Chapter 15
Iberian Lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) Conservation in Holm Oak Montados of Southeastern Portugal: The Identification of New Biodiversity-Related Activities in an Economically Depressed Rural Area

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ABSTRACT

Five volunteers mapped wild rabbit latrines along transects, as a prey index for endangered Iberian Lynx, in the Municipality of Barrancos, a Natura 2000 area. High capability and local knowledge suggest that conservation employment could offset declining rural activities with alternative income.

INTRODUCTION

The Portuguese case study was developed in the Municipality of Barrancos, in the Southeast of Portugal (Figure 1), in the context of Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) conservation. The case study included the development of one socio-economic and one mapping project with the main aim of identifying emergent economic activities associated with biodiversity conservation and management in the region, while increasing the awareness of biodiversity conservation issues in general and for Iberian lynx conservation in particular.

The region of Barrancos is largely dominated by Holm oak (*Quercus rotundifolia*) “montados” with variable tree and shrub cover (Figure 1). The area is included in the Natura 2000 Network due to the presence of natural/semi-natural habitats...
and animal species with high conservation value, and due to its historic importance for the occurrence of the critically endangered Iberian lynx (IUCN 2011). This species is currently the most endangered carnivore in Europe (Delibes et al. 2000; IUCN 2011) and the most endangered feline in the world (Nowell & Jackson 1996), with a geographic distribution limited to the Iberian Peninsula and an estimated population of less than 200 adults in the wild (Junta de Andalucia 2011). In Portugal there are no stable populations of the species. The Barrancos area is the only one where the species has been detected in Portugal in the last decade. Several projects are now underway in this region to maintain and improve the habitat for an eventual reintroduction of Iberian lynxes raised in captivity.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROJECT

Since the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century there was a considerable decline of the traditional systems of labour-intensive agriculture in the Barrancos’s region. This was associated with a decline in population, productivity and employment. During this period cereal production diminished to negligible levels and, at the same time, cattle and Iberian pig production increased. Ham and other pig products of high quality and certified origin are still produced in Barrancos, but agriculture based on animal production and the ham industry does not generate sufficient jobs for the local population.

By the other hand, almost all the Barranco’s territory is included in Natura 2000 and is also included in the priority area for Iberian lynx conservation. For these two reasons the environmental services associated with biodiversity have a potentially high added value. Improving payment from ecosystem services is one of the more important challenges for the future of the people of Barrancos and for biodiversity conservation in the region.

The new terms of Barranco’s socio-economic equation should, therefore, include biodiversity. This perception is already in practice in the project area, where public and private investments are being made in the tourism sector and in biodiversity conservation. Local people have advantages for creating new jobs due to their local knowledge, but have disadvantages due to lack of technical skills and specific training.

The concept for the socio-economic project was to determine the region’s present socio-economic equation and to help the local community to
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