

# THE FOOD CHAINS

## The return of large predators

Wild carnivorous animals, nearly extinct in the last two centuries, are gradually returning to the Eastern Alps. This spontaneous recolonisation of natural habitats is due to:

- the return to a wild state of abandoned rural and wooded ecosystems;
- the depopulation of mountain areas;
- reduced anthropic pressure;
- the creation of protected areas;
- the demographic renewal of wildlife, especially ungulates;
- their legal protection because of their ecological value.



Wolf (Photo: M. Da Ros)



Lynx (Photo: M. Da Ros)



Belling deer (Photo: F. Terrazzani)

The wolf is a predator at the top of the food chain. Its return to the Cansiglio Forest is restoring a balance that had been missing ever since it had disappeared from the area. Although the wolves of the Cansiglio Forest and other large carnivores throughout the Alpine region, such as the lynx and the bear, do require adequate management measures, they improve the biodiversity through their predation activity.

Large predators:

- keep the population of ungulates in check;
- limit ungulate harm to young trees and the shrubby and grassy undergrowth.

Moreover, undergrowth density increases, thus becoming a possible habitat for more species (e.g. western capercaillie).

The carcasses of their prey draw other small predators (foxes, beech martens and pine martens).