The changes of distribution and population density of wildcats *Felis silvestris* Schreber, 1775 in Hungary between 1987-2001

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Abstract

The wildcat is one of the most endangered carnivore species in Europe. The population density declined and the distribution area became fragmented over the last century due to the hybridisation, loss of habitat, illegal hunting and road kills (Stahl and Artois 1994). However, a slight increase in the population density could be found in Belgium, France, Germany and Slovenia over the last few decades due to the recolonisation and reintroductions (Stahl and Artois 1994). Wildcats have been protected in Hungary since 1973, but the situation of this species was not been investigated until 1987. Mail questionnaire surveys were conducted between 1987 and 2001 to evaluate the changes of population density and distribution. Clear decrease of the wildcat population distribution range, constant and serious decrease in the population density could be found in Hungary between 1987 and 2001. The stable areas of the species' occurrence are the Transdanubian and the Northern Middle Altitude Mountains, the Dráva plain, the Mecsek and the Villányi Mountains and the forests of floodplains in the Great Plain. The protection of this species have to be intensified with a species protection plan, which contains the wildcat reserve areas with strict protective management measures.

Key words

Felis silvestris, distribution, population density.