

E-3039/2002EN

Answer given by Mrs Wallström
on behalf of the Commission
(27 November 2002)

The Commission has supported, for several years already, conservation projects targeted at the Iberian lynx in both Portugal and Spain. In particular, several LIFE-Nature projects received Community funding for increasing the knowledge about the species and for creating adequate conditions, in terms of habitats and food resources, for the conservation of the Iberian lynx where it is still present or for allowing the return of the species to areas that it used in the recent past. Examples of these are the project "Recovery of habitats and preys of the *Lynx pardinus* in Serra da Malcata", in Portugal, or the projects that are starting this year for the conservation of the Iberian lynx in Montes de Toledo – Guadalmena and in Andalucia, in Spain.

The Commission is fully aware of the possible impact on nature, and namely on the Iberian lynx, of the projects mentioned by the Honourable Member. For that reason, the Commission opened infringement files against Portugal concerning the Odelouca dam and the A2 motorway. While a decision to take Portugal to court for non compliance with Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, in constructing the A2 motorway was taken by the Commission on 16 October 2002, a reasoned opinion was sent to the Portuguese authorities concerning the Odelouca dam project. In the latter case, the Commission is presently assessing the most recent information provided by the Portuguese authorities and the complainant, before taking a decision on how to proceed. Concerning the Alqueva dam, a complaint file concerning the impact on the Iberian lynx was closed after the Commission concluded that adequate measures were being taken to minimise the impact of the dam on the habitat of the Iberian lynx and to compensate for the negative impact that is being produced by the project.

The Commission is not aware of any efforts by the Portuguese government to declare the Iberian lynx as extinct.

Concerning the last question asked by the Honourable Member, the responsibility for taking the adequate measures to protect the habitat types and species covered by Directive 92/43/EEC lies entirely with the Member States. The Commission, however, has the possibility, through the management of Community funds, to encourage certain activities which contribute to the conservation of nature in Europe. Several of the LIFE-Nature projects mentioned above include measures concerning the reinforcement of the populations of wild rabbits in areas potentially used by the Iberian lynx and the conservation and recovery of cork oak forests in the same areas. Through agri-environmental measures, the Commission promotes sustainable farming methods, which contribute in a significant way to the conservation of nature.