



Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*)



French:	Lynx d'Espagne, Lynx pardelle
Spanish:	Lince Ibérico
Kingdom	Animalia
Phylum	Chordata
Class	Mammalia
Order	Carnivora
Family	Felidae
Genus	<i>Lynx</i> (1)
Size	Head-body length: 65 - 100 cm (2) Shoulder height: 40 - 50 cm (3) Tail length: 5 - 19 cm (2)
Weight	5 - 15 kg (2) (3)

Top facts

- The world's most threatened species of cat is the Iberian lynx
- The Iberian lynx feeds mainly on wild rabbits and may bury uneaten prey to return to the following day
- There are thought to be only two isolated breeding populations of Iberian lynx
- The Iberian lynx is mainly nocturnal and is a solitary animal except during the mating season

STATUS

The Iberian lynx is classified as Critically Endangered (CR) on the IUCN Red List (1), and listed on Appendix I of CITES (4).

DESCRIPTION

The Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) is the world's most threatened species of cat (2), and is currently teetering on the brink of extinction (1). A medium-sized species, it is smaller than the Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*), with which it shares a characteristically bobbed tail, spotted coat, muscular body and long legs (3). The relatively short, coarse fur is bright yellowish-red to tawny in colour, overlaid with brown or black spots, and the underparts are white. The male Iberian lynx is larger than the female, and both possess prominent whiskers on the face and long, erect tufts of black hair on the tips of the ears (2) (3).

RANGE

Historically widespread throughout the Iberian peninsula and the south of France (2). By the mid 1990s, small and severely fragmented populations were found only in diminishing areas of suitable habitat in central and south-western parts of Spain, and in fragmented areas of Portugal. Currently, there are about 170 individuals in only two isolated reproductive populations located in the Spanish Autonomous region of Andalusia: Doñana and Andujár-Cardena (5).

HABITAT

The Iberian lynx is found in Mediterranean woodland and marquis habitat (a scrub-like habitat of open forests and thickets), where there is a mixture of dense scrub and open pasture (5).

BIOLOGY

Iberian lynx are generally **nocturnal** creatures, with peak activity occurring at twilight when individuals leave shelter in order to forage (3). Both sexes are solitary and **territorial**, with male **territories** overlapping those of several females (3). Females reach sexual maturity at one year of age but will only breed once they are in possession of their own **territory** (5). The mating season peaks at the beginning of the year in January and February and births occur two months later (3). The female cares for her litter of one to four kittens (3) within a lair that may be located under a thicket or in a hollow tree. Weaning occurs at around eight months but juveniles tend to stay in their **natal territory** until they are around 20 months old (5). European rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) make up the mainstay of the diet of the Iberian lynx, unlike the larger Eurasian lynx that feeds mainly on **ungulates** such as roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) and chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*) (2). Small deer may be eaten on occasion, if rabbit numbers are low (5).

THREATS

Numbers of Iberian lynx have been decimated by habitat loss, with scrublands converted to agriculture and pine and eucalypt plantations, and with human development such as dams, highways and railways all encroaching on its native habitat (1) (3). Conversion of habitat and overhunting have also reduced populations of the lynx's main food source, the rabbit, and rabbit numbers also declined drastically after the introduction of the myxomatosis virus in the 1950s (1) (3) (5). Whilst myxomatosis is not such a threat today, a new disease that arrived in Spain in 1988, known as Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease, is once again threatening rabbit numbers (1) (3) (5). Despite protection measures and heavy fines, illegal hunting continues, and the accidental killing of lynx in rabbit traps, traps set for smaller carnivores, or with poisoned fox bait, together with road fatalities, are some of the major causes of mortality at present (3) (5).

Only two isolated breeding populations of Iberian lynx are now known to remain, totalling perhaps 170 adults at most, and no other populations are believed to include individuals that breed regularly. Already naturally at risk due to its dependence on a specific habitat and a single prey species, the Iberian lynx's tiny and fragmented population unfortunately only increases its vulnerability to extinction (1) (3).

CONSERVATION

The Iberian lynx is legally protected in both Spain and Portugal (1), and is also listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), meaning international trade in the species is prohibited (4). It is also covered by a range of European legislation (1). The Iberian lynx occurs in some protected areas, notably Doñana National Park (3), where a management plan has been implemented. This has included measures to increase rabbit numbers within the park, through habitat improvements and the removal of **ungulates**, thus reducing competition with rabbits for food (3). However, rabbit numbers still remain low (1). Around the park, efforts are also underway to reduce traffic fatalities and to eliminate the trapping of rabbits and small carnivores (3).

Further recommended conservation measures for the Iberian lynx include protecting remaining habitat, public awareness programmes, and intensifying efforts to increase the rabbit population (1). A captive breeding programme has also been started, which is considered of critical importance in saving the species and, if successful, may lead to reintroductions in the future (1). However, despite all these efforts, numbers of Iberian lynx are still believed to be in decline (1), and time may be running out to save the world's most endangered felid.

FIND OUT MORE

For more information on efforts to save the Iberian lynx see:

- IUCN Cat Specialist Group:
<http://www.catsg.org/>
- Fauna and Flora International:
<http://www.fauna-flora.org/species/iberian-lynx/>
- WWF - Iberian Lynx:
<http://www.worldwildlife.org/species/finder/iberianlynx/iberianlynx.html>
- WWF – UK:
http://www.wwf.org.uk/what_we_do/safeguarding_the_natural_world/wildlife/iberian_lynx/

AUTHENTICATION

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GLOSSARY

- **Natal:** site of birth.
- **Nocturnal:** active at night.
- **Territorial:** describes an animal, a pair of animals or a colony that occupies and defends an area.
- **Territory:** an area occupied and defended by an animal, a pair of animals or a colony.
- **Ungulates:** a general term for a mammal with hooves. Includes the artiodactyls ('even-toed ungulates'), such as pigs, deer, sheep, antelopes and cattle, and the perissodactyls ('odd-toed ungulates'), including horses, tapirs and rhinoceroses.

REFERENCES

1. IUCN Red List (July, 2010)
<http://www.iucnredlist.org/>
2. Macdonald, D.W. (2006) *The Encyclopedia of Mammals*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
3. Sunquist, M. and Sunquist, F. (2002) *Wild Cats of the World*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
4. CITES (September, 2007)
<http://www.cites.org/>
5. Sarmiento, P. (January, 2011) *Pers. comm.*
6. IUCN Cat Specialist Group (September, 2007)
<http://www.catsg.org/>