

**Transcript**

*00:00:00:00 - 00:00:02:13*

*James Shooter*

Have you seen Lynx in the wild, out and about?

*00:00:02:15 - 00:00:22:05*

*Miha Krofel*

I've seen it several times because it's part of my work. Right? So, I mean, we collar them, we capture them. And if you have lynx collared, you know where it is. So you can see them. But if I don't take into account all of these collared animals and let's say all the cubs we find because we had mother collared and so on, I only saw a lynx once, crossing the road.

*00:00:22:05 - 00:00:25:10*

*Miha Krofel*

So it's just, you know, they are Ghost in the Forest.

*00:00:25:10 - 00:00:27:01*

*James Shooter*

And that must have been a special moment.

*00:00:27:03 - 00:00:27:22*

*Miha Krofel*

Yeah.

*00:00:27:24 - 00:00:52:24*

*James Shooter*

This is the voice of Miha Krofel, a large carnivore researcher and assistant professor at Ljubljana University. He's been involved in monitoring Eurasian Lynx for almost 20 years. He's trapped lynx, collared lynx and released lynx back into the wild. He works in the capital, but commutes from his home 30 minutes away so he can be present in the same landscape as wolves, bears and you guessed it, lynx.

*00:00:53:01 - 00:01:20:14*

*James Shooter*

And in all this time, he's come across this elusive animal by chance, just once. So, one might think that I James Shooter, a man with a microphone, here for just a few days, might have had no chance at all of seeing a lynx. Well! Well, no, you'd have been right. Not a sniff, but I have walked the trails that lynx have wandered and could wander again the very next day.

*00:01:20:16 - 00:01:56:22*

*James Shooter*

And that alone is pretty exciting. It is for me at least. So how do you go about saving the ghost of the forest? How do you even start to help an animal that does not wish to be seen? A transboundary initiative has been pulling together expertise from across the

continent to bring the population back from the brink. I'm James Shooter, host of The Rewild Podcast, and this is Life Lynx.

*00:01:56:24 - 00:02:19:21*

*James Shooter*

It's early winter, and our recent journeying has taken us south through the spectacular mountains of Austria. The views are breath taking. And don't stop at the Austrian border. Slovenia is where thick forests blanket the land in every direction, waterfalls cascade down the hillsides, a mirror calm lakes reflect snow-capped peaks bringing a two for one deal on the scenery.

*00:02:19:23 - 00:02:38:04*

*James Shooter*

I'm in the area to meet with Lynx expert Miha and his four-year-old daughter, Hanna, to find out more about this enigmatic animal. What Miha doesn't know about lynx isn't worth knowing. And not to sound jealous of a four-year-old. But apparently, Hanna has a stroke too. Sedated lynx. Not a bad bring your daughter to work day.

*00:02:38:06 - 00:02:40:12*

*James Shooter*

We walk up to a viewpoint close to their home.

*00:02:40:14 - 00:02:43:06*

*James Shooter*

Yeah, it's amazing. Just forest as far as the eye can see, isn't it?

*00:02:43:10 - 00:03:09:19*

*Miha Krofel*

Yeah. So, it's a nice chunk of Slovenia here. Yeah. A good thing about these Dinaric mountains, the southern part, is really not suitable for agriculture because it just, you know, just limestone, just cast everything you can't really do agriculture. And so, there's not much nature destruction. And good thing is also that all the villages here are really compact.

*00:03:09:23 - 00:03:28:04*

*Miha Krofel*

They all kind of well together, just like together houses like in most of Europe, also like northern part of Slovenia. Yeah. Everything scatters as we have just so fragmented forests, but the villages, they all kind of compacted and you have big chunks of forest in between. Just really good for wildlife.

*00:03:28:05 - 00:03:29:08*

*James Shooter*

Yeah, definitely.

*00:03:29:10 - 00:03:45:21*

*James Shooter*

Miha tells me that a single pair of lynx inhabit the forest we're looking down upon. It's an exhilarating thought to have these incredible animals walking silently somewhere amongst the trees beneath us. One thing that is instantly obvious looking across the vastness of this landscape is that lynx need scale.

*00:03:45:22 - 00:04:05:16*

*Miha Krofel*

I mean, the average for our lynx is 200 square kilometres bit more for males, bit less for females. They have to ensure that their predation is sustainable long term, and one way they do is by having large home ranges and just, you know, so they get enough food, which means like roughly 60, 70 animals, 70 deer per year.

*00:04:05:16 - 00:04:23:20*

*Miha Krofel*

Yeah. On the, you know, big area Now that it doesn't have too much pressure to be able to disturb prey decline. And then the other adaptation is to be very territorial, which means that, you know, they defend their territory. So, basically this male here is the only male living here. It wouldn't allow any other male to come here.

*00:04:23:22 - 00:04:38:04*

*Miha Krofel*

He will tolerate a female and a female with the same. She'll tolerate a male, but she will not tolerate other females. Okay. So, this is a system that ensures that, you know, it's only basically a pair of lynx living in the area. And then there's not too much pressure.

*00:04:38:06 - 00:05:07:11*

*James Shooter*

With their secretive nature and historic declines. Eurasian Lynx are perhaps not the first species that springs to mind when the general public think about large predators in Europe. Wolves often grabbed the headlines when the media wants to talk about rewilding. Bears would probably come a close second. But Lynx? Well, they probably slip under the radar for most. My closest experience has been with the Lynx's cousin, a brilliant and explosive encounter with a bobcat trying to hunt ducks in the wilds of a Yellowstone winter.

*00:05:07:13 - 00:05:12:24*

*James Shooter*

But we're not here to talk about bobcats, I suppose. I was just trying to sound as cool as Miha for a moment.

