

# Special Issue

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## The Eurasian lynx in Continental Europe



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**CATnews** is the newsletter of the Cat Specialist Group, a component of the Species Survival Commission SSC of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It is published twice a year, and is available to members and the Friends of the Cat Group.

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Original contributions and short notes about wild cats are welcome

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**Cover Photo:** Camera trap picture of two Eurasian lynx kittens in north-eastern Switzerland. 11 December 2014 (Photo KORA).

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# Steps towards a lynx population in the Black Forest?

**The discussion between different stakeholders about a reintroduction of the lynx *Lynx lynx* in the Black Forest has been going on since the 1980s. Since the installation of the Working Group Lynx Baden-Württemberg (WG lynx) in 2004, the knowledge about the lynx and the conflicts behind it has been improved and distributed for all stakeholders represented in the WG lynx. The joint development of a technical concept for dealing with the lynx helped to develop concrete solutions for identified concerns of the stakeholders. After the state elections in spring 2021, the governing parties stated in their coalition agreement that the chances for the return of the lynx should be improved through a reinforcement program to support the population in close cooperation with all stakeholders concerned.**

Baden-Wuerttemberg BW and especially the Black Forest is located less than 20 kilometres from the lynx population in the Jura Mountains and about 40 kilometres from the lynx population in the French Vosges Mountains. Together with the Palatinate Forest, these four low mountain ranges form the core of a potential Upper Rhine lynx metapopulation (Krehbuehl et al. 2021). Suitable habitats hosting existing subpopulations and largely unused habitats in the Black Forest are separated by the Rhine River Valley and the extensive human infrastructure that dissects it. Monitoring in BW shows dispersal of male lynx from the Jura to the Black Forest and adjacent regions, but females apparently avoid crossing this landscape (Fig. 1, Monitoring results of the FVA).

Since the 1980s, the reintroduction of lynx into the Black Forest has been discussed very emotionally by the stakeholders involved. The process was characterized by unilateral

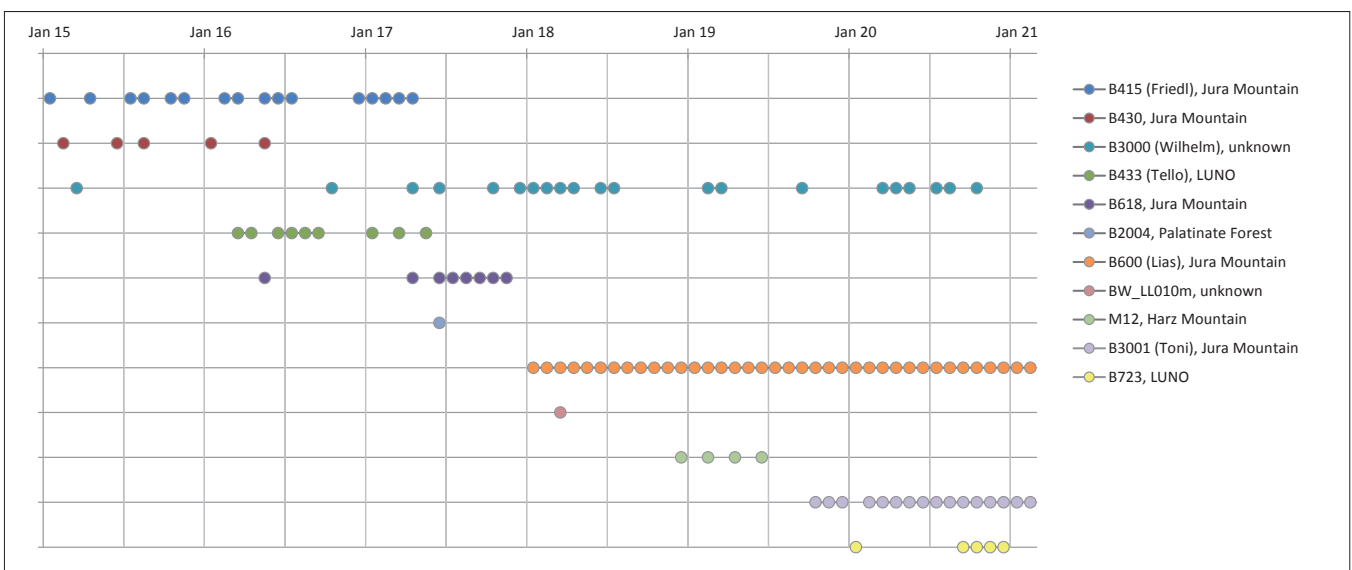
actions of opposing groups to defend their respective interests. At some point, lynx advocates went to court to fight for their right to reintroduce lynx on their own. In 1997, they suffered a major defeat, as the court ruled that reintroduction required the approval of the authoritative Ministry of Rural Areas, which the latter refused. The way the debate was conducted led to mistrust between the groups involved and to an escalation of the conflict (Luechtrath et al. 2012). In 2004, a Working Group Lynx (WG Lynx) was established by the same ministry. One goal was to build trust and mediate between the stakeholder groups represented. External facilitation is used for this purpose. Since 2004, many actions have been discussed and implemented by the members of the WG Lynx (e.g. implementation of SCALP categories for monitoring, ensuring transparency of monitoring data, training local contact persons in monitoring and knowledge transfer,

