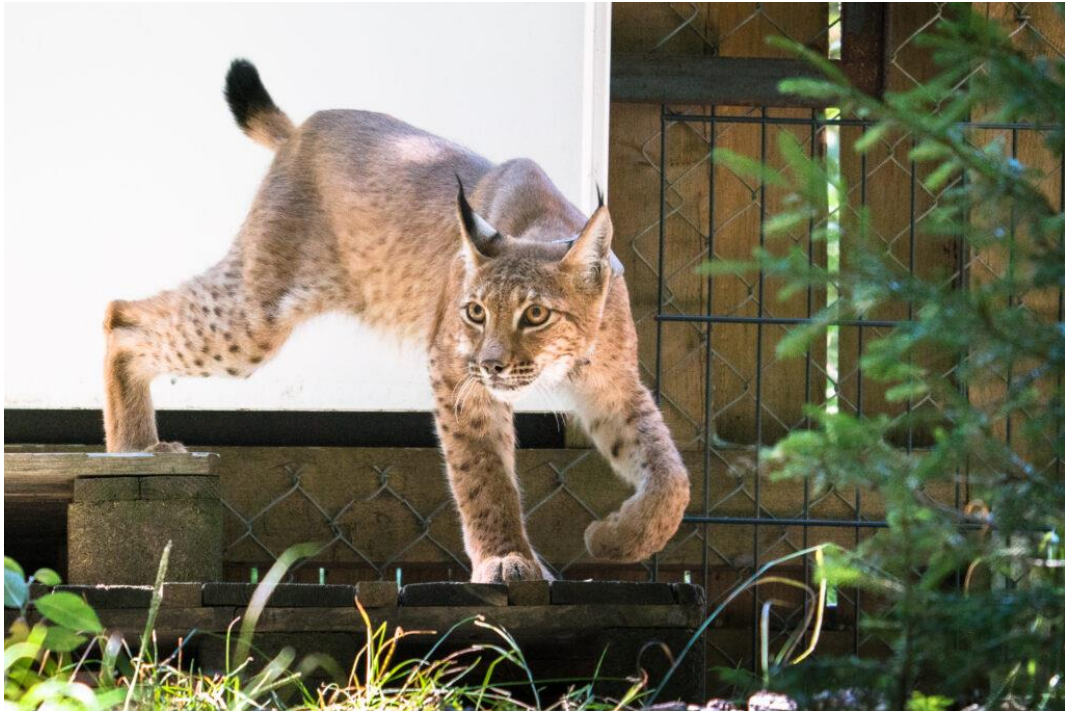


September 2026

Proceedings of the Linking Lynx Conference

Zvolen, Slovakia, 18–19 March 2026



**Nationalpark
Harz**



TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY IN ZVOLEN



alosa Stiftung

Proceedings of the Linking Lynx Conference

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Organizing a conference of this scale would not have been possible without the dedicated commitment and financial support of sponsors who share our common goals. The organizers would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Society for the Promotion of the Harz National Park and the alosa Foundation for their financial support. We also thank the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention and the Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic for their participation in the conference and their support.

Last but not least, the success of a conference depends on the active contribution of many individuals who, with great personal commitment, helped address challenges both large and small before, during, and after the event. We would like to take this opportunity to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to the success of the conference!

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Linking Lynx: A Conservation Network for the Carpathian Lynx

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Linking Lynx is a network of experts working on the conservation, monitoring and management of the Carpathian lynx. The long-term goal of the Linking Lynx network is to support the creation of a viable metapopulation of Carpathian lynx in Europe – spanning from the Carpathian Mountains to the Jura, Western Alps and the Dinaric Mountains. The network's overarching vision — grounded in the Bonn Lynx Expert Group recommendations (2021) — is to connect currently isolated western and central European subpopulations through a staged strategy of stepping-stone establishment, enhanced ecological connectivity, and ongoing genetic reinforcement. The network is governed by a Steering Committee and a coordinator, and operates through six working groups: Monitoring, Genetics, Policy, Public Engagement, Health, and Sourcing — the latter managing the three principal supply streams of orphaned lynx, *ex situ*-bred individuals from the EAZA EEP, and wild captures. A Connectivity Working Group is about to be formed during this conference to address landscape-scale dispersal barriers.

Progress since 2023 has been substantive across multiple working groups, including the publication of several Linking Lynx Protocols from the various Working Groups. Additional efforts include:

- The Genetics WG has standardised a common microsatellite marker set — critical for tracking cross-border movements and demonstrating population connectivity — and is finalising a scientific paper on metapopulation modelling for submission, alongside early-stage scenario modelling for improving genetic status of the Alpine population.
- The Monitoring WG has cooperated with the SCALP group to produce an extension of the SCALP+ distribution map of the Eurasian lynx in its Carpathian realm.
- Members of the Policy WG have been engaged in the proposal for a Concerted Action for the Eurasian lynx (including recommendations for the Carpathian lynx subspecies) under the Convention of Migratory Species.
- The Public Engagement WG used the Zvolen meeting as a starting point to complement the PE protocol with examples of good practice in public engagement from various wildlife conservation projects.
- The Health WG has convened a dedicated Cardiology Workshop (Ghent, January 2025, with six lynx and eight veterinarians from four countries) and is maintaining active exchange on cardiac health and infectious disease screening protocols across free-ranging and captive populations, with a follow-up workshop planned for April 2026.
- The Sourcing WG is coordinating the centralised distribution of *ex situ* individuals to *in situ* projects across the network's range. A more detailed report is given by the EEP coordinator Dina Gebhardt in the following section.

On the fundraising front, a LIFE Operating Grant application was unsuccessful in 2024; a COST Action proposal for Linking Lynx submitted by the University of Zagreb in October 2025 remains pending [update: proposal was rejected in May 2026]. The COST proposal would have allowed to strengthen participation of south-eastern European countries in the

network, support early-career researchers, provide funding for network activities such as conferences, Working Group meetings, and Training schools, and formalise network coordination through structured calls, registration, and reporting mechanisms.

EEP Carpathian Lynx: Population Status, Breeding Development, and Ex Situ Release Capacity

Dina Gebhardt

EAZA EEP Coordinator *Lynx lynx*, Curator, Tierpark Bern, Switzerland

The presentation provided an update on the European Ex Situ Programme (EEP) for the Carpathian lynx, covering the current population census, demographic challenges, breeding recovery, release projections, and the broader context of aging zoo populations.

Population Status and Demographics

As of the 2025 census, the Carpathian lynx EEP holds 173 individuals (96 males, 77 females) (Fig. 1.) distributed across 66 institutions — an increase from 153 individuals (87 males, 58 females, 8 unknown) in 2024. While the overall population is growing, the pronounced male skew remains a demographic concern. Of the 173 individuals, 133 are of reproductive age (78 males, 55 females), again reflecting a disproportionate male surplus.

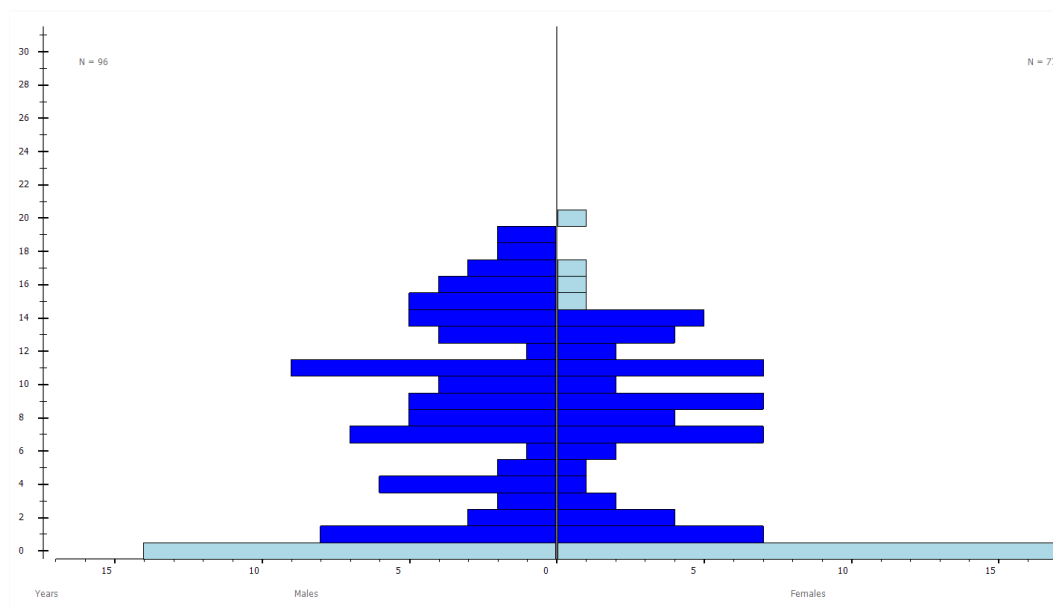


Figure 1. Age-sex pyramid of the Carpathian lynx (*Lynx lynx carpathicus*) population managed under the EEP ($n = 173$; 96 males, 77 females). Horizontal bars represent the count of individuals per age class for each sex. Shading indicates reproductive status: dark blue = reproductive age; light blue = non-reproductive age.