*00:05:13:01 - 00:05:37:04*

*Miha Krofel*

So Eurasian Lynx is the largest felid in Europe ever since Leopard got extinct here. It's interesting species because it's kind of a unique among the lynx genus because all the other lynx species are much smaller and they all adapted to hunting rabbits, hare and the smaller prey. So the only lynx that actually stayed large during the evolution didn't decrease in size.

00:05:37:06 - 00:06:06:13

*Miha Krofel*

So systematically, genetically, it's more linked to the smaller cats like the other lynx species. But ecologically and behaviourally it's actually behave very similar to big cats. I say to puma, cheetah, or leopard and so on. Basically, in that it's specialized in hunting large prey. Means prey same size or larger than yourself. And this has a lot of consequences for their general behaviour and in ecology.

00:06:06:15 - 00:06:12:06

*Miha Krofel*

So, when you think about a cougar or leopard, this is basically lynx just in European landscape.

00:06:12:09 - 00:06:32:08

*James Shooter*

Out of the four living species of lynx worldwide, two are found in North America. The Canada Lynx and my friend the bobcat. In Europe we have Iberian lynx found in Portugal and Spain and Eurasian found from Western Europe to Central Asia. Males of Eurasian Lynx can be up to 30 kilos, more than double that of the Iberian lynx.

00:06:32:10 - 00:06:42:17

*James Shooter*

That certainly explains why one prefers rabbits and the other prefers deer. If you want a comparison a bit closer to home, Eurasian Lynx are roughly the size of a Labrador retriever.

00:06:42:19 - 00:07:06:17

*Miha Krofel*

Generally, people will say that lynx live in the forests. But this is true for a large part of Europe, but not for entire range. So, once you've got, let's say, east or you go south, southeast like Turkey or further east, Mongolia and so on. They can also live out of the forest. And even in Central Europe, for example, here in the Alps, we have now some individuals that are basically above treeline already high in the mountains.

00:07:06:19 - 00:07:30:16

*Miha Krofel*

So, it's not really specialized in a way. But the main factor influencing a lynx habitat use, and especially in Europe, is avoidance of people because they're quite sensitive and because forest is the best place to hide from people. Increased use of forest is even more pronounced here than probably it would be otherwise, but generally it's a generalist and can live in, you know, all sorts of habitats.

00:07:30:18 - 00:07:56:00

*James Shooter*

Across its entire range. The Eurasian Lynx is considered least concern by the IUCN. That's the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Largely due to the stable

Russian population of around 9000 individuals propping it up. However, the further west you go, the subpopulations become smaller and increasingly isolated, so much so that the species is considered near threatened at the EU level and endangered.

*00:07:56:00 - 00:08:05:11*

*James Shooter*

In the Dinaric population, which is the mountain range we're in now, stretching south from Slovenia into Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro and Albania.

*00:08:05:13 - 00:08:27:05*

*Miha Krofel*

Lynx home ranges in our landscape is roughly 200 square kilometres. It's typically a bit bigger with males than with females, but it can range a lot like if you go to other parts of the species' range. So the north is going to be over 1000 square kilometres in some parts like in the south in Turkey, it can be just a few tens of kilometres and it's mainly dictated by the prey.

*00:08:27:05 - 00:08:36:04*

*Miha Krofel*

So, more prey, it means home range can be smaller, but there is very few prey they need to have large home ranges so they don't overhunt basically their prey base.

*00:08:36:06 - 00:08:59:05*

*James Shooter*

In high mountain areas, chamois or often hunted in the far north, reindeer come onto the menu and sika deer are taken in Northeast Asia. Red deer are hunted across the range, but mostly calves, and even the odd elk or boar are taken. But again, focusing on the youngest individuals, However, by far the most popular prey choice across the continent is the roe.

*00:08:59:07 - 00:09:21:06*

*James Shooter*

A medium sized deer overpowered with relative ease and whose meat can be fed upon for four or five days. Roe tends to be faster and have more stamina than other hunters, with only one in four or five hunts being successful. Lynx therefore need to ambush their athletic prey and improve the odds by using stealth. As a top predator

*00:09:21:08 - 00:09:41:10*

*James Shooter*

Lynx have an incredibly important role in the ecosystem. They help regulate the number of grazers and browsers in their territory, thereby limiting their effects on the vegetation. Equally, they change the behaviour of their prey. Deer on alert spend more time with their heads looking up than relaxed deer happily munching away, further reducing the amount of herbivory.

*00:09:41:16 - 00:09:49:02*

*James Shooter*

Overall, they also keep prey populations healthier by often selecting individuals in poor condition, as these are the easier ones to catch.

*00:09:49:04 - 00:10:12:18*

*Miha Krofel*

And then the other role they have is through predation of the meso carnivores, especially Fox seems to be in some study area doing some studies showing that they can actually decrease the abundance of Fox in long time and probably other small carnivores like Martens and some other species. We'll see what will happen actually with jackals, which is now a species spreading.

*00:10:12:20 - 00:10:34:05*

*Miha Krofel*

So here we don't know so much about this interaction. And another important role that lynx have is by providing food for the scavengers. We've done quite some studies also here, and we see that there are many species coming to their prey remains, like for example, for bears. They're quite important because one out of three lynx kills are visited by the brown bear.

*00:10:34:07 - 00:10:40:21*

*Miha Krofel*

Well, so they benefit. And we're just now studying the importance of lynx for the Golden Eagle in the Alps.

*00:10:40:23 - 00:11:02:04*

*James Shooter*

There are around a thousand bears in Slovenia and they kleptoparasitise lynx. This basically means feeding by theft. If you're big enough and bolshy enough, why would you waste precious energy on hunting something yourself? It's much easier to let something else do the hard work than take the rewards with minimal effort. Sounds like a good strategy to me.

