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Lynx: New Data from the Eastern Pyrenees



CAT NEWS

Issue 24, Spring 1996

by Luc Chazel*,
 Muriel Da Ros**
 and Jean Pierre
 Pompidor***

The Department of the Eastern Pyrenees is linked with the story of the lynx in this mountain range. Two specimens were killed here in the Canigou massif in 1917, and these were considered by many authors to have been the last in the French Pyrenees and the last in France.

In 1992, we published an article indicating that the lynx still survived in the French Pyrenees, in three populations located in the Western, Central and Eastern Pyrenees.

From 1990 to 1994, we were responsible for an inventory of mammals in the three Natural Reserves of Nohèdes, Conat and Jujols, all located in the Madres-Coronat massif. Since February 1995, L. Chazel has been the conservator of Jujols Natural Reserve.

Over the past five years, we have found lynx tracks and signs. The result is clear: lynx still occurs in the massif. Tracks in the snow and droppings were the main findings; claw marks on trees were found only once

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in the Massif. But such marks have been collected in the eastern part of the Pyrenees in Canigou massif.

Prey was rarely found, since we did not use specialised dogs to follow the tracks and do not have radio-tracking material which would involve catching a lynx and equipping it with a radio-collar.

Study Area: All the following information has been collected in the Madres-Coronat massif, located in the eastern part of the French Pyrenees between the regions of Capcir and Conflent. The study area covers 20,000 hectares. The geographical limits are the North Madres massif in the north, the Jau pass and Castellane valley in the east, Northwest and Southwest Madres in the west, and the Tet valley in the south.

Results for the period between December 1989 and January 1995.

- **10.12.89** One dropping collected in Southeast Madres at 1700 m (*Chazel*).
- **30.03.90** Two tracks in snow found in West Coronat at 1650 m. The sizes of the tracks were similar for the two lynx (7 cm) (*J.P. Pompidor*)
- **01.04.90** One dropping, including many hairs, in North Coronat at 1,200 m (*Chazel*)
- **13.05.90** One track in snow in

West Coronat,
with jumps of
more than two
metres, at 1,700
m (*J.P.*

Pompidor)

- **29.01.91** One dropping, with many hairs, in Southeast Madres at 1,500 m (*Chazel*)
- **18.04.91** One dropping in Northwest Coronat at 1,760 m (*J.P. Pompidor*)
- **16.02.92** One dropping in East Madres at 1,200 m (*Chazel*)
- **10.03.92** Tracks of two animals in snow with indications of mating activity at 1,700 m in Southeast Madres (*J.P. Pompidor*)
- **15.03.92** Track in snow at 1700 m in East Madres (*Chazel*)
- **15.08 to 30.09.92** Eight sheep killed during a period of a month and a half, between August and September at 2,000 to 2,400 m. We found a distance of 27 mm and 32 mm between the two canine marks. East Madres) (*Chazel*)
- **05.03.93** One track on snow at 870 m. in North Coronat (*Chazel, Da Ros, Letscher*)
- **09.05.93** One track on snow at 1,700 m in Northeast Madres (*Chazel, Da Ros, Borrut*)
- **16.06.93** One dropping in

Southeast
Coronat at 1,800
m (*J.P.*

Pompidor)

- **08.10.93** One dropping in Southeast Madres at 1,500 m (*Chazel, Da Ros*)
- **12.12.93** One chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*) found killed by lynx in East Coronat at 1,280 m. Prey hidden with fern and leaves under a pine tree (*Da Ros, Chazel*)
- **08.02.94** One track on snow in East Madres at 1,300 m (*Chazel, Da Ros*)
- **04.94** One goat probably killed by lynx. Near the remains of the prey we found one dropping of the felid at 980 m in South Coronat (*Chazel, Da Ros*)
- **10.07.94** One track in mud found at about 2,200 m in a colony of marmots in East Madres (*Chazel, Da Ros*)
- **10.94** Tracks on mud at 1,280 m in East Madres (*Chazel, Da Ros, Borrut*)
- **23.01.95** Tracks on snow found in West Coronat at 1,700 m (*Chazel, Da Ros and three persons of the Abruzzes National Park*)

Lynx Sightings:

During this period, lynx

have rarely been seen. The most important report occurred in a valley in the north of the study area. A lynx frightened by a dog was observed by J. Borrut, who is now a member of the Pyrenean lynx group. He is a professor of natural history and a very good naturalist. This observation took place in May 1993.

In 1994, Reynes, who lives in the Casteillane valley, met a lynx in a thick forest at about 1,500 m. Borrut investigated this case.

A hunter saw a lynx in the central part of the massif in September 1993, but we could not investigate this case and it remains uncertain.

Tracks and signs of lynx are not well known and few people have reported them.

First Analysis: We have studied 21 reports considered as certain. We do not refer to other cases which are uncertain. These reports are the only material concerning the lynx in the massif. They cover a large geographical area extending over nearly the whole eastern part of the Pyrenees. It seems that the lynx also occurs in the Canigou massif, but investigations have not begun there.

The average number of tracks and signs collected was 3.69/year.

The average number of observations reported was 0.46/year.

Fourteen records were

collected during the period December-April, which is the most important. The snowy period is, of course, the best for finding tracks or signs, and also droppings. The rut period is included between these dates, and one of its effects is to increase local densities. Information collected during summer is rare, but occurs constantly.

Preliminary

Conclusions: The presence of the lynx in the Madres-Coronat massif is shown through more than 35 reports since 1985, the cases described here being the latest found. The information is linked with reports made during the period 1970-1980.

The lynx, a very elusive species, is largely unknown in our mountains and the creation of the lynx group, a local branch of the Eurasian Lynx Group, is the first attempt to study it so as to conserve it.

** Member of the Eurasian Lynx Group and head of the Pyrenean Lynx Group*

*** Member of the Pyrenean Lynx Group, First Conservator of the Jujols Natural Reserve*

**** Member of the Pyrenean Lynx Group, studying marmots at Jujols Natural Reserve*

Cat News is published twice a year by the Cat Specialist Group and mailed to Group

members across the globe. **Friends of the Cat Group** is a project set up to enable those interested in furthering the conservation of felids, to contribute to a fund administered by the Chairman of the Cat Specialist Group, World Conservation Union (IUCN).

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