The age pyramid of the EEP population (Fig. 1) reveals a structural gap in breeding-age animals, resulting from a period in which active breeding was halted. This interruption — combined with the use of contraceptives in females, which require several years to reverse —

has slowed the population's recovery. Nevertheless, the trend is clearly positive: the population structure is gradually returning toward a more sustainable, pyramid-shaped age distribution.

Breeding Recovery Since 2022

Breeding was actively resumed in 2022, and since then all available breeding pairs have received breeding recommendations. The results are encouraging: births increased from 9 in 2022 to 10 in 2023, 26 in 2024, and 36 in 2025 (16 males, 20 females) (Fig. 2). The rise in female births is particularly welcome, as it helps address the long-standing male-skewed sex ratio. The population census graph shows a clear upward trajectory since 2022, following a period of decline.

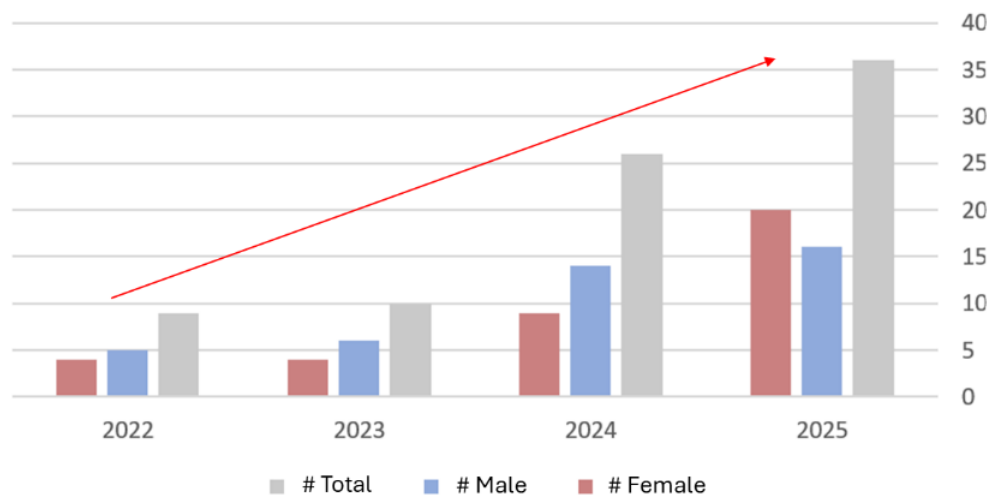


Figure 2. Annual number of births in the Carpathian lynx (*Lynx lynx carpathicus*) EEP population between 2022 and 2025. Bars represent the total number of births (grey), females (red), and males (blue) per year. Birth counts increased consistently across the four-year period.

Release Capacity Projections

Population geneticist Elmar Fiening (EAZA) modelled the EEP's capacity to supply animals for in situ release projects while maintaining a viable *ex situ* population. The analysis shows that releasing approximately 8 lynx per year is feasible and sustainable under current conditions — equating to around 40 animals over five years without compromising EEP population size. With the high fecundity observed in 2025 (~33–36 births/year), the population could grow to approximately 230 individuals over five years if releases are kept at this level. The key recommendation is to prioritise EEP population growth and demographic stability in the near term, rather than maximising short-term releases, in order to safeguard long-term supply capacity for the many ongoing and future reintroduction projects across Europe. For 2026, nine releases are planned.

Suitable Breeding Enclosures

Currently, 22 institutions have been identified as having potentially suitable breeding enclosures. Of these, 13 have been formally assessed. Breeding pairs are already in place at several facilities (e.g. Boras, Chorzow, Dortmund, Han-sur-Lesse, Harz, Karlsruhe, Langenberg, Nürnberg, Olomouc, Bayerwald), while others are awaiting new pair placements or enclosure readiness (e.g. Le Pal, Aachen, Bratislava, Auxois). Animal transfers or male exchanges are underway for some sites (e.g. Hainich) with new pairs expected by early 2026.

Context: Aging Zoo Populations as a Systemic Challenge

A recently published study by Meireles et al. (2026), analysing 774 mammal populations held in European and North American zoos (1970–2023), using Species360 data, was presented to contextualise these challenges. The study found that zoo populations are systematically aging: there are more senior individuals and fewer juveniles, reproductive activity in females is declining (largely due to contraception and restricted breeding), and population structures are shifting from healthy pyramid shapes to diamond-shaped distributions. This threatens the long-term sustainability of ex situ conservation populations globally.

For the Carpathian lynx EEP, this underlines the urgency of maintaining active breeding. Increased breeding will inevitably produce surplus individuals for which space will need to be found — through new enclosures, breeding-and-culling strategies, or coordinated transfers. These are challenges the EEP community will need to address collectively in the coming years.

Ex Situ Releases: Results 2023–2025

A total of 25 lynx from EEP institutions were evaluated for release suitability through behavioural testing and health checks. Of these, 19 were transferred to coordination or release enclosures (the remaining animals were retained as breeders within the EEP). Following a second evaluation, three were excluded (one due to health issues, two for insufficient shyness towards humans), leaving 16 *ex situ* lynx released into the wild.

Post-release monitoring shows that all 16 individuals were capable of hunting and killing wild ungulates (one additionally killed a domestic goat). Of the 16, 13 have survived to date (11 remain near the release site, 2 have dispersed), representing a survival rate of approximately 81%. Two animals died (one from distemper, one in a road accident), and one has disappeared. Three potential matings have been documented, with one confirmed successful reproduction — a significant milestone for the programme.

Reference:

Meireles J.P., Hahn-Klimroth M., Lackey L.B., van Eeuwijk N., Bertelsen M.F., Dressen S., Dierkes P.W., Abraham A.J. & Clauss M. 2026. Aging populations threaten conservation goals of zoos. PNAS 123, e2522274123. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.252227412>

Plenary Talk: Gene Flow Between Small Reintroduced Populations – Lessons Learned From the Arctic Fox Example

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The arctic fox was once abundant in the Scandinavian tundra, with around 10 000 individuals. Intensive fur harvesting driven by fashion demand in the late 18th century caused a rapid decline. Despite legal protection since 1928, continued ecosystem changes further reduced numbers, leaving only 40–60 individuals across Sweden, Norway, and Finland by the late 1990s. The population bottleneck resulted in reduced genetic variation, elevated inbreeding levels, and inbreeding depression driven by realized mutational load. Temporal genetic analysis showed no evidence of purging removing deleterious genetic variants from the population.

Because the distribution spans over three different countries, a transnational conservation programme has been implemented, in which supplementary feeding and red fox control are key management actions throughout the range. In 2025, the population was estimated to number 526 individuals across a highly fragmented distribution with low levels of natural dispersal. In addition to the key actions, a Norwegian captive breeding programme, established in 2006, releases F1 offspring from wild founders into wild subpopulations on the Norwegian side of the borders. Through post-release dispersal, however, released foxes have also established in Sweden and Finland. Although releases have increased genetic connectivity, recent analyses have shown that, despite the release of >500 foxes, inbreeding levels continue to increase in many subpopulations.