*00:11:02:06 - 00:11:17:08*

*James Shooter*

In fact, my wife and kids would probably describe me as a kleptoparasite. Fascinatingly, because this happens so often in Slovenia, the Life lynx team estimates about a 20% higher predation rate of roe, by lynx to replace the loss of carcasses to bears.

*00:11:17:13 - 00:11:47:19*

*Miha Krofel*

Lynx was widespread here in the past, but then because the hunting pressure and loss of prey species and also deforestation lynx got exterminated in the beginning of the 20th century and then was absent for several decades until 1973, when their reintroduction project started and six animals were reintroduced from what used to be Czechoslovakia and in the beginning this population showed really fast growth actually was spreading fast.

00:11:47:19 - 00:12:15:04

*Miha Krofel*

So also colonized neighbouring countries. And this happened. This was happening until roughly 1990s when population first started stagnating. And then after 2000 there was quite a sharp decline. And even though lynx got completely protected in the meantime population was still declining. And it's what shown afterwards. It was mainly because of the inbreeding, because the whole population originated from these six individuals.

00:12:15:06 - 00:12:54:02

*Miha Krofel*

And now until recently we had big problems with small litter sizes, very low survival rates, skeletal deformations. Heart failure was a big problem. Many animals died because of that. So, this is why LIFE Lynx Project was started in 2017, which the main target was to kind of reduce this inbreeding effects. So, we translocated 18 lynx from the Carpathian population and you already saw in our data that many of this population parameters improved, like litter sizes are bigger, survival is much better and the population is increasing.

00:12:54:03 - 00:12:54:12

*Miha Krofel*

Now, again.

00:12:54:17 - 00:13:20:07

*James Shooter*

Whilst historic pressures may have reduced, modern day challenges persist. As secretive animals lynx are quite sensitive to human infrastructure, particularly roads. Through the tips of the trees in the distance we can just about see lines of lorries passing on the main highway to the capital city. Whilst green bridges do exist in Slovenia, this route was built in the seventies and there was no requirement at the time to include them during the construction.

00:13:20:09 - 00:13:41:12

*James Shooter*

As a result, Lynx don't willingly pass. It creates a hard border to the local pairs territory and dispersing animals tend to bounce back in the opposite direction. Thankfully, not all roads are equal. Gravel tracks in the woods are often favoured. They offer an easier commute than traipsing through trees, and they're only infrequently used by hunters and foresters.

00:13:41:17 - 00:14:04:21

*Miha Krofel*

We are we call them kind of a lynx Facebook because they already start marking a lot when it comes to this kind of roads. So, it depends on how they're constructed, what is the traffic volume and so on. And all settlements, if it's, you know, just few houses, they don't mind they sometimes they would come and even scent mark a cabin in the forest but if it is a big town there, they would avoid it.

00:14:04:23 - 00:14:09:10

*James Shooter*

That makes sense. And do they pose a threat to livestock farmers?

00:14:09:12 - 00:14:28:00

*Miha Krofel*

They can, but the damages are very low, especially when we compare them, let's say with wolves or bears. For example, in Slovenia, we have several thousands of livestock killed every year by large carnivores, and usually it's one or even less than one on average by the lynx.

00:14:28:05 - 00:14:29:08

*James Shooter*

Wow. So hardly anything.

00:14:29:08 - 00:14:57:07

*Miha Krofel*

Yeah, but again, you know, it's also true that in our landscape, most of our livestock is protected because of the wolves and the bears. But if you have, you know, completely unprotected sheep, that's not possible that some lynx won't go for them. For example, like in Norway, Norway doesn't have any protection. And then the sheep is actually important food source for the lynx as well so they can cause trouble, but they are much easier to protect from the lynx compared to most other carnivores.

00:14:57:12 - 00:15:02:01

*James Shooter*

And just out of interest, how do you do that? How do you protect against lynx?

00:15:02:01 - 00:15:12:01

*Miha Krofel*

Yeah, I mean, tradition here we've always been like livestock guarding dogs, having human like a like a shepherd in other ways, the most effective way is electric fence.

00:15:12:03 - 00:15:37:09

*James Shooter*

I feel like I've learned a huge amount about these mysterious cats from one of Europe's most prominent experts. It's time to head off the hill now, join the highway we were looking down on and head into unknown territory. The city, never mind a lynx struggling to navigate human infrastructure. How does a James do it? Eventually, I find my way up to the offices of the Slovenian Forest Service on the western edge of Ljubljana.

00:15:37:09 - 00:16:01:09

*James Shooter*

Relatively on time and relatively unscathed. Rok Cerne greets me in the foyer and we wind up the stairs to his office on the third floor. As we push through the door, I'm in no doubt we're in the right place for the Life Lynx Project coordinator. Almost every square



inch of the walls is adorned with photographs of lynx, illustrations of lynx, lynx, graphics, lynx books.

*00:16:01:11 - 00:16:24:24*

*James Shooter*

I even spy a copy of the Lynx & Us, a book written by a friend of mine, David Hetherington, which we produced at the charity I used to work for Scotland: The big Picture. From Scotland to Slovenia, Lynx obviously ignite the imagination. As Rok starts to find me lots of glossy leaflets and booklets to take home something special catches my eye on one of his shelves.

*00:16:25:01 - 00:16:25:19*

*James Shooter*

I see.

*00:16:25:21 - 00:16:27:00*

*Rok Cerne*

But it's all on the internet.

*00:16:27:05 - 00:16:39:04*

*James Shooter*

Yeah. I mean, I'm most interested in this. That is very cool. Hahaha. No. What kind of liquor is that? Is that Slovenian?

