

EXTINCTION OF WILD SPECIES IN MONTENEGRO

Balkan lynx: A cat whose path we crossed

Nature is more than a good example that everything is connected to each other. The better quality of human life is largely "provided" by nature and the quality of nature is best described by the flora and fauna in it. Diversity ensures the stability of ecosystems, and thus our survival. Today we have a case when the wildlife is in a very bad condition due to habitat loss, poaching and hunting. According to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the "Report on Life on the Planet" for 2020 shows that during the 46 years (1970-2016) there was a staggering decline in the animal population by 68 percent.

Author: Jelena VUKAŠINOVIĆ

Do you know the story about Schrödinger's cat? It is a thought experiment performed by famous German physicist Erwin Schrödinger that illustrates an apparent paradox of quantum superposition. In the thought experiment, a hypothetical cat may be considered simultaneously both alive and dead as a result of being linked to a random subatomic event that may or may not occur.

This most known paradox could be easily dubbed Schrödinger's Balkan lynx. Especially, in Montenegro. The Directorate for Forestry and Hunting at the Ministry of Agriculture and Association of Hunter's claim there is a lynx in the territory of Montenegro.

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.

Nevertheless, Center for Bird Protection and Research and NGO Wild Life Montenegro give the opposite side of the story.

Rare animal even in the past...

The Balkan lynx existed in Montenegro in the past. **Pavle Rovinski**, Russian historian, who spent a considerable part of his life in Montenegro (19th century) mentioned that during hunting “sometimes a lynx is found”, meaning it is rarity to encounter the lynx. **Firer**, the first ornithologist, researcher from Austria mentions that the heir to the throne Danilo, who replaced the King Nikola after his death, showed him the fur from a lynx in the Cetinje Palace, caught in the Sutorman area in 1890. Also, in one of the hunting campaigns for the members of the royalty, including Danilo, in November of 1894, in the mountain of Bjelasica, a strong example of the lynx was killed. **Jovan Erdeljanović**, Serbian ethnologist mentions that the lynx existed in the area of Bratonožić.

Cruel reality of the Balkan lynx

The least numerous subspecies of the Eurasian lynx is the Balkan lynx. Due to the small number and high risk of extinction, this

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.

species is on the IUCN Red List (global list with data on the conservation status of the endangered species).



Photo 1. Balkan lynx, photo by Dime Melovski (MES - Macedonian Ecological Society)

Today, the presence of the Balkan lynx in our country is recorded only in border areas in rare occasions. That is not commendable according to the non-governmental organization Wildlife Montenegro.

- As an animal that needs a large area, we can never look at it from a national point of view as a small country because we are only a

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.



small part of the total population that has already been calculated to be small. The Balkan lynx is defined as a critically endangered species. This means that it is a species whose population has been reduced to only about 50 adults. When it comes to endangerment factors, they are clearly defined for the Balkan lynx: naturally small population size, limited availability of prey, habitat degradation and poaching – claim representatives from this NGO.

In the period from November 2014 to June 2018, the Center for the Bird Protection and Research conducted four independent seasons of Balkan lynx monitoring in the areas of the Prokletije National Park as well as in the border areas between Montenegro and Kosovo, and Montenegro and Albania using photo traps. During each season, the position of the photo traps was changed in coordination with colleagues from Kosovo and Albania. Unfortunately, during the entire monitoring period, the presence of the Balkan lynx was not confirmed in Montenegro.

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.



Photo 2. *Biologist Aleksandar Perović from Centre for Bird Protection putting cameras to record presence of the Balkan lynx*

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.



Photo 3. Camera trap positioned to record the Balkan lynx

The Directorate for Forestry and Hunting denies that the Balkan lynx was exterminated in our country and says that their habitats are in the mountain areas of Prokletije and Hajla.

Recent research with international partners (EuroNatur, the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Commission for the Conservation of Species of Large Carnivores) speaks of findings of this species in Prokletije and Hajla, which supports the fact that we

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.



have systemically, and above all by passing the Law on Weapons, largely suppressed all destructive activities against wildlife - said the Directorate.

