

That Beloved Predator

By Luis Jar

Children love animals. As humans we spend hundreds of hours staring to animals when we are kids. Animals appear in the first tales we hear, in the first picture books we look at, in the first texts we are able to read, in the first drawings we do, in the first cartoons we watch. . . Everyone has some favorite animals when child. Sometimes that animal is a pretty dolphin, a huge elephant, a hairy lion, a funny monkey, a strange zebra. We even sleep with a bear!! But time goes by and we don't like animals anymore. We became adults and we are worried about the "important things in life" but not animals. We go once each few years to a zoo with our siblings or a trip but we forget those animals we have seen as soon as we step out of the front door of the zoo.

It is and it has been us, humans, the guilty ones of the disappearance of thousands of species while we were seeking our goals. It was necessary for us to destroy and erase others to assure our comfort. And nowadays we realize about the harmful stage of our environment. In Spain we almost have been accomplices of murder. The Iberian Lynx murder.

The Iberian Lynx is one of the most endangered species in the world. It is a feline, approximately the double size of a cat, with brownish grey and black spotted coat, that lives in the well conserved isolated Mediterranean forests. Their main prey is rabbits. Iberian Lynx are the only carnivorous specialized in rabbits. They need from one to three rabbits per day to live, which represents around 90% of their total nourishment. They are lonely, nomadic and agile hunters. Iberian Lynx only join during the mating season. The gestation period is about 62 days and the litter is usually two kittens. They usually live between 10 to 15 years

Nowadays we can only find this feline in Sierra Morena, Montes de Toledo and Doñana, but forty years ago they occupied most forests in the Iberian Peninsula. Their bigger threats all over the years have been the isolation of their communities due to human constructions, the use of non-selective hunting methods such as traps, the substitution of their habitat by pine trees and eucalyptus which don't allow thicket to grow and also the decrease of the number of rabbits due to diverse illnesses. Out of almost 5000 Iberian Lynx in 1950, we had 150 in 2005.

But there is also good news for the Iberian Lynx. Since the foundation of the "Programa de Conservación Ex-Situ Lince Ibérico" the number of felines has grown up to 235 and it will continue growing little by little for the next year. This program is breeding a number of captivity Lynx that is going to increase the total amount in 120 new Lynx to introduce in their habitat during the next 10 years. This means 12 new Lynx per year in the total number of free Iberian Lynx, which subsequently would increase the chances of natural reproduction.

The Iberian Lynx was a gift from nature, now, it is our turn to take responsibilities and conserve that gift. Our children deserve the right of choosing the Iberian Lynx as their favorite animal.

References:

<http://www.faunaiberica.org/?page=lince-iberico>

Programa de Conservación EXSITU Lince Ibérico

<http://www.lynxedsitu.es>