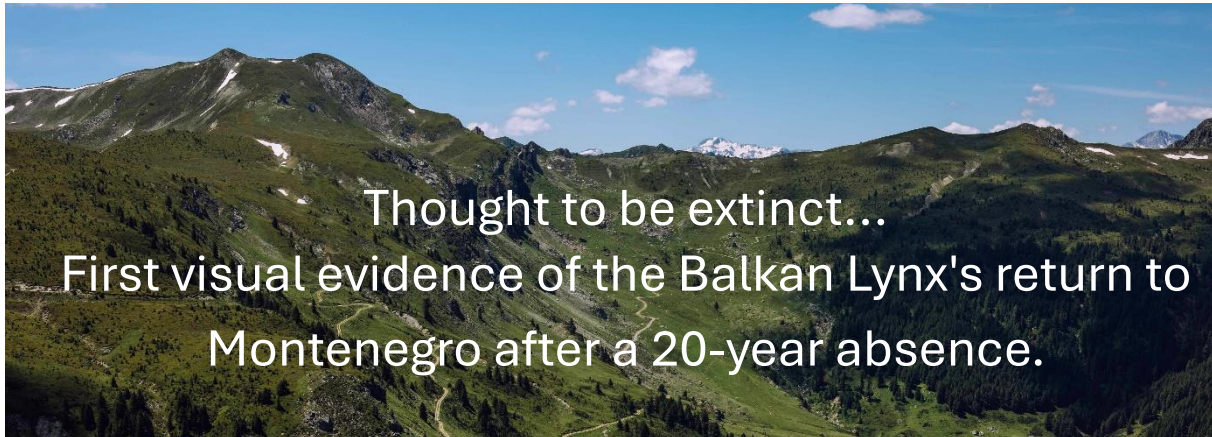


Press release  
October 11th, 2024

In collaboration with :

Semir KARDOVIĆ, Enko DREŠKOVIĆ, Esad REDŽEMATOVIĆ



*For the past 6 years, eco-volunteers from the Biodiversita program of the NGO Objectif Sciences International have been carrying out a study of biodiversity in Montenegro, with a particular focus on evidence of the presence of the Balkan Lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*), considered critically endangered by the IUCN. This summer, the automatic cameras we installed finally proved the presence of this species in the Hajla mountains in the east of the country. This is the first scientifically proven visual record of the species' presence in the country, after more than 20 years during which it was considered extinct.*

This participatory research project is led by the Biodiversita research program of the NGO Objectif Sciences International in partnership with Montenegrins Semir Kardović, Enko Drešković, Esad Redžematović and with logistical support from Nikena Eco Adventure.

The eco-volunteers' mission is to take part in a wildlife survey and inventory project in various parts of Montenegro, namely the Prokletije National Park and the Hajla Mountains. The aim of this mission is to improve knowledge of biodiversity and to search for clues to prove the presence of the lynx in these sites.

Among a range of scientific methods, one of the tools used to characterize this biodiversity is the installation of automatic detection cameras that take images and videos, day and night, without disturbing the wildlife.

When the eco-volunteers analyzed the data from one of the cameras checked last June (installed in 2021 and checked every year since), they discovered previously unseen images of a Balkan Lynx. On the video, the felid-like appearance, mottled coat, pointed ears and short tail with black muffs leave no doubt as to its identification. This discovery is especially significant given that this subspecies of the Boreal Lynx is critically endangered on a global scale.

A few weeks later, in the Prokletije National Park, lynx footprints were discovered by a group of OSI-Biodiversita eco-volunteers, demonstrating the presence of the Balkan Lynx in a second mountainous region of Montenegro.

Until now, there had been no visual evidence of the presence of this large predator in the country. Only a few eyewitness accounts and a photo of a footprint taken on the Bosnian border (but potentially belonging to another subspecies ?) suggested the animal's presence. This major discovery will enable us to initiate collaborative initiatives with other lynx-focused organizations in neighbouring countries, with the aim of adapting biodiversity conservation measures in Montenegro. Indeed, these big cats could recolonize certain parts of the country from neighboring countries such as Albania and Kosovo, which are home to small populations - but only if major biodiversity conservation measures are put in place.

These results were communicated to the entire scientific community working on the Lynx in Europe at the EuroLynx conference held in the Vosges mountains in France this week. In addition to their importance for the Balkan Lynx, these results also demonstrate the value of participatory science projects in the study of biodiversity.

The OSI-Biodiversita program will continue its studies in Montenegro to find further evidence of the presence of the Balkan Lynx in order to better understand its distribution, but also to continue the global inventory of fauna and flora species in our study areas. One of our objectives is to increase the legislative protection of these areas by attesting to their biological and ecological richness, which will require considerable communication with the country's inhabitants and governing bodies.



*Photo extracted from the video taken at night by the automatic camera*

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Find out more :

To find out more about the research mission, here is a link to the project description:

<https://www.vacances-scientifiques.com/Sur-les-Traces-du-Lynx-au-Montenegro>

For a day-by-day account of what the eco-volunteers experienced, here's the mission's logbook:

<https://osi-biodiversita.org/Sur-les-traces-du-Lynx-des-Balkans-Juin-2024.html>

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Press contacts :

Sylvain Allombert, head of the Biodiversita research and education program of the NGO Objectif Sciences International:

Mail : [direction@osi-biodiversita.org](mailto:direction@osi-biodiversita.org) ; Tel : +33.781.46.72.37

Konan Le Breton, supervisor of the research expedition “In the footsteps of the Lynx in Montenegro”:

Mail : [konan.lebreton@osi-biodiversita.org](mailto:konan.lebreton@osi-biodiversita.org) ; Tel : +33.615.77.30.48

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About OSI and its Biodiversita program:

Objectif Sciences International is a non-profit organization founded in 1992, whose mission is to organize participatory science projects on a variety of themes: astronomy, paleontology, mathematics, biodiversity, and more. These projects take the form of science camps enabling participants - children, teenagers and adults - to learn about science and take part in real research projects. For the past 10 years, the Biodiversita program has been offering participatory research projects focusing on the study and conservation of biodiversity on different continents. Among other things, Biodiversita missions aim to fill scientific data gaps in remote regions, providing information on species diversity, distribution and interactions, in collaboration with local organizations. In addition, the Biodiversita program offers a Naturalist University, to train field naturalists to meet the challenges of studying and conserving biodiversity.



Figure 1: Setting up a camera trap



Figure 1: Discovery of a lynx footprint at Prokletije



Figure 3 : Camera traps set up



Figure 4 : Bear footprint



Figure 2: OSI-Biodiversita eco-volunteer team



Figure 6 : Previewing camera traps videos