However, Aleksandar Perović, a graduate biologist - mammologist from CZIP, who led this research in Montenegro, said that there was no statement that the presence of lynx was proven in the territory of Hajla, weather in the Montenegrin or Kosovo side.

- This news was sensationally published in the media and was never substantiated. For the sake of truth, in the territory of Kosovo, through the presence of photo traps, the presence of an individual of the Balkan lynx was proven in the Sharr Mountain, a mother with youngsters near Decani and an individual in the area of Boge that gravitates towards Montenegro. There is a possibility that a smaller part of the territory held by this lynx is in Montenegro, but that has not been officially confirmed - said Perović.

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.



Photo 4. Centre for Bird Protection team talks to local people

The Hunting Association of Montenegro, based on available data, records the presence of lynx.

- There are areas of his constant presence and areas where he resides occasionally. We cannot speak for sure about its numerous situation in Montenegro, we can determine that these are rare specimens and that their number is very small - said the Hunting Association.

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.

On the occasion of this statement, the NGO WildLife asked why the institutions are not doing anything to increase their number.

- If the conclusion is that the number is small, why the institutions do nothing to build conditions for the increase in the number of this species, ie. to provide basic ecological conditions in which these animals would reproduce (peace, habitat and sufficient food). We suggest starting with the legal legislation, because how much we care about the future of this species is shown by the fact that it is not recognized by the Law on Hunting, nor is it on the List of legally protected animal species - said Wildlife Montenegro.

Poaching until the disappearance of game

As poaching is a endangerment factor for the lynx, so is it for all other game.

While the Directorate says that poaching is sporadically present in Montenegrin hunting grounds and is not represented to the extent that would endanger any species of wildlife in the wild, the NGO Wildlife says that hunting pressure leads to local extinction or very low appearance of roe deer and chamois in certain areas where one would expect them in greater numbers.

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.