establishment of compensation funds for killed livestock).

From 2008 to 2012 the WG Lynx participated in the research project "Lynx in Baden-Wuerttemberg" conducted by the Forest Research Institute BW (FVA) in cooperation with the University of Freiburg to establish a common knowledge base. The results show that habitat suitability in the Black Forest is almost as good as in the Swiss Jura Mountains, but without the release of females, there is little chance to establish a viable (sub-)population in BW (Herdtfelder 2012). The results also show that the conflict about the lynx has to be seen as part of a larger conflict about the definition and ranking of societal values between the groups involved (Luechtrath 2011). One important effect of the research project and the deliberately neutral and all-party moderation of the WG is an increasingly respectful and appreciative interaction among the members of the working group, which could be observed over time.

As a consequence, a follow-up project was conducted from 2012 to 2016 by the FVA and other members of the WG Lynx to improve and distribute knowledge about lynx and now also wolves *Canis lupus* as well as knowledge about interactions and communication between members of affected groups in BW. During the project, local networks of stakeholders were established in three model regions and over 60 events were held at different spatial and organizational levels. At each event, information about conflict dynamics and strategies to improve communication were an important part of the presentations and discussions.

As a next step, in 2018 the Ministry of Rural Affairs engaged the FVA to prepare a detailed



**Fig. 1.** Overview of lynx individuals identified in Baden-Württemberg over time, including information on the origin of each animal, all males.

concept that includes the current situation of lynx, the state of research, and the resulting options for the future management of lynx in BW. The members of WG Lynx participated in the development of the concept, especially in search for solutions that avoid or compensate perceived disadvantages for landowners, livestock keepers and hunters. A draft of the concept was completed in summer 2019 and included the following three alternative management scenarios: 1) status quo – no specific actions to improve the status of the lynx in BW; 2) small reintroduction project – reinforcement using only four female lynx within the next three years; 3) large reintroduction project – reinforcement using 12 lynx (eight females and four males). For all scenarios, the preparation of a management plan would be mandatory. Following the presentation of the complete draft concept to the WG Lynx, stakeholder groups had the possibility to send their final comments to the Ministry. In a high-level meeting of the WG Lynx held in October 2019, the ministry expressed the

political will to implement a reinforcement project in cooperation with hunters and landowners. However, due to the ongoing debate about the general alignment with agriculture and nature conservation and the associated challenges for landowners, the ministry considered the timing inappropriate for an immediate implementation. To keep the process ongoing, the FVA was tasked with further clarifying practical challenges of a reinforcement project and supporting a continuous constructive dialog between stakeholders. After state elections in spring 2021, the old and new governing parties stated in their new coalition agreement that the chances for the return of the lynx should be improved by a reinforcement program to support the population, in close cooperation with all stakeholders concerned.

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