*00:16:39:06 - 00:16:41:02*

*Rok Cerne*

No, that's from Harz.

*00:16:41:07 - 00:16:46:15*

*James Shooter*

From Harz. okay. Amazing. I'll have to find some of that. That's amazing.

*00:16:46:15 - 00:16:48:18*

*Rok Cerne*

Yeah. So cool. They send it to me.

*00:16:48:19 - 00:16:49:22*

*James Shooter*

Yeah.

*00:16:49:24 - 00:17:04:08*

*James Shooter*

This suspiciously yellow liquor is Der Luchs, and the label on its bottle is home to a lovely drawing of a lynx. I'm pretty sure if we cracked it open, some of the illustrations on the wall might start coming to life. Anyway, back to Rok.

*00:17:04:11 - 00:17:48:13*

*Rok Cerne*

I'm working in Slovenia Forest Service for 15 years. I already started on the Wildlife Department. First I was involved in Wolf, then in some bear work, and then actually we were observing the Lynx and the problems all the time, and we started to develop a strategic document for Slovenia, together with the ministry university hunters Association. And then when we were creating the strategic document in parallel, practically, we also started to write the Life Lynx Project.

*00:17:48:19 - 00:17:52:06*

*James Shooter*

So, bears, wolves and lynx, all the cool stuff.

*00:17:52:08 - 00:17:56:19*

*Rok Cerne*

The cool stuff, I'm not so sure. All the difficult stuff!

*00:17:56:21 - 00:18:00:04*

*James Shooter*

Yeah, Yeah. You like a challenge. Basically.

*00:18:00:06 - 00:18:20:01*

*James Shooter*

The Slovenian Forest Service is a public institution to help forest owners manage their trees. Every trunk thicker than ten centimetres, which is due to be cut down, must go through them. They make strategic plans for all public and private forests and also the hunting management plans for the country, the most important of which are for the ungulates.

*00:18:20:03 - 00:19:04:06*

*Rok Cerne*

We are setting the quotas and all other measures for these animals. And then in addition to this, we work something for the protected species, especially in Bear Wolf and the lynx. We work, we are preparing to the proposals for a removal. It can be some quotas for the bear or some conflict individuals for bear and wolves. And we are also doing the monitoring, national monitoring, and then we evaluate damages done by the protected species, by all of them.

*00:19:04:08 - 00:19:43:23*

*Rok Cerne*

So yeah, we are quite actively involved also in large carnivores and basically, we try to maintain balance between human and the populations, so it will be acceptable in long term. So, on one hand we propose a removal of animals such as bear and wolves, and on the other hand we saw that lynx is critically endangered. We just have had 20 animals left and then we start pushing that we need to do something with the reinforcement of the population.

*00:19:44:00 - 00:20:14:23*

*James Shooter*

The Life Lynx Initiative aims to rescue the small and increasingly inbred Dinaric population whilst creating a stepping stone group in the north that would link to the Italian Alps. This will boost the at-risk Slovenian Lynx and help them to mix with cats further afield, ensuring a healthier gene flow into the next generations. Unlike the Iberian Lynx, which had to be saved by an intensive captive breeding program, the Eurasian Lynx still has strong populations in the East which can be trapped and moved around to help bolster groups elsewhere.

*00:20:15:00 - 00:20:45:13*

*Rok Cerne*

In our case, we are lucky that in Carpathians we still have a healthy population and in my opinion, this is the best way to use such a population because we are taking a few animals per year out of a population of a few thousand. You don't harm the population. And on the other hand, we transferred also a lot of knowledge to especially to Romania, for example.

*00:20:45:13 - 00:21:15:24*

*Rok Cerne*

People are not used to works work with Lynx there and we taught them how to capture the lynx and we together developed some monitoring methods which are suitable for this area, and we ensured some sources for monitoring in Slovakia and Romania. So, in my belief, those countries benefited from being involved in the project and of course we needed those animals.

*00:21:16:05 - 00:21:40:22*

*James Shooter*

Lynx are exterminated from the area by the beginning of the 20th century. It was a movement driven by the state. The policy here 100 years ago was to remove basically everything that caused issues. That meant wolves, lynx and ungulates like boar and deer were steadily wiped out. But in 1973, the lynx was offered a helping hand, not by politicians, but perhaps an unlikely saviour.

*00:21:40:24 - 00:21:54:04*

*James Shooter*

The Hunters, a group of progressive hunters and foresters banded together and managed to bring the six lynx Miha was telling me about back to the forests where they hadn't stalked for decades, and at first, they did well.

*00:21:54:10 - 00:22:31:22*

*Rok Cerne*

So those lynx created very nice population spreading to Croatia, Bosnia, even north to Italy and Austria and it worked very well for about 30 years. Population was spreading, we had enough animals. They were also hunted because the hunters brought it back to bring back species which belong to our forest, but also to bring back a trophy animal. But then about 20, 25 years ago, we started to observe the decline.

00:22:31:22 - 00:23:00:15

*Rok Cerne*

So the hunting stopped actually, for Slovenia. It's interesting, the first one who saw the decline of wolves, for example, were the hunters. And they protected the wolf before the state did that well. So also, for the lynx, they were not hunting anymore, but also the state didn't make the plans anymore. And it was not clear back then what was going on.

00:23:00:15 - 00:23:38:11

*Rok Cerne*

Actually, something is wrong is it's with the preys, it with habitat, is it with illegal killing, it's inbreeding? So, the conclusion was that inbreeding was the key threat. So, the geneticists calculate the inbreeding coefficient and they were so, so inbred more than brother and sister or brother and brother with humans. So, between brother and brother and making yourself like this was really, really high inbreeding level.

