



LIFE Lynx

PROJECT Bulletin – 2023

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ROK ČERNE**
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Message from Coordinator: ROK ČERNE

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROJECT, our main concern was whether we would be able to get enough animals to relocate. The Romanian and Slovak partners proved to be very reliable and together with our Croatian partners, we are successfully saving the population in the Dinarides from extinction.

After that, our biggest challenge has been to establish a stepping-stone population in the Gorenjska region. We were worried that the lynx would leave the areas where they were released, but as if they knew why we had brought them, they stayed on the plateaus of Jelovica and Pokljuka. In the first year, we also confirmed the first litter in Gorenjska.

The last releases are still ahead of us. I am confident that, together with our partners and cooperating institutions, we will be successful and that these animals will also successfully integrate into the population and contribute to an even more diverse genetic picture of lynx in this part of Europe.



AIDA – first female lynx captured in Romania in the scope of LIFE Lynx.



Capturing two female lynxes in Slovakia.



Five lynxes released in Slovenian Alps. April 2021



First and second confirmed lynx reproduction in the Slovenian Alps.



Visit of the Head of the LIFE programme, Mr Angelo Salsi, May 2022



New lynx celebrity ambassador – Slovenian writer and actress Desa Muck.



Slovenian Hunters Day dedicated to the lynx. April 2022



Developed a computer model to help lynx conservation. December 2021



Drystone pyramids – an innovative way of making lynx marking spots in Croatia.



>87% support to maintaining lynx in Slovenia, Croatia and Italy.

87%

FROM SLOVENIAN FORESTS:

Lynx translocation to the Slovenian Alps and their first reproduction

IN 2021, five adult lynx from Romania and Slovakia were translocated and released to the Alpine part of Slovenia. In contrast with the past releases in the Dinarics where individual animals were released, more animals were released at the same time in the Alps. The main goal of these releases is establishing a population stepping-stone, which would in the long term connect with the existing populations in the Alpine area on the north and with the Dinaric population in the south.

Prior to the translocations and releases of lynx in this area, we organised several presentations of the project to hunters and the general public to inform them about all the planned activities. As a result, we have established cooperation with Triglav National Park and the Nomenj Gorjuše hunting family, where we set up two release enclosures. After a very successful capturing season, five adult lynx, including three females, were prepared for translocation in Romania and Slovakia. A couple from Romania was released in the area of Jelovica plateau and two females from Slovakia and one male from Romania were released in the area of the Pokljuka plateau.



Release in Triglav National Park.



Release in Jelovica.

Their movements were regularly monitored using telemetry collars and we could soon confirm that all lynxes established territories near the release locations. What is more, we confirmed the first reproduction on the Jelovica plateau, where the female lynx gave birth to three kittens just a few months after the release. Using telemetry, camera trapping, and genetic sampling, we will