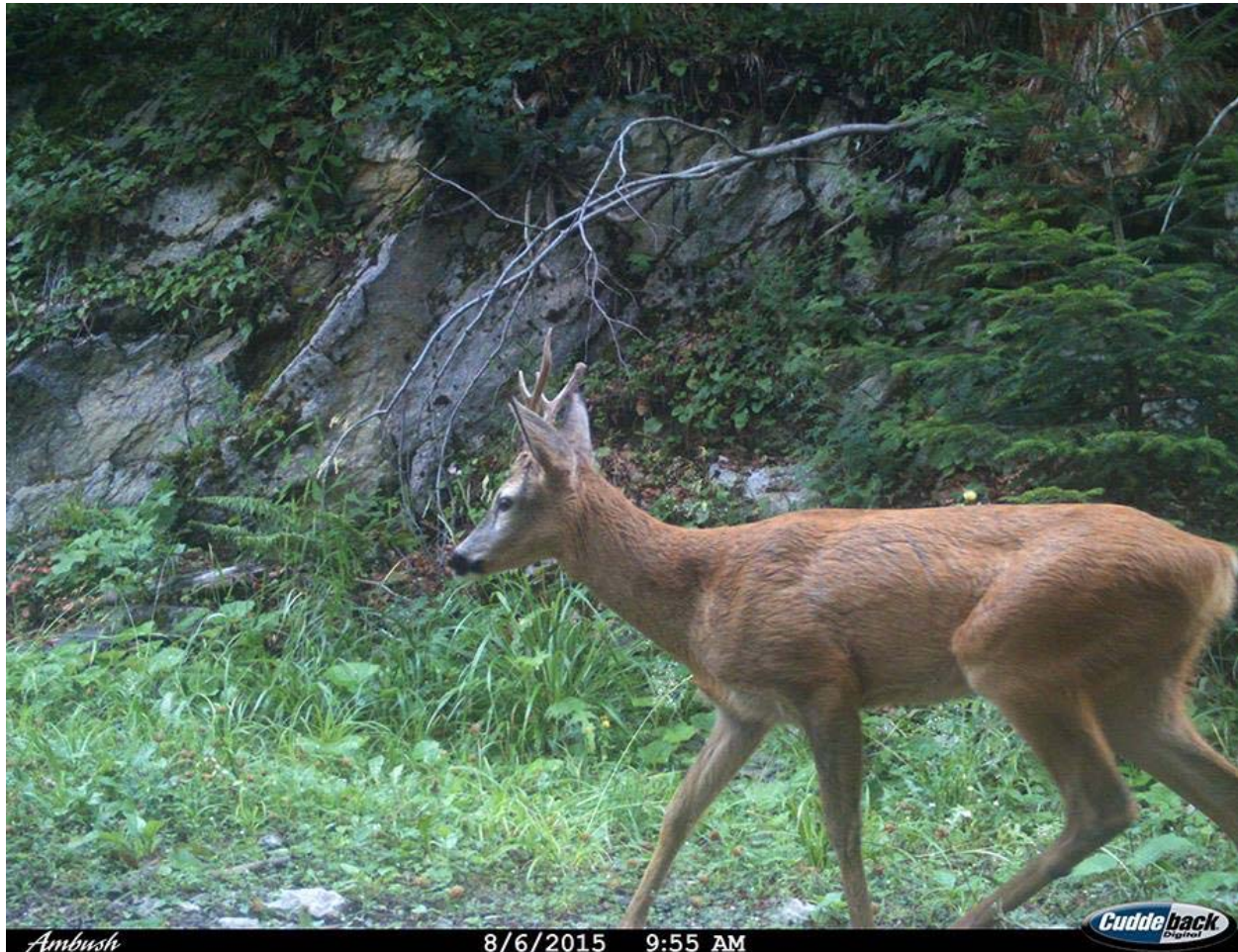


Photo 5. Result of camera traps. Source: Centre for protection and research of birds

- These species are the basis for feeding large carnivores (which is, for example, the basis for the survival of lynx). Montenegro does not have a red book of fauna and we are still guided by international legislation and expert opinions. By researching the historical distribution of certain hunting species, it is very easy to come to the conclusion that lawlessness from the past

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.



(until the middle of the 20th century) led to their endangerment, not only in Montenegro, but also in the Balkans. There are, for example, data on the presence of lynx 300 years ago in Lovćen or Bratonožići. Now these are very changed habitats and are not suitable for this species - said from Wildlife Montenegro.

The Hunting Association said that, as in any other activity, there are violators and poaching is present, but not to the extent to endanger any game species in Montenegro.

The number of noble game is questionable?

When it comes to the increase of noble game in the territory of Montenegro, the NGO Wildlife said that no one in Montenegro has the correct answer to that question.

- In the history of Montenegro, monitoring of any type of mammal has never been carried out at the national level. Only when the counting is carried out according to the established methods in a period of three to five years, only then could this question be clearly answered - they said.

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.



Photo 6. Results of camera traps. Source: Center for Bird Protection and Research

- On the other hand, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Hunting Association of Montenegro claim that the number of noble game is increasing, although they have not stated how they determined that.
- In the past period, through the media, the general public had the opportunity to be informed that the number of game (especially noble) is increasing throughout the territory of Montenegro. We

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.

emphasize that this Ministry, when giving consent to the Annual hunting plans implemented by the users of hunting grounds, allocates minimum quotas for the shooting of certain species, most often pests - they state.

The Hunting Association says that as a result of many years of hard work in hunting, there is an evident increase in the number of all game species in Montenegrin hunting grounds: roe deer, chamois, bears, wild boars, rabbits and partridges.

- And all other species, which were confirmed by European experts in the field of hunting, biology and veterinary at the meetings held during their stays in Montenegro - they said.

Again, we do not have specific names and people who conducted these researches. The Hunting Association of Montenegro has no problem with referring to European experts who allegedly confirmed these views, but it has to say who these people are by name and surname. They did not answer that question.

Criminal charges against poaching

Based on the information available to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, in the past five years, 60 criminal charges were filed, 56 misdemeanor charges and 69 disciplinary proceedings were initiated against members of hunting associations.

- We did not receive information from the courts and hunting ground users about their outcome - said from the Ministry.