00:23:38:11 - 00:23:42:03

*Rok Cerne*

And that, of course caused health issues.

00:23:42:05 - 00:24:08:07

*James Shooter*

I am sure that for some it would be hard to imagine a situation where those that hunt an animal are also those that save it. But hunters here are fiercely proud of their natural heritage and are so well connected to their local ground that to ignore their involvement would be a massive misjudgement. Now, I can't imagine myself ever wanting to shoot a Lynx, but I also wouldn't have the knowledge on how to save it, how to track it, how to think like a lynx.

00:24:08:09 - 00:24:16:06

*James Shooter*

The hunters were the pioneers who reignited the lynx in the seventies, and their ongoing involvement is crucial to the overall success of this vital mission.

00:24:16:08 - 00:24:44:18

*Rok Cerne*

So, we are working together for a long time, not seeing a chance that it would be any other way, because they really also for the field work, they know the field and when we are doing the monitoring, the hunters are great. We also go we go together to set the cameras because we know where they somebody saw lynx that followed the lynx tracks in the snow or something like this.

00:24:44:18 - 00:25:17:24

*Rok Cerne*

So, their knowledge is very valuable for us. And our hunters have local hunting clubs and they know the local society very well. So they were included for releasing the animals and they actually release the animals and communicate the things within their local

society. We, from the capital cannot do that. They can do it. And these are things without which this project wouldn't work.

*00:25:18:00 - 00:25:34:18*

*James Shooter*

To reinforce an at-risk population of animals, you need a source and the consensus for this part of Europe is that the Carpathians offer the closest healthy population of Lynx. They were never wiped out and with expansive habitat and low human density, they remain in good nick to this day.

*00:25:34:20 - 00:26:06:22*

*Rok Cerne*

And I think that this in the whole Western part, the politics was going the direction of exterminating everything. What is not completely, I would say everything. What potentially bothers us, For example, if lynx can eat a sheep, it must be removed. And if we have red deer which eat the grass and our grasslands, we need to remove them.

*00:26:06:22 - 00:26:38:11*

*Rok Cerne*

And if the wild boar is doing some damage too, it's clear that these animals cause trouble to farming. But I believe with our knowledge we can do something to coexist and also my personal belief is humans have to find ways to coexist with wild animals. We don't have the right to remove any of them. We need to co-exist.

*00:26:38:13 - 00:27:05:14*

*James Shooter*

Coexist. Perhaps the most important trait for humans to relearn. We're not the only beings on this planet. We shouldn't separate ourselves entirely from nature. We should intertwine. Those hunters that push for the lynx to come back are in that world of coexistence. They take a little but give a lot. 50 years on from the initial reintroduction, people still play a big part in the make or break of this Cats comeback.

*00:27:05:16 - 00:27:30:06*

*James Shooter*

Whilst it's vitally important to know how many animals you can take from source, it's also imperative to know how many you can bring in at the receiving end. Too few, and you risk not escaping your inbreeding issue. Too many and the public opinion may turn against you. Thankfully, in modern day Slovenia, surveys at the beginning of the project showed there was overwhelming support from the public for the Lynx return.

*00:27:30:08 - 00:28:09:18*

*Rok Cerne*

Regarding lynx in Slovenia, there was practically no opposition because lynx in Slovenia practically doesn't do damages. We have about one damaged case per year in Slovenia on sheep. So lynx is not even real issue for the farmers and our hunters like in general, the presence of lynx. So it was no question about that. But nonetheless, there are a few

few hunters who don't like the lynx so much, and there are few farmers who don't like the lynx so much.

*00:28:09:20 - 00:28:40:05*

*Rok Cerne*

So, from our perception, our strategy was that we need to inform them and involve them and explain what we are doing. So, some of them are involved in actually our project and working together. But no, you cannot involve 22,000 hunters. So, for everybody, we prepared articles in the Hunting magazine, what we are doing. We had local consultative groups for local inhabitants for wherever.

*00:28:40:05 - 00:29:00:17*

*Rok Cerne*

We released the Lynx, we created a local consultative group where everybody could join and we were informing them like approximate demand for what we are doing and met once or twice per year to present our work to answer the questions and concerns and try to address them.

*00:29:00:19 - 00:29:21:15*

*James Shooter*

The evidence from the Carpathians, and particularly in Romania, was that when an animal was taken, it was replaced very quickly by another individual moving in. This would suggest a healthy, interconnected population in that region. Even so, the team would only trap and remove a single lynx from an area before moving on and identifying a new location to capture the next.

*00:29:21:17 - 00:29:24:18*

*James Shooter*

Thus, ensuring a good variety of genes were collected along the way.

*00:29:24:24 - 00:30:10:02*

*Rok Cerne*

So, for capturing lynx, you have to know how he moves very well. You have to find his path where he walks and so for this first year we installed some monitoring, so we set out camera traps. So, where the lynx are and then where the lynx were regular removing or having her marking spots. We set then the box traps on the best such locations and when you set the box trap, you have to be ready 24 hours because when it triggers, you have to go there immediately.

*00:30:10:04 - 00:30:30:19*

*James Shooter*

Once the caught lynx are tranquilized, the race is on to carry out health checks, administer a rabies vaccination and transport the animal to a holding facility. The cat is then taken to their release enclosure in Slovenia, where they're held for some time. This gives them a chance to get used to their new surroundings and improves the probability of them sticking around the area once they are released.

