

KRYSTUFEK, B., FLAJSMAN, B. & GRIFFITHS, H.I. (eds) (2003): *Living with Bears - A Large European Carnivore in a Shrinking World. - Ecological Forum of the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia in Cooperation with the Liberal Academy, Ljubljana, Slovenia.* 368 pp., numerous photographs, figures, and maps. ISBN 961-90522-4-2

This book grew out of a heated public political debate in Slovenia in 1999 and 2000 over the future of the brown bear population. It has some more breadth in coverage but its main emphasis is on issues related to the existence of large carnivores (brown bear, wolf, lynx) in an area as densely populated and as intensively under human use as Europe, in particular the situation in Slovenia. After a general introductory contribution "The Pleistocene history of the brown bear with particular reference to the western Palearctic" its remaining three main chapters are dedicated to the subject under the following headings: "Large carnivore - human interactions", "Case studies", "Management". As stated before, the major portion of individual contributions geographically focusses on Slovenia but other areas of eastern (Slovakia, Czech Republic), south eastern (Croatia, the southern Balkans) and southern central Europe (Brenta, Italy) are also covered. The first main chapter on large carnivore - human interactions spans the time period from the Upper Pleistocene with a paper on the interactions of Neanderthal men and the cave bear to another with case studies of human - brown bear conflicts in Slovenia during 1999-2000. The scope of this chapter also includes a study on the public opinion on large carnivores in the Alps and the Dinaric Mountains, and thus also covers the very important cultural and socio-political aspect of their conservation. The Case Studies chapter mainly presents data on population dynamics, status and conservation issues of large carnivores in Slovenia and various other areas, treating problems and human-bear conflicts arising from brown bears preying on domestic animals and raiding places in or close to human settlements in search for food, or direct encounters between humans and bears in the wild. The contributions of the Management chapter in some way try a perspective of brown bear conservation in

Slovenia in the specific situation of that country, considering the main biological and socio-cultural issues mentioned in the previous chapters. It is obvious, not only for Slovenia, that conservation planning for large carnivores in Europe definitely will have to include population management strategies because suitable habitat for any of these species is so restricted and fragmented that in any area where they are still present or which they could recolonize only relatively limited populations can survive. Unfortunately, it is just this issue which is still highly contentious in the general public debate.

Like a burning lens this book focusses our attention to all the issues that in a wider scope are crucial in large carnivore conservation in Europe and which already are under hot debate in those countries where populations of them still exist. They are sure to become 'virulent' in any other part of Europe where any of these species may return actively, is already in the process of doing so or where there are plans to reintroduce one of them with human assistance. Unless all these issues are considered seriously and openly addressed in a public debate large carnivores have little chance of survival in most of Europe, no matter whether they are legally protected or not, and any plans for their reintroduction are doomed to become a failure.

All in all this book is testimony of a remarkable effort and the dedication of a few people. They have done the wider European community a great service. This is all the more laudable as Slovenia is one of the smaller European countries. In addition, this volume provides a lot of data on a mammal species for which there is little published from this part of European range in widely accessible publications. Definitely, this book ought to be on the shelves of anybody involved in issues of nature conservation, especially for large carnivores, no matter whether on the side of the biologists, the general public directly concerned by planned relevant measures or that of those involved in actual political decision making.

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