Long-term genetic studies of Swedish subpopulations offer an unprecedented opportunity to explore these processes in detail while evaluating the impact of assisted gene flow. In the southernmost Swedish subpopulation, originally founded by seven individuals, the immigration of three males released from the captive breeding programme caused a genetic rescue effect and reduced genomic inbreeding levels (FROH). However, this effect was short-lived, with genomic inbreeding levels increasing again in the F2 and F3 generations. A later study demonstrated higher levels of highly deleterious mutations in immigrant descendants compared with native arctic foxes, with the overall number of highly deleterious mutations in the population increasing after immigration. This mutational load had fitness consequences: individuals with a higher proportion of genotypes homozygous for highly deleterious variants showed reduced lifetime reproductive success, shorter lifespan, and a trend toward lower juvenile survival. However, comparisons with another Swedish subpopulation experiencing similar immigration events revealed that outcomes were context dependent and related to factors such as population history and individual characteristics.

Because fragmentation and isolation, particularly in the context of climate change, pose severe threats to the Scandinavian arctic fox, restoring genetic variation is fundamental for long-term persistence. The Arctic fox example demonstrates both positive and negative outcomes of assisted gene flow in small, inbred populations and highlights the trade-off between the benefits of genetic rescue and the risk of introducing mutational load. Important considerations include a priori evaluation of donor and recipient populations, as well as breeding strategies. Furthermore, maintaining high levels of heterozygosity through

continuous gene flow is likely essential to prevent the accumulation of realized mutational load.

LECA - Supporting the Coexistence and Conservation of Carpathian Large Carnivores Final Conference

Martin Dul'a

Mendel University in Brno / Friends of the Earth Czech Republic – Carnivore Conservation Programme, Czech Republic

The LECA Final Conference “Coexisting with Large Carnivores” was held on 16–17 March 2026 in Zvolen, Slovakia, and brought together experts, policy-makers, conservation practitioners and stakeholders involved in large carnivore conservation and management across the Carpathians and neighbouring European regions. The conference focused on strengthening transnational cooperation, sharing project outcomes and best practices, and discussing practical solutions for coexistence with wolves, lynx and brown bears. The programme addressed key topics including conflict prevention, anti-poaching measures, cross-border monitoring, ecological connectivity, stakeholder engagement and the integration of scientific evidence into policy and management. Particular attention was given to the role of the Carpathian region as an important stronghold for large carnivores and as a source of expertise for reintroduction and reinforcement initiatives elsewhere in Europe. The discussions highlighted that long-term coexistence requires robust data, stable institutional cooperation, harmonised monitoring, participatory approaches and effective transfer of project results into policy and practice. The second day of the conference included thematic field trips focused on brown bear and Eurasian lynx conservation, linking conference discussions with practical field experience.

A Preliminary IUCN Red List and Green Status Assessment of the Carpathian Lynx

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The Carpathian lynx (*Lynx lynx carpathicus*) represents one of the most important large carnivore populations in Europe and serves as the principal source population for numerous re-introduction and reinforcement programmes across Central and Western Europe. Although its conservation status and management needs have been repeatedly evaluated through international conservation frameworks and expert initiatives, including the *Action Plan for the Conservation of the Eurasian Lynx in Europe*, *Action Plan on Conservation of Large Carnivores and Ensuring Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians*, and recommendations of the Bonn Lynx Expert Group, implementation of coordinated conservation measures has remained limited. Moreover, most countries sharing the Carpathian lynx population still lack dedicated national action plans or comprehensive management frameworks for its long-term conservation. Population assessments have historically relied largely on expert-based estimates and heterogeneous monitoring approaches, often lacking methodological consistency and scientific validation. Recent systematic monitoring has demonstrated that several previously reported abundance estimates were likely inflated and that substantial uncertainty persists regarding population size, trends, and demographic status across parts of the range. Together, these limitations highlight the need for a harmonized, science-based evaluation of both the conservation status and recovery potential of the subspecies.

The ongoing IUCN Red List and Green Status of Species assessment of the Carpathian lynx draws upon information from systematic camera-trapping surveys, telemetry studies, national monitoring programmes, and international population assessments. Particular emphasis is placed on estimating the number of mature individuals, a key parameter for Red List evaluation. Given the limitations of existing international population estimates for this purpose, a standardized assessment framework has been applied, integrating demographic information, range-wide distribution data, and science-based density estimates derived from recent monitoring studies. This approach provides a more transparent and biologically meaningful basis for evaluating extinction risk and recovery status at the subspecies level. Long-term research from the Western Carpathians has further revealed substantial spatial and temporal variation in local population dynamics, highlighting the importance of standardized and scientifically robust monitoring for reliable conservation assessment and management.

The assessment identifies illegal killing, habitat fragmentation, infrastructure development, loss of ecological connectivity, and restricted gene flow as the principal threats affecting the long-term persistence of the Carpathian lynx throughout both its autochthonous and reintroduced range. Anthropogenic mortality continues to influence population dynamics in several regions, while expanding transport infrastructure and other barriers increasingly disrupt dispersal and connectivity among populations. These processes can reduce genetic exchange, constrain natural recolonisation and range expansion, and increase the vulnerability of small or isolated populations. Acting in combination, they may compromise demographic resilience, reduce adaptive potential, and ultimately limit both the long-term viability and recovery prospects of the subspecies.

Preliminary Red List analyses suggest that the autochthonous Carpathian population may qualify as Vulnerable (VU D1) if assessed separately, whereas inclusion of established reintroduced populations results in a Near Threatened (NT) assessment at the subspecies level. These findings indicate that the conservation status of the native Carpathian population may be less favourable than previously inferred from official population estimates and reporting frameworks. The assessment therefore provides additional evidence that the long-term viability of the autochthonous population warrants increased conservation attention. At the same time, it highlights the substantial contribution of reintroduced populations to the current status of the subspecies and demonstrates the importance of the Carpathian population as the principal demographic and genetic source for lynx recovery across Europe.

The preliminary Green Status assessment classified the Carpathian lynx as Largely Depleted, indicating that the subspecies remains substantially below full recovery in terms of viability, ecological functionality, and representation across its indigenous and restored range. Recovery remains incomplete and ecological functionality has not been fully restored across large parts of its historical range. Conservation impact analyses indicate that past conservation actions have been instrumental in preventing further declines and facilitating the establishment of vital reintroduced populations. Future scenarios suggest that continuation of current conservation efforts will likely maintain the present recovery status, whereas enhanced conservation measures could substantially accelerate progress towards a fully recovered and ecologically functional metapopulation.

Overall, the assessment highlights that long-term recovery of the Carpathian lynx cannot be achieved through isolated conservation actions at local or national scales. Instead, it requires coordinated transboundary conservation, scientifically robust monitoring, maintenance and restoration of ecological connectivity, and effective mitigation of human-induced mortality across the entire range of the subspecies. Successful implementation of these measures will depend on strong cooperation among governmental authorities, protected area administrations, researchers, conservation organisations, forestry and hunting sectors, and local communities. The assessment therefore reinforces the need for a shared international conservation framework capable of translating scientific knowledge into coordinated management and policy actions. As the demographic and genetic integrity of the Carpathian population continues to underpin the viability of many reintroduced populations elsewhere in Europe, conservation of the autochthonous population remains fundamental to the long-term persistence and recovery of *Lynx lynx carpathicus* throughout its range.

CMS Concerted Action for the Eurasian Lynx: Progress Report

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Background and Policy Framework

The Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx* Linnaeus, 1758) is a Palearctic felid with a large and stable boreal distribution range, but comprising four taxonomically and ecologically distinct southern subspecies that have suffered severe range contractions or remain data-deficient with respect to their conservation status (Kitchener et al. 2017; UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.31.3.3). Following a proposal co-sponsored by North Macedonia, Uzbekistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) COP14 (Samarkand, Uzbekistan, February 2024) unanimously listed *Lynx lynx* in CMS Appendix II (species with unfavourable conservation status in need of international cooperation for their conservation) and the Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus* Bureš, 1941) in Appendix I (endangered species) (UNEP/CMS/COP14/Doc.31.4.1/Rev.1). Concurrently, a Concerted Action (CA) for the Eurasian lynx was approved, co-proposed by the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group and the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, in accordance with CMS Resolution 12.28 (Rev.COP14). The CA addresses four southern subspecies — *L. l. balcanicus*, *L. l. carpathicus*, *L. l. dinniki*, and *L. l. isabellinus* — all clearly distinct from the nominotypical boreal subspecies that are assessed as Least Concern.

