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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

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**PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO APPENDIX II:
LISTING BALKAN LYNX (*LYNX LYNX SSP. BALCANICUS*) IN
THE APPENDIX II OF THE BERN CONVENTION**

- Proposal by Albania -

*Document
prepared by
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responsible for its content*

JUSTIFICATION PAPER FOR LISTING BALKAN LYNX (*LYNX LYNX SSP. BALCANICUS*) IN THE APPENDIX II OF THE BERN CONVENTION

THE STATUS OF BALKAN LYNX

According to the IUCN Red List Criteria, the Balkan lynx is classified as Critically Endangered CR under criterion D as the number of mature individuals is estimated to be less than 50 (Melovski et al., 2015). The total size of the population is estimated to be 27-52 independent (adult and subadult) lynx, corresponding to about 20-39 mature individuals. The continuous presence of the Balkan lynx is so far only confirmed for Macedonia and Albania in two separate locations, respectively in Mavrovo National Park and surroundings in “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Munella mountain and surroundings in Albania. Therefore, the population is considered to consist of two subpopulations. Recent camera-trapping surveys have confirmed the presence of at least two individuals in western Kosovo*. The presence of the Balkan lynx in Montenegro and Greece is presently regarded as unlikely.

In all range countries, illegal killing of lynx and their prey species, decreasing prey populations (roe deer, Balkan chamois & brown hare) due to unsustainable wildlife management and illegal killing and habitat degradation and fragmentation are identified the most relevant threats to the survival of Balkan lynx (Breitenmoser et al., 2008; Ivanov et al., 2008).

BALKAN LYNX AS A SUBSPECIES OF THE EURASIAN LYNX

Genetic analyses comparing Balkan lynx with lynx populations including the Carpathian lynx which is the closest population prove its distinctiveness as a different subspecies (Breitenmoser et al., 2008; Gugolz et al., 2008). The genetic difference to the Carpathian lynx is most likely a result of a different post-glacial radiation. The Balkan lynx was first described as a separate subspecies in 1941 by the Bulgarian zoologist Ivan Buresh (Buresh, 1941). The name that Buresh gave to the Balkan lynx was *Lynx lynx balcanicus*. Later on, the Serbian mammologist Đorđe Mirić conducted more thorough research, mainly focusing on morphometric skull measurements (Mirić, 1978). Mirić changed the subspecies name of the Balkan Lynx to *Lynx lynx martinoi* with no further references to Buresh (1941). According to the International Code for Zoological Nomenclature, the first given name of the taxon is valid for scientific use (Kryštufek, 2013).

Lynx lynx balcanicus was assessed to be a valid subspecies of the Eurasian lynx by the IUCN Cat Classification Task Force (Kitchener et. al., in prep.) and was integrated into the IUCN Red List as a Critically Endangered subspecies of the Eurasian lynx in November 2015 (Melovski et al., 2015).

BALKAN LYNX IN THE BERN CONVENTION

Due to the transboundary range and conservation status of the Balkan lynx, the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) is of particular importance, given the Convention’s aims of conserving (sub)species which are endangered and require the cooperation of several countries for their conservation. Albania, “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Montenegro and Greece are all Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention and the Convention continues to be the pre-eminent forum for international cooperation regarding the Balkan lynx, providing an appropriate overarching framework for the elaboration and implementation of further measures by the various (current and potential) range states.

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) are classified as Least Concern (LC) in the IUCN Red List on the species level (Breitenmoser et al., 2015) and their population in Europe alone (without Russia) is estimated at around 9000-10,000 individuals (Breitenmoser et al., 2015; Chapron et al., 2014). While,

*All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

in the past, Eurasian lynx populations have been decimated and their range has been largely restricted within the European continent (Breitenmoser, 1998), currently their conservation status across most of the continent looks favourable and their native populations are recovering and expanding (Chapron et al., 2014; Kaczensky et al., 2013). In some countries, such as Sweden, Finland and Romania, the lynx can be hunted under derogations of their protection, while in others (Estonia, Norway) lynx are considered game species, hunted within defined quotas and seasons (Breitenmoser et al., 2015; Kaczensky et al., 2013). In addition to this, several re-introduction initiatives in Central and Western Europe have restored parts of previously extinct populations (Linnell et al., 2009). The Balkan lynx is the only population out of the five native Eurasian lynx populations (the others being the Scandinavian, Karelian, Baltic and Carpathian) to not have shown any sign of recovery and their situation remains critical (Chapron et al., 2014; Melovski et al., 2015). Given that Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*) is recognised as a separate subspecies of the Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) with a Critically Endangered IUCN Red List status and due to their particular and different set of issues with comparison to the conservation status of Eurasian lynx overall, the merits of including Balkan lynx in Appendix II of the Bern Convention have been highlighted by representatives of the range countries and experts during an International Balkan lynx Symposium in 2015, organised under the auspice of the Bern Convention (von Arx and Breitenmoser, 2015). The strict protection status deriving from an Appendix II listing, would be much more in line with the precarious conservation status of the Balkan lynx than the Appendix III regime which presently applies to all Eurasian lynx.

Inclusion of the Balkan lynx in Appendix II also appears well justified by the terms of Standing Committee Recommendation No. 56 (1997), which sets out guidelines to be taken into account by Parties when proposing and adopting amendments of Appendix II. According to these, account will be taken, *inter alia*, of “the category of threat,” and of “whether the species is declining in the central area of its distribution, or ... is only threatened in the border of its range,” while further account is taken of the “ecological role of the species, such as their position or role in the food chain.” Whereas Parties are recommended to “confine, as a general rule,” the flora and fauna proposed for listing “to the taxonomic level of the species,” exceptions may be made “with very good conservation reasons that must be clearly stated.” The preceding analysis, in combination with these guidelines from Recommendation No. 56, clearly indicate that the Balkan lynx is eligible for listing in Appendix II.

Furthermore, there are several precedents for such listing. The Convention’s appendices have included taxa at the subspecies level from their outset. Currently, eight subspecies are specifically listed under Appendix II, and further subspecies figure on Appendices I (flora) and III (Trouwborst in prep.). There is also precedent for the special situation whereby a subspecies belonging to an Appendix III species is itself listed in Appendix II, which would be the envisaged scenario for Balkan and Eurasian lynx. An example is the ringed seal (*Phoca hispida*), listed in Appendix III, but with two subspecies listed in Appendix II, namely Saimaa ringed seal (*Phoca hispida saimensis*) and Ladoga ringed seal (*Phoca hispida ladogensis*). Another example is chamois, with *Rupicapra rupicapra* in Appendix III and *Rupicapra rupicapra ornata* in Appendix II (Trouwborst in prep.).

Given the circumstances with regard to the delicate conservation status of the Balkan lynx, the urgency for transboundary collaboration to safeguard this subspecies, and taking into account the existing precedents within the Bern Convention, we propose to include the Balkan lynx, *Lynx lynx balcanicus* in Appendix II of the Bern Convention.

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