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.

In the past three hunting years, 55 criminal charges, 41 misdemeanor and 43 disciplinary penalties have been filed by the Hunting Association of Montenegro, and the outcome of these charges is known to the competent courts and hunting ground users.

In the last five years, police officers have filed 52 criminal charges under Articles 325 and 326 of the Criminal Code of Montenegro.

POLICE UNITS	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	TOTAL
Podgorica	8	12	9	5	6	40
Nikšić	0	1	0	0	2	3
Bijelo Polje	0	0	3	0	1	4
Bar	0	0	0	0	0	0
Berane						4
Budva	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pljevlja	0	0	0	0	0	0
Herceg Novi	0	0	0	0	1	1

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.



The Inspectorate for Forestry, Hunting and Plant Protection for the period 2017, 2018, 2019 and for the six months of 2020 performed a total of 898 inspections, namely inspections in the field of hunting, then imposed a measure to eliminate irregularities in 59 cases and issued 15 solutions.

For non-compliance with the Law on Game and Hunting, it issued 24 misdemeanor warrants in the amount of EUR 4,600.00 for the reporting period, submitted 22 requests for initiating misdemeanor proceedings to the competent courts and filed six criminal charges for illegal hunting, as well as confiscated 50 quails.

In addition to regular activities, this inspection performed supervision on initiatives, and most of it, in the past period, was from NGOs and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, then from individuals and the least from the Hunting Association of Montenegro.

Following the path of criminal charges, the last stop and perhaps the most important were the Prosecutor's Office and the Courts, which referred me to their non-working sites because of COVID-19.

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.



Moratorium on hunting is the best solution

Nature is more than a good example that everything is connected to each other. The better quality of human life is largely "provided" by nature, and the quality of nature is best described by the flora and fauna in it. Diversity ensures the stability of ecosystems, and thus our survival. Today we have a case when the wildlife is in a very bad condition due to habitat loss, poaching and hunting. According to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the "Report on Life on the Planet" for 2020 shows that during the 46 years (1970-2016) there was a staggering decline in the animal population by 68 percent.

Aleksandar Perović from Centre for Bird Research and Study warns that poaching is more and more present in everyday life and these illegal actions are one of the main reasons for such a decline in the number of game populations.

Unfortunately, both the protected and unprotected game is now under pressure from poaching. It all started with the Balkan lynx and now bears along many other animals protected by law are targeted by poachers. We have a case of poaching almost every day and that must be stopped - Perović explained.

Perovic said that the situation of the killed bear in Berane was the last straw and that urgent changes within the system itself should be demanded.

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.



In order for all the game not to end up extinct like the Balkan lynx, it is necessary to introduce a moratorium on hunting for a period of at least five years. Center for Bird Protection has been advocating this idea with other 80 NGOs and will not give up on it - said Perović

He adds that the moratorium is necessary at this moment, but also due to the fact that the Institutions deny the presence of poaching, namely, reduce it to a minimum.

First of all, it is necessary to create a zero state of the number of hunting species in hunting grounds by professional and credible institutions in order to obtain reliable data, which has never been done in our country so far. That is why it is absurd to state an increase in the number of game when we do not even know how much we had - he said.

He adds that it is necessary to strengthen the capacities of the hunting inspection, rangers from hunting organizations and national parks, police, customs, prosecutor's office and judiciary. According to him, the criteria for taking hunting exams should be tightened and the existing permits should be renewed, in order to draw the attention of hunters to the articles of the law, while at the same time to educate the local population living in the hunting grounds.

It is a pity that poaching is such a big issue for Montenegro, that the animal, like the Balkan lynx, has been exterminated due to unscrupulous individuals. We can only conclude that we are sorry we crossed this cat's path - Perović concluded.

This project was funded, in part, through a U.S. Embassy grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Ovaj projekat je dijelom finansirala Ambasada SAD u Podgorici. Mišljenja, nalazi, zaključci ili preporuke koji su ovdje izneseni su stav autora i ne odražavaju nužno stav Stejt dipartmenta/Vlade SAD.