Concerted Action Activities and Progress

The CA comprises five activity blocks, targeting the four southern subspecies, with delivery timelines extending to the end of 2026 (UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.31.3.3).

Activity 1: Balkan Lynx Conservation Strategy

The Balkan lynx (*L. l. balcanicus*) is assessed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List and persists in a single small transboundary population at the border of North Macedonia and Albania, with potential recovery habitat extending into Montenegro, Greece, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244/99). This activity is **completed**: the Red List Assessment (RLA) and Green Status of Species (GSS) assessment have been finalised and are ready for publication on the IUCN Red List. A range-wide Conservation Strategy was developed through five online expert workshops (winter/spring 2025) and a stakeholder consultation workshop in Skopje (North Macedonia, 2–5 June 2025). The final draft was submitted to the Bern Conventions and CMS on 23 October 2025, constituting the first completed deliverable under the CA.

Activity 2: Carpathian Lynx Conservation Strategy

Lynx lynx carpathicus has autochthonous populations in the Carpathian Mountains (Romania, Slovakia/Czech Republic, Ukraine) and several reintroduced populations in Central and Western Europe. While the Romanian population appears stable, the Slovak/Czech population shows a declining trend, and the Ukrainian population may be at risk of range discontinuity. A range-wide Conservation Strategy is being developed in cooperation with the Carpathian Convention Secretariat, with RLA and GSS completed as input documents. Dates for

stakeholder workshops are to be confirmed subject to available funding; finalisation is scheduled for the third quarter of 2026.

Activity 3: Guidelines for Lynx Recovery in Central and Western Europe

The Eurasian lynx became extinct throughout Central and Western Europe in the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Reintroductions using wild-caught *L. l. carpathicus* from Slovakia have been ongoing for 50 years, but the resulting populations remain small, isolated, and increasingly affected by inbreeding. IUCN SSC Guidelines for the recovery of the Carpathian lynx across the “realm of the Carpathian lynx” — as defined by Bern Convention Recommendation No. 204 (2019) — are being developed in cooperation with the Linking Lynx Expert Group. The guidelines will cover translocation and reinforcement protocols, sourcing strategies including cooperation with the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) captive breeding programme, harmonised monitoring standards, and governance frameworks. Delivery of a draft is expected by fall 2026, contingent on completion of the Carpathian Strategy (Activity 2).

Activities 4 & 5: Baseline Surveys and Red List Assessments for Asian Subspecies

The Central Asian Turkestan lynx (*L. l. isabellinus*) and the Caucasus lynx (*L. l. dinniki*) have never been formally assessed under IUCN Red List criteria due to profound data deficiencies in both distribution and population trend. Parallel baseline surveys are underway, encompassing literature reviews, compilation of camera-trapping bycatch data, and structured questionnaire surveys conducted by local experts across Range States. Assessor training for RLA and GSS has been provided in two online workshops per subspecies. For *L. l. isabellinus*, inclusion in the CMS Central Asian Mammal Initiative (CAMI) was formally achieved at the third CAMI Range State meeting (24–26 June 2025, Tashkent, Uzbekistan), providing an additional cooperation framework. A Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment (CCVA) is planned for both subspecies. Finalisation of both activities is targeted for mid-to-end 2026.

Outlook

The CMS Concerted Action for the Eurasian lynx represents a unique instrument for transboundary conservation coordination across 35 Range States. Activity 1 has been successfully concluded; Activities 2–5 are ongoing and require a one-year extension of the implementation period until the end of 2026, as submitted to CMS COP15 (Campo Grande, Brazil, March 2026). The integration of multiple international legal instruments — CMS, the Bern Convention, the Carpathian Convention, and CMS CAMI — alongside the scientific infrastructure provided by IUCN SSC specialist groups and the Linking Lynx network, positions this Concerted Action as a model for multi-jurisdictional carnivore conservation at the continental scale.

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Ongoing and Planned Lynx Reintroduction and Reinforcement Projects: An Overview

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The overarching conservation goal for Eurasian lynx in Europe is to connect currently isolated populations through coordinated reintroduction and reinforcement efforts. Low observed heterozygosity in reintroduced western and central European populations — well below levels seen in autochthonous populations — underscores the urgency of genetic rescue. The completed LIFE Lynx Project (2017–2024) demonstrated the viability of this approach, successfully reinforcing the critically small Dinaric population and establishing a stepping-stone nucleus in the Slovenian Julian Alps. Building on this foundation, three concurrent reinforcement projects are now being conducted in Germany — in Thuringia, the Black Forest (Baden-Württemberg), and the Ore Mountains (Saxony) — with a collective target of releasing around 50 individuals by 2027. Between 2023 and 2025, a total of 18 lynx were released across these projects, comprising two wild-caught individuals from Romania, two from Switzerland, and 14 captive-born animals from the EAZA ex situ programme (EEP), coordinated through the Linking Lynx sourcing working group. Another three captive-born individuals were released for the reinforcement of existing small lynx occurrences, with two releases in the Kalkalpen National Park, Austria, and one in Tarvisio, Italy. Prior to their release, all captive-born individuals have spent several months in so-called coordination enclosures in the Wildcat Village of Hütscheroda (Thuringia) or in Karlsruhe Zoo, where medical and behavioural checks have been carried out.

Looking ahead, more releases are planned after 2027, both in the three project regions in Germany, and also in several new regions and countries. In Germany, a new project is going to start in 2026 in the Palatinate Forest with the goal to reinforce an inbred resident population. Switzerland, a pioneer of lynx reintroduction since the 1970s, now faces serious genetic deterioration in both its Alpine and Jura populations and is planning a minimum of 24 reinforcement releases from 2028. Austria is currently in a preparatory phase of a reintroduction project with the aim of releasing up to 20 lynx in the Limestone Alps around the Kalkalpen National Park from 2030, while the German federal state of North-Rhine-Westphalia has secured preparatory funding for a release of approximately 20 animals from the same year. At the southern edge of the range, the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme plans to reinforce the critically endangered *Lynx lynx balcanicus* — with only around 50 mature individuals remaining — using Carpathian lynx (*Lynx lynx carpathicus*) from 2028. Raw estimates indicate that approximately 100 individuals will be required between 2028 and 2033, to meet the needs of the ongoing and newly emerging in-situ projects. This raises the question whether the high demand for suitable lynx can be met by the available source populations, the autochthonous population in the Carpathian Mountains and the ex-situ population of the EEP.

Linking Lynx Meets EUROLYNX

Joe Premier on behalf of EUROLYNX

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Established in 2018, EUROLYNX is an initiative to investigate variation in Eurasian lynx ecology along environmental gradients or under specific conditions (Heurich et al. 2020). The original aim of EUROLYNX to promote comparative theoretical and applied research into lynx behaviour and ecology at broad scales has, over eight years, expanded to include topics like reproductive biology, monitoring optimisation, and social dimensions. The collaborative and comparative approach remains, as does the openness to all research groups who are interested in contributing, with data and expertise, to research on lynx. In 2026, EUROLYNX comprises over 50 member groups across 22 countries. Our connection to the EUROMAM-MALS family extends our network's resources even further (Urbano et al., 2021). Our procedures promote discussion and dialogue, seeking to optimise effort among members and ensure mutually beneficial research.

The lifecycle of a EUROLYNX research topic begins with a member's idea that they develop into a short proposal (a "pager"), which is distributed by email to stimulate formation of a working group, gather data providers, and delineate research questions with respect to existing efforts. Working group, i.e. pager, leaders are responsible for documenting the process, organising regular online meetings, maintaining contact with related working groups, and presenting updates at the annual EUROLYNX meetings. Once there is a consensus on a pager's results, data withdrawal is no longer allowed, and the process continues onto manuscript writing, approval, and eventual submission. These procedures are described in the 'Terms of use' each member agrees to. EUROLYNX provides infrastructure to help members collaborate on pagers, for example the website (<https://eurolynx.org>), mailing list, PostgreSQL database, cloud-based storage and tools. To date, EUROLYNX has published 11 peer-reviewed papers and enabled four doctoral students to complete their studies.

