support from the GOs and NGOs). Furthermore, the experts need to support the regional GOs and the private institutions to build partnerships and to incorporate their region or local situation into a more general concept and into a pan-Alpine picture. If the mountain does not come to the prophet (as we have partly experienced at the Amden meeting), the prophet must go to the mountain.

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