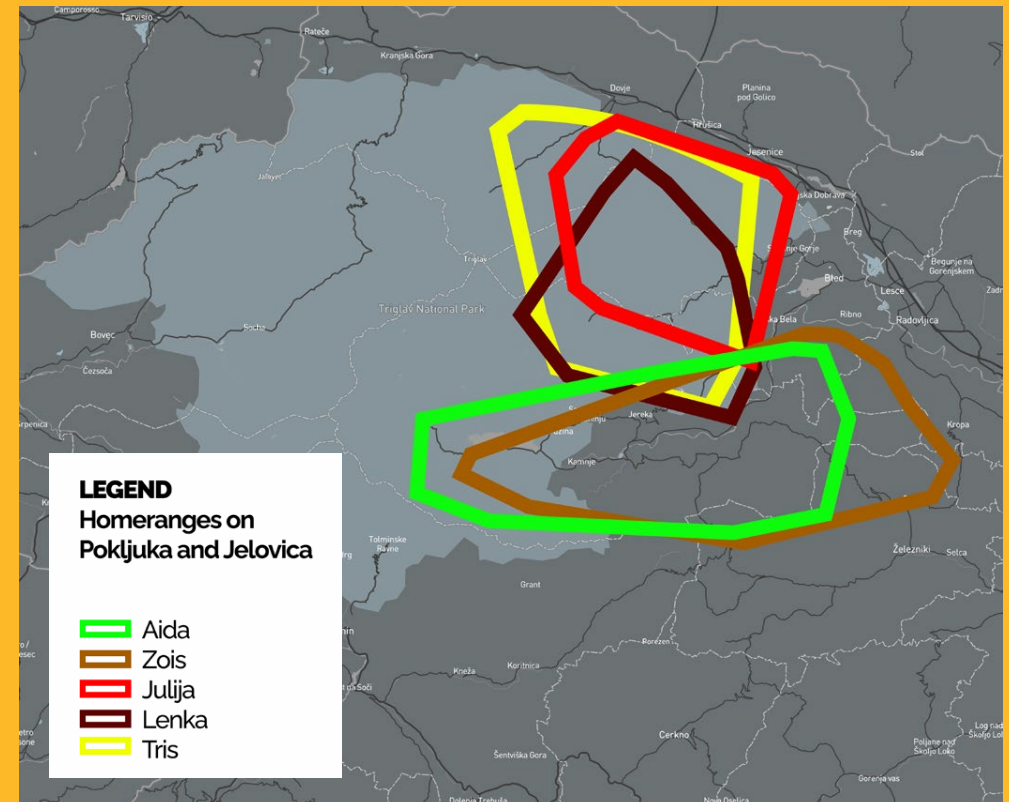
continue monitoring the development of the Alpine stepping-stone population in the coming years.



Lynx Julija with her three kittens.



Lynx kitten from Jelovica.



FROM ROMANIAN FORESTS:

Capturing lynxes in Romania, and the remaining challenges

IN THE FINAL SEASON of the capture activity and with it the completion of the Romanian team's tasks in the LIFE Lynx project, we found this to be a good time to reflect on what this experience meant to us.

Five challenging years have passed and during this time the team has experienced an equally wide range of emotions: from worrying that we will not be able to catch and relocate any lynxes to the excitement of the first capture – Goru. From the exultance and simultaneous weariness of capturing five lynxes in a season to the sheer joy of finally capturing a lynx female – Aida. So far, we have captured eleven lynxes in Romania and translocated nine of them to Slovenia



RO8, the second collared male lynx released in Romania.

and Croatia, while two were collared and continue to roam the Romanian forests.

We believe that the effectiveness of our action can be ascribed to three key factors. First, the knowledge transfer and technical support provided by our Slovenian, Croatian, and Italian colleagues. Sharing knowledge and practical assistance throughout the project's duration have been fundamental to its success. Second, sharing the same goal and attitude toward teamwork. Throughout the five years, many technicians and volunteers from several European countries (Portugal, England, Germany, Italy,



Representatives of both Slovenian and Romanian Forest Administrations meeting each other.

France, Slovenia, and Romania) were part of our team.

Undoubtedly, we have felt overwhelmed, pressured, or as if we lacked the essential abilities at times, but each of these states was conquered with the support of a great team and a common desire to succeed. Last but not least, we established a partnership with our colleagues from ROMSILVA – the National Forest Administration. By sharing their knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm for the project, they helped us find some of the best micro-locations for lynx live capture.



Moving a box trap to a new location.

The idea that the lynxes that were sent from Romania have already made an important contribution to the much-needed improvement of the genetic diversity of the Dinaric-SE Alpine lynx population leaves us content. However, the final year of the project is not without its challenges: the hope that the last lynx we capture for the project will be a female can easily be dashed by the past results, and it all rests on making use of what we have learned, and some luck, to achieve this goal.



Volunteers working in lynx capturing activity.