These descriptions serve as an introduction, or recap, and highlight differences between Linking Lynx and EUROLYNX. As a management focussed network that must deliver time-sensitive decisions, Linking Lynx is guided by a common vision and goals. The Linking Lynx Steering Committee and network coordinator aim to coordinate the work of the different working groups. In comparison, EUROLYNX is built in a more bottom-up structure that depends on members' engagement to produce outputs, i.e. publications and meetings. Another key difference is the focus of Linking Lynx on Carpathian lynx, for management reasons, while EUROLYNX imposes no limits. The intersection of the two networks is found in their membership, or expert pool, which overlaps strongly, and their interest in evidence-based conservation. This highlights the potential for inter-network complementarity and collaboration, since some questions generated by Linking Lynx members could be addressed within the EUROLYNX network, profiting from resources across the range of Eurasian lynx.

Inter-network collaboration has begun, with pagers addressing knowledge gaps in telemetry and camera trap monitoring, and documenting experiential knowledge derived from past reintroduction and reinforcement projects. These pagers were stimulated by management needs, making their future outputs of significant add on value for conservation of Carpathian lynx.

The next EUROLYNX meeting will take place in October 2026, offering participants the opportunity to hear research updates and discuss new ideas, including those with high utility for Linking Lynx and management. Finally, it will be important to discuss how we can optimise the inter-network collaboration further, ensuring open communications and respect for different network, individual, and research needs – with the shared goal of promoting evidence-based decision-making for Eurasian lynx conservation.

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Spatially Explicit Individual-Based Modelling Approach to Lynx Metapopulation Genetic Prognoses

Joe Premier

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The poor and deteriorating status of lynx populations, especially reintroduced populations, in Europe has been a concern of conservationists for many years. The isolation of the small populations due to high habitat fragmentation and high mortality rates puts them at risk of inbreeding and genetic drift. In 2017, this situation stimulated my doctoral studies, the aim of which was to provide management recommendations based on the results of individual-based modelling - announced at the Bonn Expert Conference. Starting with the spatially explicit individual-based model of Kramer-Schadt et al. (2005), we added neutral genetic markers (Premier et al. 2020) and later outlined our aims (Premier et al. 2021). Several key ingredients have since been developed, such as European wide habitat (Oeser et al. 2023) and road risk (Bastianelli et al. submitted) maps, and reproductive parameters (Liang et al. accepted). The research motivation remains the same, with the situation in Central Europe increasing in complexity; several projects have been completed, started or are planned, and connectivity is affected by fencing of European borders.

Currently, the inverse fitting of population distributions, demography and genetics is underway to create a starting point for simulations. Genetics will be based on simulated genotypes, initialised in an aspatial island metapopulation model before integration into the spatially explicit simulations. As ever, the research questions are 1) what effect will the reintroduction and reinforcement projects have on the populations? 2) Will a metapopulation emerge without further interventions? 3) If not, what is needed to reach favourable reference populations? To achieve this, we will consider simulation scenarios with no management interventions, various translocation frequencies of males and females from different source populations, and – based on information from the Zvolen meeting – under the assumption that various proposed projects take place.

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Connectivity in the Carpathians and Beyond

Martin Duřa

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Landscape connectivity is a key prerequisite for the long-term viability of Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) populations in Central and Eastern Europe. Although knowledge of lynx population status, spatial ecology and threats in the Carpathians has improved substantially in recent years, connectivity issues have so far received comparatively limited attention. This is particularly important from a metapopulation perspective, as several reintroduced lynx populations in Western and Central Europe remain small, isolated or demographically vulnerable, while the autochthonous Carpathian population represents one of the most important potential source populations in the region. Strengthening functional connectivity between core Carpathian areas, peripheral populations and reintroduced populations is therefore essential for maintaining gene flow, supporting natural recolonisation and reducing the risk of long-term genetic and demographic isolation.

The presentation summarised current knowledge on lynx connectivity in the Carpathians and highlights major knowledge gaps, emerging threats and future priorities. Recent assessments have provided valuable information on the conservation status, spatial distribution and ecological requirements of the Carpathian lynx population. However, data directly addressing dispersal routes, ecological corridors, permeability of fragmented landscapes and critical connectivity areas remain scarce. At the same time, new anthropogenic barriers are emerging, including security border fencing along sections of the Slovak–Ukrainian and Ukrainian–Romanian borders. These barriers may substantially reduce cross-border movements and limit gene flow in parts of the Carpathian range, particularly where individual home ranges or dispersal routes overlap national borders.

The importance of connectivity is further illustrated by the situation at the western edge of the native Carpathian lynx range, especially in the Beskydy–Kysuce region. Long-term monitoring in this area has documented the regular presence of approximately 10–12 resident individuals, but also strong interannual fluctuations in population density, high turnover rates, low persistence of adults and relatively low apparent survival. Population density estimates vary markedly across neighbouring subregions, with lower values recorded in the Beskydy and Javorníky Mountains and higher densities in the Kysuce area. These patterns suggest strong spatial heterogeneity and indicate that the western edge of the Carpathian population is exposed to substantial anthropogenic pressure. Poaching, traffic mortality, landscape fragmentation and limited dispersal into adjacent mountain ranges remain among the main constraints affecting population persistence and expansion.

GPS telemetry and systematic camera-trapping have provided detailed information on the spatial ecology and demography of lynx in the region. Between 2020 and 2025, eight individuals were fitted with GPS collars, allowing the assessment of home-range size, spatio-temporal activity, habitat use, feeding ecology, resting sites and potential corridors or critical movement sections. Home-range estimates differ between males and females and confirm the large spatial requirements of the species. Documented dispersal events in the study region involved only males, with dispersal occurring at 11–19 months of age and recorded dispersal distances ranging from 45 to 122 km. The fate of dispersing individuals varied, but

was frequently linked to human-induced mortality. These findings underline that natural connectivity is possible but highly vulnerable to landscape barriers and anthropogenic risks.

Existing initiatives such as ConnectGREEN, TRANSGREEN, SaveGREEN, ForestConnect and the Carpathian Countries Integrated Biodiversity Information System have created an important basis for identifying ecological networks and large carnivore corridors at the Carpathian scale. Recent modelling approaches have further contributed to the delineation of ecological networks for large carnivores, including models based on non-invasive monitoring data for lynx. Nevertheless, practical implementation of connectivity conservation requires closer integration of field data, telemetry, genetic information, mortality records, corridor modelling and cross-border cooperation.

A key proposed outcome is the establishment of a dedicated Connectivity Working Group within the Linking Lynx framework (add Crossreference). This group should define practical and achievable objectives, assess synergies with existing working groups and ensure coordination with the expert group preparing the Conservation Strategy for the Carpathian lynx (*Lynx lynx carpathicus*). Priority actions should include continued collection of data on lynx dispersal, identification and validation of ecological corridors, detection of critical connectivity bottlenecks, harmonisation of monitoring approaches and improved coordination between countries and institutions.

Overall, the conservation of Eurasian lynx in the Carpathians and beyond requires a shift from isolated population management towards a broader metapopulation approach. Maintaining and restoring connectivity between core and peripheral populations, as well as between autochthonous and reintroduced populations, is essential for supporting long-term population viability, enhancing gene flow and enabling natural range expansion. The Carpathians represent both a stronghold and a potential source area for lynx conservation in Europe, but their role can only be fulfilled if ecological connectivity is recognised as a central conservation priority.

Carpathian Convention: Cooperation Mechanism for Conservation of Large Carnivores in the Carpathians

Klaudia Kuraś

UN Environment Programme, Vienna Office, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, Austria

The Carpathian Mountains, spanning seven countries in central and eastern Europe, represent one of the continent's last great wilderness areas. Home to 17 million people and critical headwaters for major European rivers, the region hosts an extraordinary concentration of biodiversity and protected areas. The Carpathian Convention — initiated by Ukraine in 2001, signed in Kyiv in 2003, and entering into force in 2006 — was established to coordinate environmental protection and sustainable development across this shared eco-region. Operating through a Conference of the Parties, an Implementation Committee, and a dedicated Secretariat hosted by the UNEP Vienna Office, the Convention functions as a framework for policy coordination, a platform for joint activities, and a forum for dialogue among member states.

On biodiversity and large carnivore conservation specifically, the Convention's Working Group on Biodiversity and its Expert Group on Large Carnivores have produced key instruments including a Large Carnivore Monitoring Report (2020), an Action Plan on large carnivore conservation and ecological connectivity (2020), and a Joint Conservation Strategy for the Carpathian lynx — all currently under revision or development for adoption in 2026¹. These efforts are supported by active projects such as LECA (Supporting the Coexistence and Conservation of Carpathian Large Carnivores) and ForestConnect, which address harmonised monitoring, poaching investigation, and habitat connectivity across borders.