*00:30:30:21 - 00:30:59:21*

*James Shooter*

This approach is known as soft release. To bolster a population or create a new one. Like the Alpine stepping stone, it's important to release the pair together so that they get used to one another and have a better chance of mating. Basically, it's a bespoke dating service. Find an eligible bachelor and one or maybe two bachelorettes. Send them for a few nights away to let them get to know each other and then release them into a new home, preferably under a beautiful moonlit sky, with Barry White playing in the background.

*00:30:59:23 - 00:31:41:19*

*Rok Cerne*

When we released a female in the dynamics, we released it where we haven't recorded the females in close vicinity of that. And also the males were released in the area where there were other animals present. It wouldn't make sense to release it outside. So at the beginning we decided that we we have four release enclosures, two in one region and two in Dinaric, and based on their availability, based on monitoring of the population and based on the sex, we decided in which enclosure this animal will go and be released from there.

*00:31:41:23 - 00:31:49:05*

*James Shooter*

After years of consulting, engagement, monitoring and releasing, what is the end result for the Dinaric lynx?

*00:31:49:07 - 00:32:21:12*

*Rok Cerne*

So, we managed to translocate 18 individuals. We already included in the population 12. Some of them were released this year, so we cannot perceive them included in the population. We already recorded 18 reproductions of the translocated animals. Also, the area in the Alps, we have regular reproduction in first year one, the next year three. For this year we already recorded two.

*00:32:21:14 - 00:32:34:16*

*Rok Cerne*

So, in long term I hope that the connection with the other population would happen and natural exchange of genes which happened in the project LIFE Lynx won't be needed anymore.

*00:32:34:22 - 00:32:35:15*

*James Shooter*

So, the key thing.

*00:32:35:15 - 00:32:45:04*

*James Shooter*

Now is that connectivity between existing populations so that the expanding reproductive kittens and stuff making new territories and spreading out into the populations.

*00:32:45:08 - 00:32:55:14*

*Rok Cerne*

Yeah, exactly. I mean, in Slovenia we have space for about 100 other individuals. So we need to be connected with the neighbouring countries and neighbouring populations.

*00:32:55:20 - 00:33:17:01*

*James Shooter*

I'm fascinated by the ecological impact of apex predators, but I'm equally intrigued by the human element. There are so many people working on an initiative like this. I'm particularly keen to hear more on the close working relationship with hunters. I leave Rok and Head back out the city. I've arranged to meet Jernej and Tjasa. A husband and wife team who are passionate local hunters.

*00:33:17:06 - 00:33:39:13*

*James Shooter*

They've been long term collaborators in the Life Lynx program and they've agreed to take me into the forest to check camera traps. Whilst they might have turned up dressed in camouflage. The vehicle is a bit harder to miss. A mint green Austrian made 4x4 from the 1980s. It's retro, loud and I love it. Thank you.

*00:33:39:15 - 00:33:42:12*

*James Shooter*

I like this vehicle. This is a cool. Yes.

*00:33:42:14 - 00:33:54:23*

*Jernej Zgur*

So, to go. We have Tjasa is my wife. Yeah. And we are running smaller tourist agency. yeah, right. We are doing bear watching tours.

*00:33:55:00 - 00:33:55:11*

*James Shooter*

Amazing.

*00:33:55:17 - 00:34:11:09*

*Jernej Zgur*

Yes. Yeah, this is very cool. We use this car for this. And our colleague for this we are doing this bear watching and forest hiking during the mostly summer.

*00:34:11:11 - 00:34:32:00*

*James Shooter*

As Tjasa winds and weaves through the deserted forest roads Jernej excitedly rummages for his phone to show me something. Stored amongst his pictures are some of his prized



captures from one of their trail cameras. He scrolls past a badger, some red deer, even a couple of wolves, to the creme de la creme of Woodland Wanderers: a lynx.

*00:34:32:02 - 00:34:35:00*

*Jernej Zgur*

But we already know this is Blinks.

*00:34:35:02 - 00:34:36:16*

*James Shooter*

You know which lynx that is.

*00:34:36:21 - 00:34:42:00*

*Jernej Zgur*

Is. Yeah, yeah. So, they recognize him by the pattern of the dots.

*00:34:42:02 - 00:34:43:18*

*James Shooter*

Ah so they're all different?

*00:34:43:20 - 00:34:55:15*

*Jernej Zgur*

It's like a fingerprint. Others yeah. Wow. So cool. I already know. It's Blinks.

*00:34:55:17 - 00:35:16:24*

*James Shooter*

Hunters like Jernej and Tjasa know these forests intimately. It's why they've been so integral to the Life Lynx Project. They, of course, have their own experiences with wildlife amongst the dense forest here, but they're also part of a network of hunters that live and breathe it too. It's their knowledge of the landscape and experience tracking animals. That is so invaluable to projects like this.

*00:35:17:01 - 00:35:41:00*

*James Shooter*

A pawprint seen over here. a roe kill found over there. It means they'll know exactly where the best places are to install camera traps. As hunters, it's in their interest to know how the local wildlife is doing. They're often the first to realize when a particular species is showing signs of decline. For instance, when they notice the roe deer population taking a plunge, they took it upon themselves to leave them be.

*00:35:41:00 - 00:35:51:18*

*James Shooter*

If roe deer numbers remain low, will they will the lynx switch prey to smaller red deer or things like that, or will they still go after the roe? Yeah.

*00:35:51:20 - 00:36:15:23*

*Jernej Zgur*

Yeah, it's guess so. Yeah. Okay. They say yeah. So, the scientists, it's not we. Yeah. What we see is so they say the lynx can go for the smaller and the baby red deer. Yes. And the other quite often for the lynx here is, you know, Dormouse? yeah. Yeah. Dormouse Yeah. So, Dormouse Yeah, yeah.

