

# Flora & Fauna in Spain

## The Iberian Lynx

(*Lynx pardinus*)

The Iberian lynx is still the world's most threatened feline species, although a few careful steps do seem to have been taken in the right direction over the last few years.

### Description

The Iberian lynx is smaller than the Euroasian lynx; the males weigh an average of 12.8 kilos (although an individual can weigh up to 20 kg), the females 9.3.

They have very characteristic ears with long, black brushes on top, possibly to help with camouflage, and a black line down from the ear to the chin. This line gets bigger with age; newborn lynxes haven't got it, but when they are about a year old, they have got a beginning, though not very long, and eventually when they are several years old it reaches down under the chin.



The lynx has long legs and a short tail with a black tassel at the end. Their coat is mottled in larger or smaller patterns.

### Habitat

The lynx was once to be found all over the Iberian peninsula, but it is now thought to be extinct in Portugal, and the only places in Spain where there is absolutely certainty of their presence are in the Sierra Morena, which stretches between the Cordoba and Seville provinces, and in the Doñana Natural Park.

Their preferred habitat is open pasture land, which is where their favourite prey, the rabbit, lives. They do not like agriculture land or land planted with eucalyptus or certain pine trees, as the rabbit is absent in these areas.

Their preferred altitude is 400-900 metres, although they have sometimes been found as high up as 1,600 metres.

### Reproduction

The mating season is January to February every year, and although the lynxes are normally solitary roamers, they stay together with their mates in this period.

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The lair is usually in a protected place, either a hollow tree or a cave. The cubs are born after 65-72 days. A lynx normally has between one and four cubs, two is the most usual. When the cubs are four weeks old the mother moves them to another lair, and when they are eight weeks old they are old enough to go out hunting with their mum.

They generally reach independence when they are 7-11 months old - on average each female lynx manages to bring one to two cubs per litter to independence.

The female lynx is able to reproduce when it is one year old, but in areas of high population density, such as the Doñana Natural Park, the female will not start reproducing until she has gained her own territory - in other words when her mother dies or when she manages to expulse another. This can mean that some females do not start breeding until they are five years old, and this poses a big problem for the attempts at increasing the population.

The lynxes live to about thirteen.

### Prey

The Iberian lynx is 100% carnivore. Its favourite food is, as mentioned above, the rabbit, which constitutes about 80-90% of its diet. The rest is made up by small mammals and various wild fowl.

### Present Status

The Iberian lynx was made a protected species in 1966, but nevertheless the population kept falling for the next 35 years. This was to a great extent due to the sharp fall in the rabbit population as well as the type of rabbit that now survives in the countryside is almost only half the size of the wild rabbit of 50 years ago.

But with the protection of lynx habitats and a captivity breeding programme slowly gaining ground, there are grounds for careful optimism.

Let's hope that this magnificent cat will stay with us for good!