Looking ahead, the Convention is advancing the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework as a regional mechanism to implement the Global Biodiversity Framework, structured around eight strategic objectives ranging from habitat conservation to climate change. A major upcoming initiative is the transnational CARPATHIAN LIFE SNaP proposal — a €50 million, nine-year project (2027–2035) involving 47 partners — which places large carnivore conservation among its core focus areas. The 8th Conference of the Parties is scheduled for December 2026, with Ukraine assuming the Convention Presidency for 2027–2029.

¹ Update since the Conference: the Revision of the Large Carnivore Monitoring Report has been recently postponed to 2027

Sourcing Working Group - Summary

Kristina Vogt
KORA Foundation, Switzerland

Lynx distribution strategy for the future

Kristina Vogt (KV) presents the demand for lynx in the next 15 years as well as criteria for prioritizing in situ projects that have previously been discussed in the Sourcing WG.

The participants discuss the expected increase in demand for lynx for release in both ongoing and planned projects in the coming years. This development is anticipated to put significant pressure on the ex situ population as well as on the availability of wild-caught and orphaned individuals suitable for translocation. For 2030-2033, where the demand will be highest, compromises need to be found.

Several possible approaches to address this challenge are discussed:

- A set of prioritisation criteria could be established to guide decisions on the allocation of lynx individuals to in situ projects. Possible criteria include the biological impact of a project, demographic development of the established population, risk factors, and the financial contribution of a project to overall success.
- The creation of a new MoU regulating the collaboration within the lynx distribution platform is proposed from 2028 onwards.
- An increase in the number of lynx bred each year is discussed as a potential solution. However, this would require additional holding capacity and may raise ethical concerns regarding culling of surplus individuals. At the same time, the demographic stability and genetic integrity of the ex situ population must be maintained.
- All in situ projects are encouraged to identify and develop additional enclosure capacity, including facilities for housing post-reproductive lynx individuals or surplus males, as well as enclosures suitable for breeding animals intended for release. This commitment could also be part of the MoU.
- Another suggestion is that each project contributes by constructing its own enclosure capacity for lynx.
- It is suggested that projects provide more precise information on the number of males and females required each year to facilitate decision-making. KV will include these into a planning table.
- The possibility of slightly relaxing genetic purity requirements is raised. This would require further discussion with the Genetics WG. The recommendations of the Bonn lynx expert group and agreements with EAZA emphasize the use of pure Carpathian lynx to conserve the subspecies as an Evolutionarily Significant Unit within its realm.
- Additional sourcing options are considered, including identifying new populations for translocation (e.g. exchanges with the Dinaric population).
- Finally, the option of slowing down the overall release strategy is discussed, including reducing the number of individuals released per year in each project.

The LIFE project proposal

The importance of providing realistic numbers of lynx allocated to the planned LIFE project proposal is emphasised. The proposal must include concrete indicators and measurable progress in terms of number of animals released. Its success is critical for securing funding for ongoing and/or planned reintroduction/ reinforcement projects.

The challenges related to sourcing sufficient numbers of captive lynx for all in situ projects (LIFE project participants and others) must be addressed in order to provide reliable data. A conservative approach to estimating available individuals is recommended, especially for the females.

Decisions made

- A new MoU regulating the collaboration within the lynx distribution platform shall be developed, aligned with the existing EAZA MoU, and adopted from 2028 onwards.
- The decision process until now (recommendation from EEP coordinator and Linking Lynx coordinator followed by democratic decision within lynx distribution platform group) is deemed adequate and should continue in the future.
- In case of unsolvable conflict, a final decision about the distribution of lynx shall be taken by the Linking Lynx Steering Committee against a set of defined periodization criteria. This process will be defined as part of the new MoU.
- All in situ projects endeavor to find holders willing to harbor surplus ex situ animals. New coordination enclosures should be designed in a multi-use way to be able to serve all purposes (rewilding, breeding, holding surplus individuals).
- KV will devise a planning table with the number of lynx (females) allocated to each in situ project (LIFE project partners and other projects) from each source and for each year. This table will serve to monitor sourcing success, define key indicators for the LIFE proposal, and identify shortages in lynx supply.

Next meetings

In summer 2026, a joint meeting with the Genetics WG should be organized to discuss practical questions and possible tools for tracking genetic relatedness of released animals and to discuss ways to optimize the creation of new EEP breeding pairs suitable for release.

In 2026, another Sourcing WG meeting on management of surplus individuals (building additional multi-use/coordination enclosures, finding holders willing to take post-reproductive lynx, breed & cull) should be organized

Genetics Working Group – Summary

Gregor Rolshausen

Centre for Wildlife Genetics, Senckenberg Research Institute, Germany

A roadmap for the anticipated Lynx metapopulation in Central Europe

The envisioned lynx metapopulation in Central Europe is currently still in a formative state. Gene flow between the six core demes is just starting to establish with very few dispersers between the Harz Mountains and northern Bavaria, as well as occasional dispersers between the upper Rhine Valley and the western Alps. The eastern Alps and the Dinaric region remain largely isolated. We found that the current deme sizes and near-future projected migration rates are far too low to reach the long-term conservation goal (i.e. effective Size > 500) within a reasonable timeframe of ~ 50 generations. Moreover, local deme sizes, particularly in stepping stones, are not sufficient to counteract inbreeding dynamics and the continuous erosion of genetic diversity.

Near-future goals are thus (i) to mitigate dispersal dynamics and establish migration between demes, and (ii) to reinforce local genetic diversity in demes to avoid inbreeding depression. Implementing these goals requires ongoing distribution of captive-bred or wild-caught individuals into demes, and/or translocations between demes, in order to advance local effective sizes and connectivity. It is crucial that reinforcement decisions are based on a long-term strategy, involving captive-breeding programs and ongoing genetic monitoring. In addition to providing sufficient numbers of individuals to avoid pulsed releases that are followed by long periods of isolation, breeding programs need to implement a genetic distribution strategy in order to avoid mating between close relatives and aim at increasing the effective size of the ex situ population. In accordance with genetic monitoring of within-deme diversity, released lynx should be selected for average kinship minimisation in the respective demes. Moreover, reinforcement should ideally promote philopatry – particularly in small, newly established demes – via resource-consuming gradual release strategies including an acclimatisation period. Yet, the optimisation of release strategies warrants further investigation.

Moreover, because of limited capacities and distribution trade-offs, assisted migration can only function as a transitional remedy, whereas long-term stability hinges on inherent growth rates and vital genetic exchange in a metapopulation framework. Here, we caution against diverting future resources towards new introductions at the expense of ongoing reinforcement of existing demes, and highlight the importance of mitigating dispersal barriers and threats.

Monitoring Working Group – Summary

Kirsten Weingarth-Dachs¹, Anja Molinari-Jobin²

¹ *Habitat-Wildlife-Services, Austria*

² *KORA Foundation, Switzerland*

The Monitoring Working Group convened on 18 March 2026 in Zvolen, bringing together experts from across the Carpathian and Balkan lynx regions to discuss current developments in Eurasian lynx monitoring, data harmonisation and future reporting standards. The session was co-led by Kirsten Weingarth-Dachs and Anja Molinari-Jobin and focused on strengthening methodological coherence across populations and countries.

The meeting opened with a presentation by J. Ziegler on a newly emerging lynx initiative in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, which aims at a potential reintroduction of lynx by 2030. The project is already supported by a broad stakeholder coalition, including public authorities, the hunting sector and Zoo Wuppertal, where breeding lynx may play an important role. Initial political support and financing pathways are already under preparation, marking this as a highly promising initiative to help the lynx expand westwards.

A major focus of the session was the progress of the SCALP+ Monitoring Reports, presented by Anja Molinari-Jobin. The discussion highlighted the importance of broadening the geographic scope of future reports by including countries and regions with still incomplete but highly relevant datasets, particularly Poland, Ukraine, Romania and the wider Carpathian region. Additional future inclusion of Luxembourg and the Netherlands was also discussed. Participants from Ukraine confirmed that data from the Policia region can be contributed, which significantly strengthens the eastward continuity of the dataset.