*00:36:16:00 - 00:36:36:21*

*Jernej Zgur*

They're, they're living all over the Europe. Yeah, yeah. But they're usually living in the, in the trees yeah. Except the here once the limestone area. We have a lot of holes in the ground, little caves. Yeah. And shelters. Yeah. They live on the floor. Yeah. Yeah. And it's easier for us to catch them.

*00:36:36:21 - 00:36:37:06*

*Jernej Zgur*

Yeah.

*00:36:37:08 - 00:36:38:08*

*James Shooter*

Okay. Well.

*00:36:38:10 - 00:36:47:20*

*Tjasa Zgur*

And we have a lot of them because the main trees here are Beech tree, and the main food for the dormouse.

*00:36:47:22 - 00:36:57:04*

*James Shooter*

God I wouldn't have thought lynx would go for a dormouse.

*00:36:57:06 - 00:37:24:14*

*Jernej Zgur*

Seven years ago it was five years ago when they ask us for to cooperate with the Forest Service you know, to go to carry for the camera traps, we just didn't care, we put the camera up and we go every two months to check the what's it recorded but biggest no it was not the biggest job was to find out where to put the camera.

*00:37:24:14 - 00:37:26:03*

*Jernej Zgur*

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

*00:37:26:07 - 00:37:30:15*

*James Shooter*

Because it's on forest trails and yeah, you can check through on your phone?

*00:37:30:17 - 00:37:32:20*

*Tjasa Zgur*

Yeah. It's easier if you have some equipment.

00:37:32:20 - 00:37:35:13

*James Shooter*

Yeah. Yeah, definitely. I didn't know that was even a thing.

00:37:35:15 - 00:37:38:13

*Jernej Zgur*

Yeah. We checked this camera a few a few days ago.

00:37:38:13 - 00:37:48:18

*James Shooter*

Yeah, yeah, yeah. The amounts camera traps I've checked back in Scotland and. And carried the card all the way back home to the computer. So, you just do it on your phone. I didn't even know that existed.

00:37:48:19 - 00:37:51:24

*Tjasa Zgur*

So, some of them, they can send you a picture straight away.

00:37:52:00 - 00:37:53:06

*James Shooter*

Yeah, right. Yeah.

00:37:53:08 - 00:37:54:08

*Tjasa Zgur*

But this camera.

00:37:54:11 - 00:37:58:18

*James Shooter*

This, they even just to check for the other card in the field like that is a lot easier.

00:37:58:23 - 00:38:10:05

*Tjasa Zgur*

And easier and faster. Yes. Yeah. So, it's also really important not to spend a lot of time here. Yeah. If, you know, the lynx and other animals are here, so just come check and go.

00:38:10:07 - 00:38:13:18

*James Shooter*

Ah motor biker. Okay. Yeah.

00:38:13:20 - 00:38:16:14

*Jernej Zgur*

No, I'm just talking about it. Yeah. Yes.

00:38:16:16 - 00:38:17:17

*James Shooter*

Yeah, first thing that comes up.

00:38:17:19 - 00:38:25:15

*Jernej Zgur*

No, no, that's a roe deer. Yeah. Yeah.

00:38:25:17 - 00:38:28:15

*Jernej Zgur*

It's only five days. Yeah. Yeah. It was.

00:38:28:17 - 00:38:30:10

*James Shooter*

Oh badger!

00:38:30:12 - 00:38:51:16

*Jernej Zgur*

Me. Yeah. Yeah, So badger and deer. Yeah. Okay, this few days. Otherwise, we get lynx here. Here. Yeah. Yeah. This area twice so amazing.

*Tjasa Zgur*

Yeah this location we find out after the winter we saw the footprints so we then we decide to put camera here.

00:38:51:18 - 00:39:11:20

*James Shooter*

No lynx this time but that's not surprising. Having seen the size of a territory from up high in the hills with Miha is amazing to capture any activity at all. I can't imagine the excitement, though, of first seeing one of these cats on the camera wandering along the very trail you stood on. I'd probably cry a little if I ever saw one in the flesh.

00:39:11:22 - 00:39:28:11

*James Shooter*

This husband and wife team are obviously passionate about lynx. You can hear the excitement in their voices as they talk to me about them. I'm interested about the hunting community here, how it works, why they do it, and their feeling of responsibility to a feline. Hardly any of them will have seen.

00:39:28:13 - 00:39:33:18

*Jernej Zgur*

There are 400 hunting ground here, so Slovenia is divided.

00:39:33:19 - 00:39:34:19

*James Shooter*

Split up into four hundred?

00:39:34:24 - 00:40:07:23

*Jernej Zgur*

Split into 400 yeah and we have 400 hunting clubs. So, with anyone citizen of Slovenia can join, okay and make the exams here to be a hunter. And it costs us 105, €150 a year. And we hunt for free except accept out of this, Slovenia has ten bigger areas which are managed by the Forest Service.

*00:40:08:01 - 00:40:08:23*

*James Shooter*  
Okay.

*00:40:09:00 - 00:40:13:22*

*Jernej Zgur*  
Like Rok Cerne from the Forest Service. Yeah. There special meaning. Yeah, some special areas.

*00:40:13:22 - 00:40:20:08*

*James Shooter*  
So, you have to stick to your own hunting area. You can't, you can't go for a weekend somewhere else.

*00:40:20:10 - 00:40:43:19*

*Jernej Zgur*  
Now we are, we are often invited by other hunters. But this forest, we have 5000 hectares, four or five thousand hectares, average area to hunt. And you can also join two clubs. Yeah. Okay. All right. And you are invited with by the others. Yeah. But ten then. All of these are bigger and they are managed by the Forest Service.