TRANSLOCATED **LYNX** IDENTITY CARDS



Name **TRIS**
 Age 4 YEARS (2021)
 Sex MALE
 Weight 27 KG (2021)
 Origin country ROMANIA
 Date of translocation 11. 3. 2021
 Country of release SLOVENIA
 Date and location of release 28. 4. 2021, POKLJUKA
 Territory POKLJUKA (SLOVENIA)



Name **JULIJA**
 Age 2 YEARS (2021)
 Sex FEMALE
 Weight 17 KG (2021)
 Origin country SLOVAKIA
 Date of translocation 24. 4. 2021
 Country of release SLOVENIA
 Date and location of release 28. 4. 2021, POKLJUKA
 Territory POKLJUKA (SLOVENIA)



Name **ZOIS**
 Age 2 YEARS (2021)
 Sex MALE
 Weight 19 KG (2021)
 Origin country ROMANIA
 Date of translocation 17. 4. 2021
 Country of release SLOVENIA
 Date and location of release 26. 4. 2021, JELOVICA
 Territory JELOVICA (SLOVENIA)



Name **EMIL**
 Age 3 YEARS (2021)
 Sex MALE
 Weight 20 KG (2021)
 Origin country SLOVAKIA
 Date of translocation 14. 5. 2021
 Country of release CROATIA
 Date and location of release 14. 5. 2021, VELEBIT
 Territory BAŠKE OŠTARIJE (CROATIA)



Name **LENKA**
 Age 3+ YEARS (2021)
 Sex FEMALE
 Weight 15 KG (2021)
 Origin country SLOVAKIA
 Date of translocation 24. 4. 2021
 Country of release SLOVENIA
 Date and location of release 28. 4. 2021, POKLJUKA
 Territory POKLJUKA (SLOVENIA)



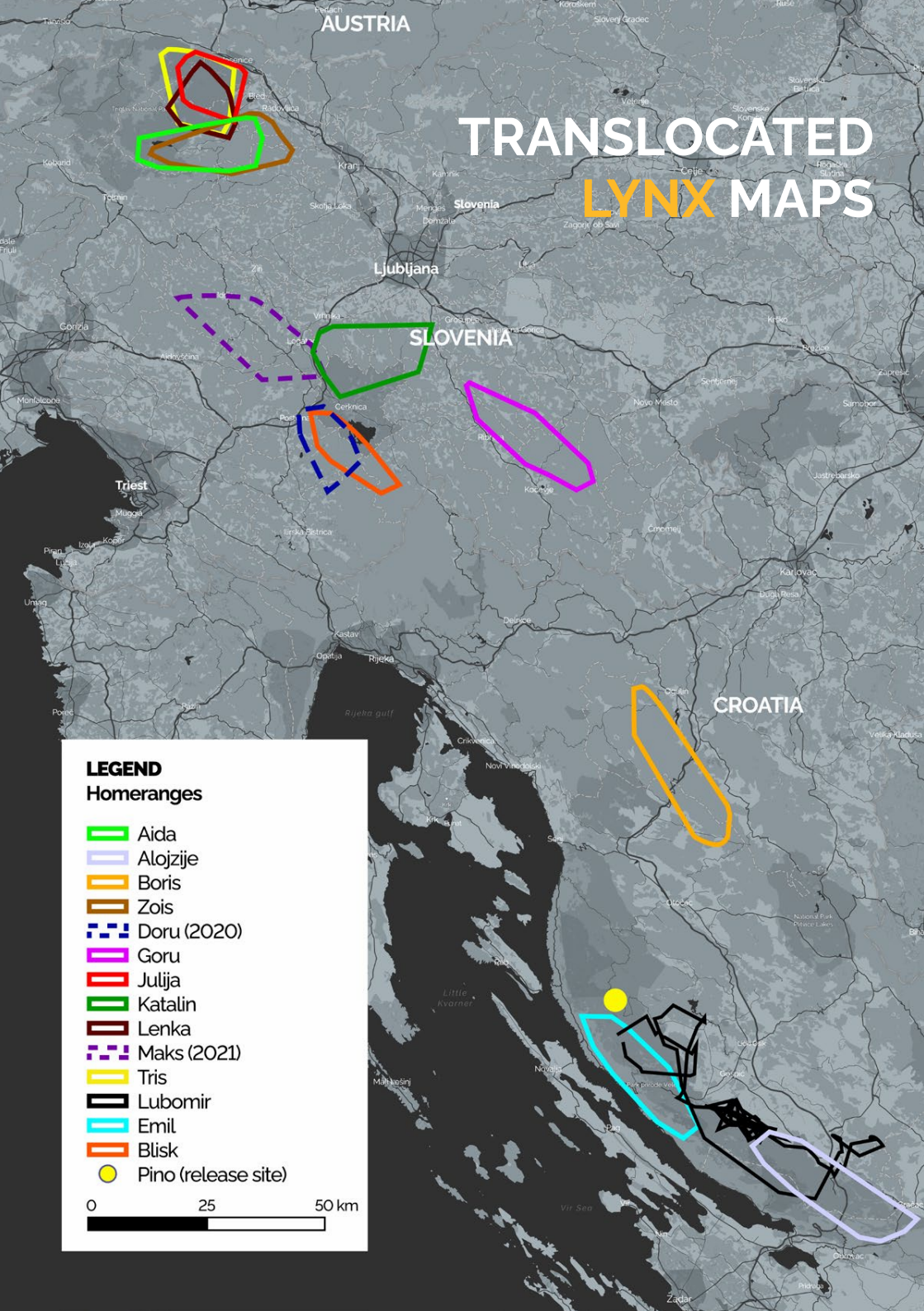
Name **AIDA**
 Age 2 YEARS (2021)
 Sex FEMALE
 Weight 16 KG (2021)
 Origin country ROMANIA
 Date of translocation 17. 4. 2021
 Country of release SLOVENIA
 Date and location of release 26. 4. 2021, JELOVICA
 Territory JELOVICA (SLOVENIA)



