

## Poster 11

**CONSERVATION STATUS OF BROWN BEARS IN THE DINARA – PINDOS AND STARA PLANINA – RILA - RHODOPI MOUNTAINS**

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Despite being legally protected throughout the biggest part of their range, brown bears (*Ursus arctos L.*) in southeastern Europe face a number of threats and their survival is still far from being secured. A general misconception and significant hindrance in the effective conservation of the species is the local range in which management measures are planned and implemented. With home ranges that can span over several countries, brown bear conservation and management efforts should be planned and carried out on a transboundary level. Considering the legislative, logistic and scientific differences and the differences in conservation and management priorities between different countries, coordinating and bringing them under a common conservation framework is a considerable challenge. Within the framework of a SEE-ERA.NET program, an effort was launched in 2006 to recreate the BALKAN NET, a network of conservation bodies in countries sharing continuous large carnivore populations in southeastern Europe. This network managed to gather data from eight countries and link scientists and conservationists of the area. One of the primary goals of their cooperation was to assess the conservation status of brown bears in the region. In order to guarantee a uniform method of data collection, a standardized protocol for reviewing published data and summarizing information on ongoing research and conservation activities was devised. Data collection included information on various topics, such as distribution, population size and trends, mortality, reproductive and legal status of the species in the country, management priorities, human – bear conflicts, threats and research and conservation actions carried out in each respective country. The compilation of information from each participating country produced a clear picture of the status of the brown bear populations in the Dinara-Pindos and Stara Planina – Rila-Rhodopi Mountains, both on a biological and a conservation and management level. While the general status of the species in the northern part of the range (i.e. Slovenia and Croatia) can be considered as favorable, conservation conditions for brown bears in the region deteriorate as one proceeds towards the southern part of the range and improve again slightly reaching the southernmost edge of the species distribution, in Greece. While the participants presented some minor information gaps in certain areas, some countries, such as Albania lacked even basic information on population parameters and mortality figures. Considerable research efforts are still required in order to fill in these knowledge gaps. The assessment of the conservation status of brown bears in the Dinara – Pindos and Stara Planina – Rila-Rhodopi Mountains enabled the identification of research, management and conservation priorities for the species, both on a national and a transboundary level. The information compiled will be used to improve the National Action Plans for the species in each respective country and serve as the groundwork for a transboundary Action Plan for brown bears in the region.

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