*00:40:43:21 - 00:40:52:24*

*Jernej Zgur*  
and our areas where we hunt also the, the Forest Service is managed by the Forest Service not by us.

*00:40:53:01 - 00:41:18:18*

*James Shooter*  
The main quarry for the hunters here is the ungulates. So red deer roe deer and wild boar. The Slovenian Forest Service sets quotas for them all. Some foxes, badgers and wildfowl are also shot in some hunting concessions, bear hunting still takes place. It's usually for a trophy by visiting hunters from outside of Slovenia. Jernej tells me it's not well-supported by the general public, and it's great to see them making a real venture from bear watching tourism instead.

*00:41:18:18 - 00:41:31:12*

*James Shooter*  
Their bear hides are fully booked in the summer months. That's got to be a clear signal to the value of these awe-inspiring animals. The last lynx that was legally shot was in the eighties, but they're now very much protected.

*00:41:31:14 - 00:41:58:12*

*Jernej Zgur*

It's about also I remember your questions. It's about how the hunters feel about the lynx. Yeah. Yeah, they are. There are 60 of us here, so we have different opinion. It's not always the same. And so, we are more active, you know, with running this tourist agency. We must be, you know, informed about everything. And we. So, we follow Forest Service.

*00:41:58:12 - 00:42:06:23*

*Jernej Zgur*

Yes. And the University of Ljubljana, what they think what they say, you know, but some hunters, you know, they see a lynx like a competition. Yes.

*00:42:06:23 - 00:42:08:03*

*James Shooter*

Yes. I was wondering about that.

*00:42:08:03 - 00:42:29:09*

*Jernej Zgur*

Yeah. And it's Yeah. Why? The roe deer population, it's yeah, it's always like up and down now it's like a little bit down and then who is they. All they think who is the guilty one. And now bring your bringing lynx you know. Yes. Yeah. And that is main pressure on the roe deer. Yeah. And they don't like it you know.

*00:42:29:09 - 00:42:36:22*

*Jernej Zgur*

And now it's our job and everybody to, to convince them the different mission.

*00:42:36:22 - 00:42:44:06*

*James Shooter*

Imagine that's better probably coming from Hunter to Hunter than someone maybe in the city saying you should like lynx.

*00:42:44:08 - 00:43:00:14*

*Jernej Zgur*

So, my thinking is we are people we are guilty. You know we make the lynx almost extinct from this land. So, we all owe now to reintroduce it to carry to, to bring it back.

*00:43:00:20 - 00:43:02:19*

*James Shooter*

So, it's part of your responsibility?

*00:43:02:19 - 00:43:15:04*

*Jernej Zgur*

Yes, of course. Bigger than everything here, me as a hunter. And I can say that the big part of the hunters, agree with me. It's our responsibility to bring the lynx back.

*00:43:15:04 - 00:43:17:17*

*James Shooter*

Yeah, that's really a good. It's good to hear.

*00:43:17:19 - 00:43:47:03*

*James Shooter*

When it comes to nature loss, we all need to take responsibility, recognising our impact on the lands around us and the life that lives there. We can do something about it, or we can do nothing. It's as simple as that. These are hunters taking responsibility and making a difference. They're working together with academics, researchers, foresters and politicians, each bringing with them something different an alternative viewpoint, an additional skillset.

*00:43:47:05 - 00:44:11:16*

*James Shooter*

What I'm trying to get at is that humans can become extremely tribal based on our beliefs. I've heard rewilders say that they'd nothing to do with hunters, and hunters say they'd have nothing to do with rewilders. Yet the Life Lynx Project is proof that when people come together, a much bigger difference can be made. Concessions, compromise and finding common ground are vitally important ingredients in the recipe of nature restoration.

*00:44:11:16 - 00:44:46:17*

*James Shooter*

I must admit a particularly personal interest in the successes and failures of lynx reintroduction here. I'll make it no secret that I'd love to see them returned one day to Woodlands back home. They'd fit back in perfectly to the expanding forests of Scotland, stealthily hunting the abundance of deer glimpsed perhaps by a lucky few. Their legend passed on through the whispers of hill walkers. In the UK we're likely to be the last corner of Europe not to have any of the continent's apex predators, and with poorer for it.

*00:44:46:19 - 00:45:11:17*

*James Shooter*

I'm embarrassed when I have to admit to new friends across Europe that badgers are the biggest predators to walk our lands. I have nothing against budgets, by the way, but I'd love to walk through the woods knowing there's something a wee bit larger out there. Credit to Slovenia and the other progressives willing to live alongside bears, wolves and the ghosts of the forests, despite the challenges they may present.

*00:45:11:19 - 00:45:36:23*

*James Shooter*

You're sharing this world. I raise my glass to you. If only it had some Der Luchs in it. Thanks for joining me for episode 11 of the Rewild podcast. I love getting into the detail of a species-specific episode, so I'm sure we'll do more in the future. It is great to spend time with Miha, Rok, Jernej & Tjasa.

*00:45:37:00 - 00:46:00:01*

*James Shooter*

*The Rewild Podcast*  
*By James Shooter*  
*Episode 11*  
*LIFE Lynx*



You each gave me a wonderful insight into the secretive life of the Lynx. As always, thanks to Andrew O'Donnell Beluga Lagoon for the music and Gemma Shooter for producing the artwork. Life Lynx is a member of the European Rewilding Network, a collection of ground-breaking initiatives across the continent brought together by Rewilding Europe as part of a broader rewilding movement.

*00:46:00:03 - 00:46:15:19*

*James Shooter*

This is an organization making rewilding happen through positive action on the ground. Do join us next month as we travel into the mountains of Italy to visit the Central Apennines. There's crayfish, bears and cheese. What more could you want? Catch you next time.