Name **BLISK**
 Age 6-7 YEARS (2022)
 Sex MALE
 Weight 27 KG (2022)
 Origin country ROMANIA
 Date of translocation 8. 4. 2022
 Country of release SLOVENIA
 Date and location of release 17. 5. 2022, SNEŽNIK
 Territory NORTHERN JAVORNIKI (SLOVENIA)



Name **LUBOMIR**
 Age 5 - 7 YEARS (2022)
 Sex MALE
 Weight 22 KG (2022)
 Origin country SLOVAKIA
 Date of translocation 14. 6. 2022
 Country of release CROATIA
 Date and location of release 14. 6. 2022, VELEBIT
 Territory NOT YET ESTABLISHED



TILEN HVALA

POLICE OFFICERS TRAINED TO INVESTIGATE THE ILLEGAL KILLING OF WILD ANIMALS

With new lynx translocations and consequently an increase in their abundance and spatial distribution, there can be also an increase in negative attitudes towards them which can, in the worst cases, lead to illegal killing. Any illegal killing of lynx individuals is a great loss, as it decreases the genetic diversity and demographic structure of the population. Therefore, to address this problem we connected with the Ministry of the Interior and in 2019 and 2022, conducted the first professional training sessions for police officers with the goal of educating them about the importance of detecting, prosecuting, and sanctioning the illegal killing of lynx. The result of the training was approximately 50 police officers specially

trained for prosecuting the illegal killing of wild animals.

Field personnel, such as foresters, game wardens, hunters, and biologists, are normally the first to detect and report to the police a suspicion of illegal killing, therefore it is important to educate them about the proper standard procedures upon these events. Following this goal, we carried out educational seminars for foresters and game wardens on standard procedures to be followed in case of finding an animal carcass with the suspicion of illegal killing. We also produced a handbook and a leaflet on the investigation of poaching, which can be a very useful tool when detecting the illegal killing of wild animals.



FROM CROATIAN FORESTS:

Lynx research in the edge habitat in Croatia and creating drystone pyramids as marking spots

THE CORE AREA OF THE LYNX distribution in the Dinaric Mountains in Croatia strongly overlaps with the distribution of Dinaric mixed beech-fir-spruce forests. In the northern and western parts of the Dinaric Mountains in Croatia, this habitat type is highly dominant and the lynx density is relatively high. However, in the south-eastern part of the Croatian Dinaric Mountains, in a more extreme climate and shallow soils, only pure stands of beech are developed, the forest cover is lower and the lush glades are replaced by extensive dry karstic meadows. The lynx is present there also but the population density is lower and more difficult to research. Additionally, there are many exposed rocks and boulders, and locating traditional lynx marking spots becomes difficult, if there are such locations at all. To make things even more complicated, the snow cover appropriate for snow-tracking is short-lasting, lying several days only as the area is under a high maritime influence (sirocco wind) that quickly melts snow but also the strong northern bora wind that freezes soft snow.

