

Okarma H., Dovchanych Y., Findo S., Ionescu O., Koubek P. and Szemethy L.

Large carnivores in the Carpathian Mountains: status and conservation problems

Institute of Nature Conservation, Polish Academy of Sciences, Mickiewicza 33, 31-120 Kraków, Poland

e-mail: okarma@iop.krakow.pl

Abstract: The Carpathian Mountains of Central and Eastern Europe harbour the largest European population of large carnivores: brown bear *Ursus arctos*, wolf *Canis lupus*, and Eurasian lynx *Lynx lynx*. Political and economical transformations in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s considerably changed conditions for those species, albeit differently in the various countries. Recent international initiatives have stimulated discussions on a holistic conservation strategy for the Carpathians, and large carnivores have become its very important element. Experts from six Carpathian countries collected data from all available sources on conservation status of large carnivores and major threats to their existence. It was confirmed that the pan-Carpathian populations of brown bear, wolf and Eurasian lynx still exist in sizeable numbers (7,000, 4,000, and 2,400 individuals, respectively). Generally, Romania and Slovakia harbour largest populations, Poland and Ukraine harbour moderate ones, and the Czech Republic and Hungary have small numbers of each species. Official data on number of carnivores are usually overestimated. Legal status of these species is generally favourable, and they are protected in most countries. Brown bears are hunted only in Romania and Slovakia, wolf in Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine, and lynx in Romania. In Ukraine, wolves can be hunted all year round. Often, laws are badly enforced, and poaching is an important mortality factor. Other threats to conservation of carnivores are the small size of hunting units in some countries created as a result of recent changes in hunting systems, privatisation of forests, and negative attitude of some hunters and wildlife managers (especially toward the wolf). There is no regional coordination of management policy regarding large carnivores. The same population of a species can be fully protected in one country and simultaneously harvested heavily in a neighbouring country.

Key words: brown bear, wolf, Eurasian lynx, conservation, management, Carpathian Mountains.