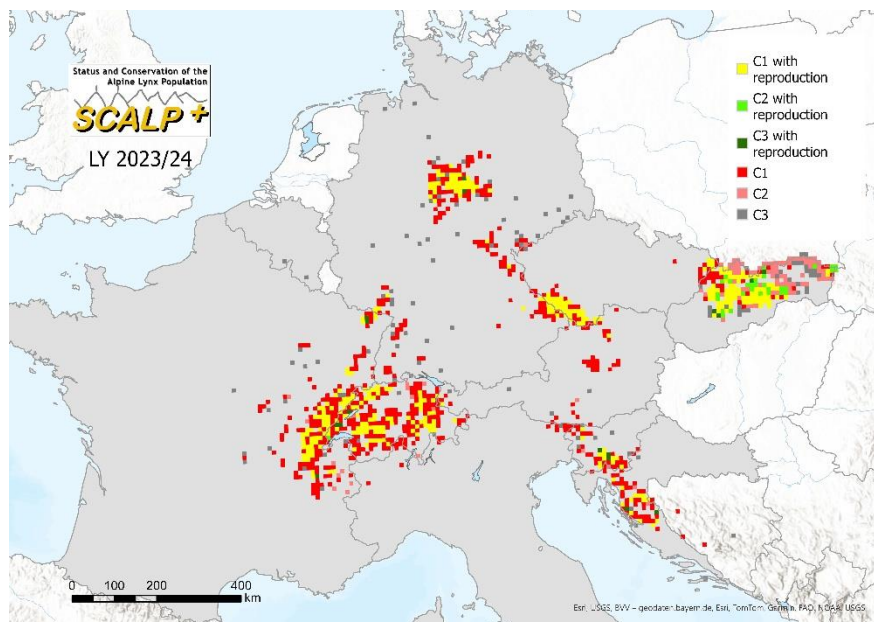


Figure 1. The most recent SCALP+ map showing lynx distribution in Central Europe 2023/2024.

Several improvements to the SCALP+ reporting structure were agreed upon. In addition to the established distribution maps, participants recommended the inclusion of a dedicated ta-

ble summarising lynx releases and translocations, thereby improving the interpretability of recolonisation dynamics. The group also stressed the need to harmonise acknowledgements and country-level data contributions to ensure transparency and equitable visibility of all partners. A further methodological discussion addressed the possible inclusion of reproduction data, which remains challenging under current SCALP criteria due to insufficient photographic evidence and uneven documentation standards.

A timeline when the countries will provide updated datasets for the upcoming SCALP+ 2024/2025 reporting cycle, was agreed on. Country coordinators were reminded to carefully revise acknowledgements and metadata entries.

The second major thematic block focused on monitoring harmonisation across scales, covering intra-population, inter-population, connectivity and cross-border monitoring. M. Dula and J. Kubala presented progress from the LECA project, in which monitoring harmonisation represents a key pillar. The discussion underlined the need for a common terminology framework, clearer definitions of monitoring intensity levels and stronger alignment of field effort across populations. Existing protocols, particularly those from the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme (BLRP), were identified as highly relevant references that should be incorporated into future Linking Lynx standards.

A key outcome of the meeting was the strong support for LECA's recommendations on lynx monitoring harmonisation, alongside the decision to develop a dedicated Linking Lynx protocol on monitoring harmonisation. Particular emphasis was placed on the unresolved challenge of monitoring dispersing and migrating individuals, which will require close coordination with the Connectivity Working Group.

Looking ahead, the group identified several priority topics for the next meetings, including camera trap study design and modelling approaches, occupancy modelling, terminology harmonisation and structured data exchange for migrating lynx. These topics are expected to form the methodological backbone for the next phase of cross-population monitoring integration within the Linking Lynx framework.

Health Working Group – Summary

Magda Sindičić

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Croatia

As cardiac pathologies have been identified as one of the most significant threats to inbred lynx populations, the Health group devoted special attention to this issue. In addition to guidelines for in-situ and ex-situ health surveillance of lynx, and protocols for clinical examination and anaesthesia, protocols for cardiac screening in live animals and a post-mortem heart dissection protocol were prepared. Furthermore, capacity building for cardiac screening was identified as a key step towards better lynx health screening, so Laurens von Mulders and Jonas Spruyt organised a cardiology workshop. Eight doctors of veterinary medicine from four countries were trained by Laurent Locquet, Dipl. ECVIM-Ca, in Ghent, Belgium (30–31 January 2025). The second Lynx Cardiology Workshop will take place at WOW Safari in Thoiry, France, on 3–4 April 2026.

During the workshop, the latest results of lynx health monitoring and research in the Dinaric, Carpathian, and German populations were presented, and the group discussed pathogens that were detected, including parvovirus, calicivirus, FeLV, herpesvirus, and one case of ocular infection with *Chlamydia felis*. Health monitoring of animals included in the breeding programme was also discussed, and activities related to lynx health monitoring within the new LIFE proposal currently in preparation were presented.

Priorities for future action have been agreed:

- Development of guidelines for handling animals that test positive for high- and intermediate-priority pathogens.
- Capacity building for veterinarians and staff involved in the zoo breeding programme.
- Capacity building in clinical examination and sampling for veterinarians, biologists, and staff involved in lynx capture.
- Retrospective study of morbidity and mortality in Eurasian lynx in zoos.
- Analysis of health issues in wild lynx requiring intervention, and development of corresponding guidelines.
- Update of the clinical examination protocol.

Public Engagement Working Group – Summary

Sybille Wölfl¹, Moritz Klose²

¹ *Luchs Bayern e.V., Germany*

² *NABU International Foundation for Nature, Berlin, Germany*

Here we present the results of the Public Engagement Working Group workshop during the Linking Lynx meeting in Zvolen in March 2026. The objective was to discuss and compile examples of good practice and case studies of public engagement from various large carnivore conservation projects. This should serve as the first step towards creating a supplementary section for the public engagement guidelines that were drafted in 2024.

The following criteria were used to select the most appropriate public engagement (PE) methods for all stages of a lynx translocation or reintroduction project. These criteria can also be used to evaluate the success or failure of public engagement methods.

- **Stakeholder Participation and Representation**
e.g. high participation rates in meetings, representation from all key stakeholder groups versus low attendance or participation, dominance by a single group.
- **Knowledge and Awareness**
e.g. increased understanding of species ecology and threats, awareness of depredation mitigation tools versus persistent misunderstanding of lynx ecology and behaviour.
- **Attitude and Perception Change**
e.g. improved attitudes and increased tolerance, reduced fear and misinformation, measured through surveys or interviews versus negative attitudes persist or worsen, increase in hostility toward lynx or conservation agencies, continued spread of myths or misinformation.
- **Behavioural Change**
e.g. adoption of livestock protection measures, considerate recreational activities in nature, reduced illegal hunting versus stakeholders refuse to adopt recommended practices, continued or increased illegal killing.
- **Conflict Reduction**
e.g. reduced human-human conflict due to game hunting or conflict due to livestock depredation versus escalating tensions between key stakeholder groups and conservation agencies.
- **Trust in conservation institutions and scientists**
e.g. willingness to collaborate with conservation programs, participation in monitoring versus distrust toward authorities or scientists, communities disengage from programs.
- **Long-Term Sustainability of Engagement**
e.g. PE program continues due to integration into conservation policy versus engagement stops once the project funding ends, programs fail to become institutionalized.

Public engagement is a critical component of conservation success, particularly for the conservation of large carnivores, which depends heavily on human tolerance. Having clear success and failure criteria helps us to evaluate the effectiveness of engagement methods.

Methods of engagement are considered successful when they change attitudes, behaviours

and relationships in ways that ultimately improve coexistence and support viable lynx populations. This means that public engagement is a means of achieving conservation goals, rather than being a goal in itself. Linking engagement outcomes to ecological indicators such as population stabilisation or growth, improved habitat connectivity, and reduced mortality ensures that public engagement programmes actually contribute to species recovery.