In the beginning of lynx research within the LIFE Lynx project, we tried to get lynxes to mark wooden poles (hair traps) but they were mostly ignored by lynxes and destroyed by bears.



Bear cubs destroying a hair trap pole.

After that, we tried something completely new and erected drystone pyramids across the paths or roads. We used rocks that were already there (there are a lot of rocks everywhere) to build them at the very edge of the path, easily visible from both sides, as high as we could feasibly build, and to have the side that is on the path vertical with one rock that juts out to create an overhang. That small jutting overhang is the point in the pyramid that is used for scent marking and it seems that it triggers marking behaviour.



Drystone pyramid at Crveni potoci Velebit.

Wild cats were the first to use the pyramids, and the lynxes followed. Lynx Alojzije, that was translocated from Romania, was also filmed using the pyramids on his territory. Hair traps cannot easily be attached to the pyramids but marking animals are turning both sides to the camera traps which is a big improvement compared to animals that are just passing by the camera trap. The Croatian team plans to erect more such pyramids and to modify hair traps to be able to attach them to the pyramids.



Lynx marking a drystone pyramid at Trišnja, Velebit.

It was a great honour to participate in the LIFE lynx project and to release translocated lynx Lubomir in our hunting ground Ramino korito. The presence of such a rare, mysterious and endangered species provides an opportunity to enrich tourist programmes in our county.

MARIJA KRNIJAČIĆ, Director of the Rewilding Velebit Foundation



FROM ITALIAN FORESTS:

The return of the lynx is also getting closer in Italy

WHEN IN 2014 we presented the first application for an EU LIFE project about the conservation of the lynx, the species already had bad conservation status in Italy, and the last nucleus present on the national territory (in the Tarvisio area) consisted of only three individuals. For this reason, the National Forest Service, the Friuli V.G. region and the Italian Lynx Project had initiated the ULyCA project (Urgent Lynx Conservation Action) in which the local lynx nucleus was reinforced with two individuals from the Swiss Jura Mountains. The action was successful, as in the same year of the release (2014) the female lynx called Jura reproduced and had two kittens. However, despite this short-term success, more substantial measures were needed.

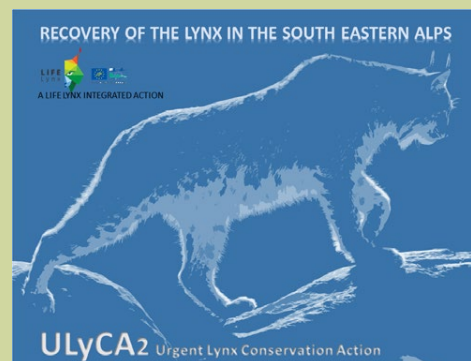
Fortunately, in 2017 we started with the LIFE Lynx project, in which not only the Dinaric population was strengthened, but also the Alpine one. In fact, in 2021 five individuals of Carpathian origin were released in the Slovenian Alps, settled there and immediately reproduced. In addition, the LIFE lynx team monitored lynx Maks' journey from the Dinarides (to where he was translocated)

to Gorenjska, just eight kilometres from the Italian border, near the Tarvisio area, where some of the last Italian lynx were present. This fills us with optimism, hoping that one of the dispersing young individuals will soon reach Italy. To carefully monitor the process of recolonisation of the border area of the Julian Alps and the Alpine foothills, the Italian Lynx Project (PLI) and the Carabinieri Forestali, together with the regional Forest Service, have increased the monitoring effort with camera traps in the area. We have set over 40 cameras that are operational 24 hours a day on forest roads and trails in the Italian-Slovenian border area.

In addition to this passive monitoring, the Italian partners have also launched a new project, ULyCA2 – "Recovery of the Lynx in the South-Eastern Alps", in the scope of which an additional five individuals will be released by the end of the LIFE Lynx project. In this way, a second and very important stepping-stone nucleus will be created between the Dinaric Mountains and the Alps, making it easier for lynx to connect with other populations in the Carnic and Central Alps.



Triglav National Park rangers opening the three-compartments of lynx enclosure on Pokljuka. The offspring of these individuals could represent the basis of a new nucleus also for the Italian Julian Alps.



