

Policy Support Statements of the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE).

Policy support statements are intended to provide a short indication of what the LCIE regards as being good management practice with respect to certain aspects of large carnivore conservation.

The release of captive-bred individuals as a tool in large carnivore conservation

The reintroduction and population augmentation of threatened carnivores are potentially powerful tools in the conservation toolkit. These methods have been widely applied to a wide range of taxa on all continents. There are two potential sources of individuals – from larger wild populations and from captive breeding. Both sources have been used for carnivore conservation projects and there are successful and unsuccessful examples of both. Reintroduction and population augmentation projects should never be undertaken without careful consideration because they are very expensive, highly technical, very controversial with the public, and while there are many successful examples - overall there is a relatively low rate of success. As a result the LCIE cannot support any reintroduction or population augmentation projects that do not carefully follow the recommendations of the IUCN's Captive Breeding Specialist Group. Any such activity should only be conducted after exhaustive research into the cause of population extinction or decline, careful analysis to determine that adding new animals to an area / population will significantly assist conservation, and detailed evaluation of both the release site and methodology. Furthermore, any such release should be carefully monitored.

Additional concerns exist when the animals to be released are of captive origins.

- **Concern over genetics.** Animals in captivity are often of uncertain origins as stud books have not always been kept. Where it is possible maintaining local genetic characteristics is regarded as being important in conservation, and should only be deliberately interfered with if there is evidence for inbreeding depression or virtually no chance of natural dispersal.
- **Welfare.** Experience indicates that translocated wild born individuals have a higher survival than released captive born individuals. This implies that there may be some welfare concerns for captive born individuals if they are not able to adapt to the wild, and if there is no follow-up or support for released animals.
- **Public safety.** Some large carnivores, such as wolves and bears, are potentially dangerous to humans. There is reason to believe that individuals that become habituated to, or lose their fear of, humans because of their experiences in captivity, may be more dangerous or may be more likely to develop problem behaviour if released. It is also possible that a lack of shyness could bring them into close contact with people and into more conflict situations that could negatively affect public opinion.

Therefore, the LCIE do not ever recommend the release of captive-bred wolves or bears under any circumstances in the human-dominated environments that characterise Europe. For other large carnivore species living in Europe we advise against the use of captive-bred individuals in any situation where wild living individuals from a population that can support their removal and with a similar genetic background to the animals living in the release area are available. The release of captive bred individuals should only be contemplated in situations where (1) there exists a clear need for reintroduction or population augmentation in

a context that can make a substantial contribution to their conservation , and (2) no other alternative sources of animals exists. It is difficult to imagine any such situations for Eurasian lynx or wolverine. However, one potential example that fulfils these criteria is the Iberian lynx for which there are no source populations and where their survival depends on the re-establishment and augmentation of populations in the wild.