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Action urged to save Balkan lynx

Urgent efforts are needed to save the Balkan lynx, the largest of Europe's wild cats, from extinction, conservationists say.

Only around 100 of the big cats are thought to remain in existence.

The largest numbers are found in the remote hills of western FYR Macedonia, where they are considered a national symbol and appear on a coin.

Several European groups are working together to try to gather more information on the reclusive animal.

Balkan lynx, a distinct subspecies, are also found in parts of Albania, Serbia and Greece.

They are generally reddish brown or light grey and can grow as long as 1.3m (4ft), weighing up to 35kg (77lb). They are described as solitary creatures which roam large areas.

'Only seen footprints'



A number of lynx species are endangered

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"It's a very rare and sensitive animal, like a shadow moving in the trees," said Zdravko Moteski, a hunter in the village of Lesnica in western Macedonia, who is helping experts to collect information.

"I never had a chance to see a lynx. I've only traced its footprints during the winter," he said.

German group Euronatur said an area should be set up in the Macedonian-Albanian border area to protect the animal's habitat.

Part of the problem, it said, was that swathes of Albania's formerly dense forests, the lynx's preferred habitat, had been cut down for firewood and were now used for grazing.

Dime Melovski, a Macedonian biologist, said the initial plan was to gather information and use photosensors to photograph one of the animals.

"Then we hope to eventually capture one for DNA analysis and to reintroduce the Balkan lynx with breeding in captivity," he said.

There are several different lynx species in Europe, a number of which are endangered.

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