Front page of the ULyCA2 Project - dedicated to the recovery of the lynx in the Italian south-eastern Alps.

An important part of my forestry work consists of wildlife monitoring and I am particularly happy to be able to contribute as a regional forester to the work that the Carabinieri Forestali and the Progetto Lince Italia carry out to monitor the lynx. I hope that one of the lynx of the new occurrence in the Slovenian Alps will soon be able to cross the border and settle in our territory, leaving its footprints in the district where I am working.

LAURA DELLA MEA, Regional Forest Service, Friuli Venezia Giulia Region

It is right to bring back the animals that once lived here and to make sure that such animals, including lynx, do not become extinct and remain in our forests. When it was explained to us why lynx is being reintroduced to our area, we accepted this with enthusiasm. Unfortunately, the natural return of the wolf and the damage it does to small livestock is also damaging the lynx.

JOŽE SODJA, Major of Bohinj Municipality

FROM SLOVAKIAN FORESTS:

The Slovakian contribution to lynx conservation in the Alps and in the Carpathian Mountains

CAPTURING WILD ANIMALS for the purpose of translocation requires relevant and systematic research survey on the source population. The results from our research survey allow us to assess whether the lynx population, as a species of European importance, has a favourable status in a specific area, and whether the capture and translocation of individuals will not present any negative impact for the local sustainability of the species. The results obtained through our systematic robust monitoring survey conducted within the LIFE Lynx project, together with other previous surveys, allow us to estimate the average lynx population density in the Slovak Carpathians at 1.15 (± 0.29) lynx per 100 km² of suitable habitat, with an overall population size of 323 adult individuals. Based on these results, we can say that the lynx population in the surveyed Slovak areas has a favourable status, and therefore the Slovak lynx population can be a source for the reintroduction/reinforcement efforts in the Dinaric Mountains and Southeastern Alps. This is why we were able to capture and translocate three more lynx at the beginning of 2021; two of them were caught in the Vepor Mountains (male Emil and female Julija) and one in the Vtáčnik Mountains (female Lenka).



Resident adult male at the capture site in the Western Carpathians.



Transport of the adult female Julija from the capture site in the Vepor Mts.

Moreover, the whole Carpathian lynx population appears to be stable, although in certain regions, e.g. Ukraine, numbers have decreased. Nevertheless, this negative trend status was based on “expert esti-

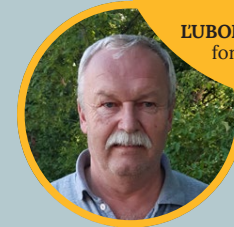


Joint discussion with partners in the field in Ukraine.

mations” and not in scientific based survey data. If this data is however confirmed, and the lynx range in Ukraine is broken (IUCN 2012–2016 report), it becomes a potentially dangerous gap in the continuous distribution in the Carpathians, threatening the long-term (genetic) viability of the entire population. This is one of the reasons we had bilateral visits in 2021 targeting the exchange of know-how and experiences within the Slovak team of the LIFE Lynx project, from the Technical University in Zvolen and the Bojnice National Zoo, and the Ukrainian team, from WWF Ukraine and the University of Lviv. Together we started planning long-term systematic lynx monitoring, aiming for more relevant conservation and management of this species in Ukraine and the Carpathians. In this way, the LIFE Lynx project also helps to ensure long-term and large-scale survival of the species in the geographic scope of the Carpathians and hence contributes to the conservation of both the native and reintroduced populations.

I have been part of the historical lynx reintroduction programmes and I greatly appreciate the opportunity to help the Dinaric – SE Alpine lynx population at the moment. It is my honour to continue the story of my predecessors and lynx catchers in the Slovak Ore Mountains and, in this way, help to preserve the species population in the whole of Europe.

