

# On silent paws

## The return of the lynx



A resettlement project began in the neighbouring Kalkalpen National Park with the release of the lynx "Freia" in 2011. Four more wild lynx (Kora, Juro, Juri, Aira) from Switzerland were released and bred 13 young lynxes in subsequent years. However, illegal shooting and animals disappearing are increasingly threatening the project.

Photo: Martin Mecnarowski ([www.photomecan.eu](http://www.photomecan.eu))

### FACT FILE

#### **Occurrence in Austria (2022):**

Northern lime stone alps/Gesäuse: approx. 7 lynx  
Mühl- und Waldviertel : 26 lynx (20% BBA-Pop.)

**Mating season:** February - April

**Offspring:** late May to mid-June

**Size, weight:** female ♀ 80-110 cm, 15-21 kg  
male ♂ 80-110 cm, 20-32 kg

**Home range:** ♀ 50-100 km<sup>2</sup> ♂ 100-250 km<sup>2</sup>

Historically, lynxes lived in all forest and steppe areas of Europe and Asia. Rigorous persecution led to their extermination in Austria and almost all of Western Europe by 1900. The discovery of "Klaus" the immigrant lynx in 1998 in Kalkalpen National Park gave rise to the hope there could be suitable habitat for lynx here.



Young lynx, Photo: Maringer

### The live of the lynx

Lynx are recognised by their brush ears and stubby tail. Twice as heavy as related species, Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) have perfectly adapted their senses and physique to the hunt and climate of their region.

Lynx are solitary creatures that communicate primarily through scent markings and calls. However, during the mating season in late winter, male and female meet in their overlapping territories. Mating then takes place from mid-March. The female is conceived once a year and gives birth to 2-3 kits in a den at the end of May to mid-June. The initially blind young animals begin to explore their surroundings at the age of two weeks and are gradually introduced to prey by their mother. They stay with their mother for the first winter. The male does not take part in rearing the young, but defends its territory against competitors and thus indirectly supports the family. With the onset of the new mating season, the bond between mother and cubs weakens until they eventually go their own way. Lynx are sexually mature at the age of 2(♀) to 3(♂) years..

## What's on the lynx's menu

The lynx's main food is roe deer and chamois, and to a lesser extent young red deer. Smaller mammals make up the remainder of its diet.

On average, a lynx consumes 54 deer per year – roughly one deer per 200 hectares in its home range (data from the Bavarian Forest National Park).

The lynx catches deer and chamois of all ages and both sexes alike. Of course, weakened or inexperienced animals have less chance of escaping a lynx. Lynx need home ranges of around 10,000 hectares to ensure their hunting success. As with all predators, their numbers are restricted by the supply of prey and not the other way around.



## On the trail of the lynx

### Footprints

*Around 6-9 cm in diameter, similar to domestic cats but significantly larger. No claws visible.*

### Tracks

*Slowly pacing, like a fox, straight, hind paw joins front paw, stride length approx. 80 cm*

In addition to their tracks, lynx can also be recognised by their prey carcasses and their calls. As surprise hunters, they kill their prey with a throat bite. Usually you won't find other external injuries. They devour the carcass starting at the hind legs and right down to the internal organs, fur and bones. They sometimes bury prey under foliage.

The calls of the lynx sound rough, hoarse and drawn out. They are often repeated and are especially heard during the mating season.



Karo the lynx on the Gesäuse camera trap, Feb. 2016

If hair and droppings are found at places where they 'lie up' or feed, they can be scientifically analysed to see if they are from a lynx. Traces of saliva on prey animals can be genetically detected.

## What's the outlook for lynx?

Although the habitat seems good for lynx, the Upper Austrian lynx project struggled with the loss of animals. Lynx with transmitters have also disappeared without a trace and the number of camera trap captures fell continuously. In the summer of 2016, it was proven that at least two lynx had been poached in Upper Austria. No signs of breeding were found in 2019. Also, the lynx Luzi's cub from 2018 couldn't be found. To prevent the increasing problem of inbreeding and the lack of reproductive success, wildlife biologists feel there is an urgent need to act.

Lynx are not a threat to humans, livestock or sustainable hunting. The Styrian Lynx Group is working to break down prejudices and fears and to collect information.



## How can I help?

Please report lynx evidence to the lynx group (sighting, photo, kill). They are also happy to answer questions about biology and behaviour.

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By the way: if you find a carcass (killed prey), leave it untouched. Then the lynx returns and uses all the prey.