Policy Working Group – Summary

Manfred Wölfl¹ & Jochen Krebühl²

¹ *Sächsisches Landesamt für Umwelt, Landwirtschaft und Geologie, Fachstelle Wolf, Germany*

³ *Stiftung Natur und Umwelt Rheinland-Pfalz, Germany*

Looking back at the policy work carried out so far, it was noted that both the Carpathian Conservation Strategy and the IUCN Technical Guidelines for the Conservation of Carpathian Lynx are to be finalised by 2026, including endorsement by the relevant conventions. Both documents serve as an international convention- and EU-related basis, providing legitimisation for key actors in the range countries and member states. At the same time, they act as facilitators for concrete action at the national (range countries) and regional level (federal states, provinces).

The upcoming implementation of these strategies was identified as the major challenge ahead. It was recommended that National Action Plans should be developed on the basis of the Carpathian Conservation Strategy in order to create ownership among the countries involved, with support from the Carpathian Convention. Interreg was named as a possible instrument for cooperation and funding, and the discussion also touched on whether and how the EU Restoration Law could serve as a political pledge for the lynx (in spite of focussing more on habitat types than species).

As next steps, it was agreed to inform the EU Commission about the Strategy and the Guidelines, and to explore whether and how the approach could be extended from the Carpathians to the Alps. As an additional topic, the need to build political commitment for the meta-population concept was highlighted, along with the importance of developing political support for its implementation in order to connect isolated lynx populations.

Connectivity Working Group – Summary

Martin Dul'a

Mendel University in Brno / Friends of the Earth Czech Republic – Carnivore Conservation Programme, Czech Republic

The first meeting of the Connectivity Working Group, newly established following the meeting in Zvolen and the presentation focused on connectivity, was dedicated to discussing the scope of the group and identifying its main thematic priorities.

During this initial meeting, the participants jointly defined several key directions in which the working group should develop. These include, for example, habitat, spatial and genetic connectivity, barriers and ecological corridors, traffic mortality, and related aspects of landscape permeability and population connectivity.

The next step will be to organize a follow-up meeting aimed at refining and clearly defining the thematic focus of the working group. This meeting should also serve to formulate specific objectives, milestones and measurable outputs, as well as to prepare background materials for the group's web presentation and future activities. In addition, the structure of the working group should be further developed, including the identification of members, thematic sub-groups and potential group leaders.

Final Discussion

Nicole Bosshard
KORA Foundation, Switzerland

The long-term goal of the Linking Lynx network is to support the creation of a viable meta-population of Carpathian lynx in Europe – spanning from the Carpathian Mountains to the Jura, Western Alps and the Dinaric Mountains. The final discussion centred on the question “Where do we want to be in 5 / 10 / 20 years?” and on identifying shared challenges and priorities for the future.

While each Linking Lynx Working Group had already formulated an objective for collaboration within their group for the next 5 years in the frame of the COST proposal (submitted in October 2025), these objectives were of a more operational nature. The discussion showed that concrete objectives and activities for implementing the Linking Lynx long-term goal are still lacking. Participants emphasised the importance of setting realistic and measurable objectives while maintaining an ambitious long-term vision. While participants reflected on mid-term objectives and long-term perspectives, there was broad agreement that the next phase should focus on translating existing concepts and strategies (such as the CMS Concerted Action or Bonn recommendations) into practical implementation. Participants emphasised the need for a consolidated approach that links strategic objectives with specific actions, making them more tangible for stakeholders and decision makers and facilitating the implementation of these actions across different regions and projects. The Upper Rhine Conference was mentioned as a practicable regional example for transferring strategy to implementation.

Furthermore, future challenges were discussed. The question was raised as to the extent to which ecological connectivity can realistically be restored in the near future. The discussion also emphasised the importance of strengthening collaboration with infrastructure-related sectors, as they play a crucial role in determining connectivity opportunities, and with law enforcement authorities. The availability of lynx founder individuals for reintroduction projects was identified as a big challenge, particularly in relation to the timing and demands of multiple reintroduction/reinforcement initiatives.

Appendix I – List of participants

Surname	Name	Country	WG	Attendance¹
Anders	Ole	DE	Sourcing	In person
Baránková	Lucie	CZ	MOE CZ	In person
Bauduin	Sarah	FR	OFB	Online
Belotti	Elisa	CZ	Public Engagement	In person
Blum-Rérat	Catriona	DE	Sourcing	In person
Bosshard	Nicole	CH	Sourcing	In person
Brady	Deborah	GB	Sourcing	In person
Breese	Kolja	DE	Monitoring	Online
Breitenmoser	Christine	CH	Genetics	In person
Breitenmoser	Urs	CH	Policy	In person
Bürki	Roland	CH	Sourcing	In person
Catzel	Li	GB	Sourcing	In person
Cerne	Rok	SI	Connectivity	In person
Cherepanyn	Roman	UA	Monitoring	Online
Donato	Bart	GB	Sourcing	Online
Drouet-Huguet	Nolwenn	FR	Genetics	Online
Duľa	Martin	CZ	Monitoring/Connectivity	In person
Dykyj	Ihor	UA	Monitoring	Online
Farny	Sandrine	FR	Public Engagement	Online
Fischer	Dominik	DE	Health	Online
Fuglíková	Jana	CZ	MOE CZ	In person
Gazzola	Andrea	IT	Sourcing	In person
Gebhardt	Dina	CH	Sourcing	Online
Gerngross	Peter	AT	Sourcing/Connectivity	In person
Grama	Horatiu	RO	Health	Online
Heider	Christoph	DE	Sourcing	Online
Helluy	Manon	FR	Sourcing	Online
Hertfelder	Micha	DE	Genetics	In person
Hoxha	Bledi	AL	Monitoring	In person
Hucht-Ciorga	Ingrid	DE	Sourcing/Monitoring	Online
Junkova-Vymyslicka	Pavla	DE	Sourcing	In person
Klebelsberg	Eva	DE	Sourcing	In person
Klose	Moritz	DE	Public Engagement	Online
Klüssendorf	Louisa	DE	Sourcing	In person
Kopaniak	Linda	DE	Monitoring	In person
Koval	Nelia	UA	Monitoring	Online
Krebuehl	Jochen	DE	Policy	In person
Krofel	Miha	SI	Monitoring	Online
Krojerová	Jarmila	CZ	Genetics	In person
Kubala	Jakub	SK	Sourcing	In person
Lavrič	Bojana	SI	Connectivity	In person
Leschinski	Lisa	DE	Sourcing	In person

Marocco	Ilenia	DE	Monitoring	In person
Middelhoff	Lilli	DE	Monitoring	Online
Mihelič Oražem	Vesna	SI	Public Engagement	In person
Mináriková	Tereza	CZ	Monitoring	In person
Mirzoev	Dagmar	CZ	MOE CZ	In person
Molinari-Jobin	Anja	IT	Monitoring/Sourcing/Connectivity	In person
Norén	Karin	SE	Genetics	In person
Nowak	Carsten	DE	Genetics	In person
Pagon	Nives	SI	Connectivity	In person
Pfeiffer	Zoe	DE	Monitoring	In person
Port	Markus	DE	Sourcing	In person
Premier	Joe	DE	Connectivity	In person
Reshetylo	Ostap	UA	Monitoring	Online
Roller	Marco	DE	Health	Online
Rolshausen	Gregor	DE	Genetics	In person
Sever	Maja	SI	Public Engagement	In person
Šíma	Jan	CZ	MOE CZ	In person
Sin	Teodora	RO	Sourcing	In person
Sindicic	Magda	HR	Health	Online
Skrbinsek	Tomaz	SI	Genetics	Online
Stephan	Audrey	FR	Sourcing/Connectivity	Online
Sterrer	Ursula	CH	Monitoring	Online
Táám	Branislav	SK	Health	Online
Thiel-Bender	Christine	DE	Sourcing	In person
Vogel	Katrin	DE	Sourcing	Online
Vogt	Kristina	CH	Sourcing	In person
von Arx	Manuela	CH	Public Engagement	Online
Weingarth-Dachs	Kirsten	AT	Monitoring	In person
Weyer	Nora	AT	Sourcing	Online
Wölfl	Manfred	DE	Policy	In person
Wölfl	Sybille	DE	Public Engagement	In person
Ziegler	Jörn	DE	Monitoring	In person
Zlatanová	Diana	BG	Monitoring	Online
Zschille	Jana	DE	Monitoring	Online

¹Lists only participants of plenary sessions. Additional online participants of Working Group Workshops are not listed.