LUBOMÍR ÁRVAY, Slovakian forester, hunter, and game manager



LYNX EDUCATIONAL TRAIL IN KOČEVJE

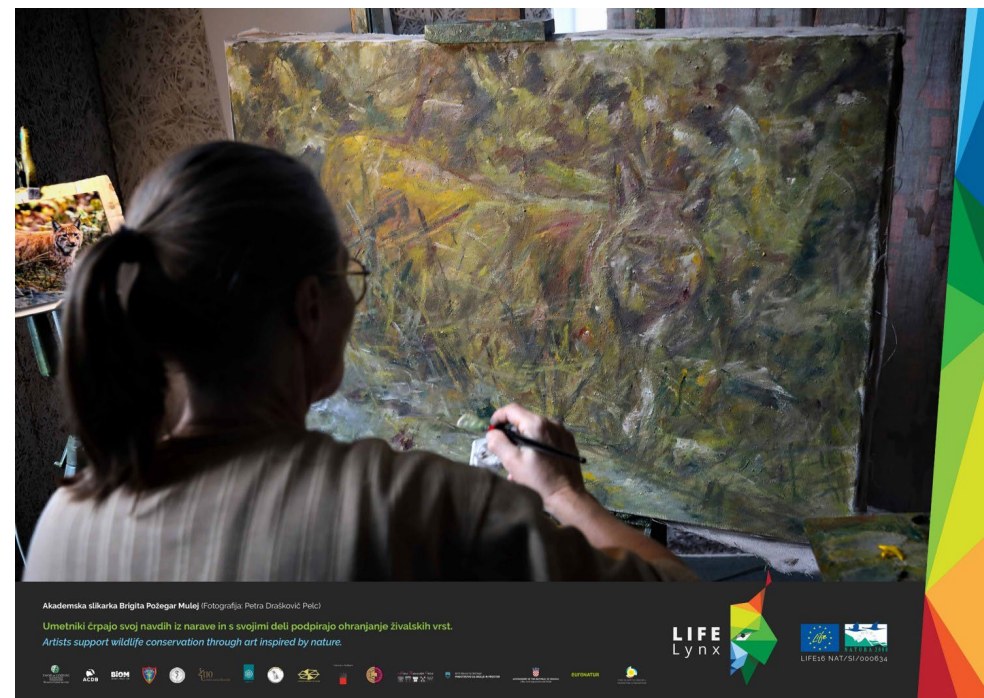
LEARNING TRAILS attract many visitors and introduce them to nature in an interesting way. In 2021, in cooperation with local organisations (the Kočevje Public Institute for Tourism and Culture, the Kočevje Hiking Society and SiDG d.o.o.), the LIFE Lynx project created a new educational trail in Slovenia. The trail has eight thematic stations with information boards in English and Slovenian, through which visitors can learn about the lynx as a species and why it is endangered. The circular trail, marked with lynx markings, starts in a forest clearing, near the “Koča pri Jelenovem studencu” cottage, and is particularly suitable for visits by families with children and school groups. It is equipped with simple didactic games where visitors can compare their skills with those of the lynx. To make it more appealing to children, we have also produced a booklet “In The Footsteps of Lynx Mala”. Children can observe the forest with Mala the lynx and Urša the researcher, learn about the tracks of different animals, look for places in the forest where the lynx might be hiding and learn a lot about the work of the researchers and the LIFE Lynx project. By answering the questions in the booklet correctly, they can earn a nice prize.



Lynx trail booklet



Booklet - Po sledih risinje Male.



Over the years, we have built successful collaborations with artists. Their artwork was transformed into posters whose messages promote the importance of lynx conservation and the opportunities the lynx presence offers for the development of creative tourism programmes.

During my time researching and learning about lynxes, I have grown to love them so much that the mention of this miraculous animal immediately brings tears to my eyes and I talk about them to everyone who comes my way.

DESA MUCK, writer and lynx ambassador



The return of the lynx to the Triglav National Park is a historic moment, because we are returning to nature something that we, humans, have taken from it.

MIHA MAROLT, Triglav National Park



ABOUT THE PROJECT

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Preventing the extinction of the Dinaric-SE Alpine lynx population through reinforcement and long-term conservation

Acronym

LIFE Lynx

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ON LINE

www.lifelynx.eu

life.lynx.eu@gmail.com

www.facebook.com/LIFELynx.eu

www.facebook.com/lifelynx.hr

www.instagram.com/life.lynx

COORDINATING BENEFICIARY



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INTERACTIVE E-LESSONS

A fun way to learn about the
lynx!

