

Editorial



Dear Readers,

The first bear newsletter of 2005 follows the awakening of the bears in Austria

last week. Normally Austrian bears tend to show first signs of presence from the end of February to early March, but due to the high amount of snow this year the first snow track was sighted only last Monday (march, 21.).

But finally snow is melting rapidly and all our hopes are concentrated on the females that could possibly soon leave their dens with their new cubs.

Already last year Mona, a reliable mother since 1996 and a direct daughter of the famous Ötscherbär, was expected to have cubs. But the fact that there was no reproduction in 2004 and -even worse- no sings of Mona either, is a reason for further concern.

In such small populations like the Austrian bear population every individual counts. Celebrating her 12th birthday this year Mona could still give birth to a number of cubs in the coming years, but if she doesn't appear in the DNA samples this year either, we have to fear for the worst.

Hoping for the best, we ask our dear readers to keep their fingers crossed for new offspring this year. We will most certainly keep you informed about the development.



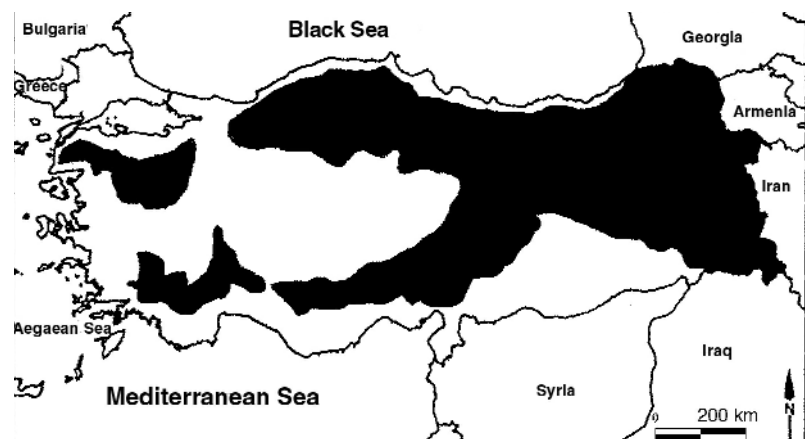
Beate Striebel

The Turkish Brown Bear

Forestry and oilpipeline endanger Turkish bear population - a status report from Turkey

The brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) is one of the several large carnivore species in Turkey including wolf (*Canis lupus*), hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*), Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*), caracal (*Caracal caracal*) and the Anatolian leopard (*Panthera pardus tulliana*). The Turkish bear population is estimated to amount up to 3000 individuals. They are mainly concentrated in the Black Sea and Anatolian regions.

Due to habitat loss the population declined during the last 50 years and now consists of 3 to 5 subpopulations. Especially the Western populations were separated and now form distinct patches. Corridors disappeared because of human activities. Distribution of the brown bear is mostly correlating with natural forest areas in natural condition. Turkey's forests cover 20.7 million ha. 40% of these are heavily degraded; only about 2.5% of the total forest area remained entirely undisturbed. Especially areas in the Black Sea region with large continuous forests provide shelter for the largest bear population in Turkey.



Distribution of brown bear in Turkey, WWF Turkey

Due to Land Hunting Law of 1937, constituting the legal basis for all wildlife protection and conservation activities in Turkey, the bear is not listed as pest species, like the other large carnivores, but rather as a protected species. Only regulative hunting may be allowed for a fee. The hunting fee was set up to \$US 2000 in 2002, the fine for illegal hunting up to \$US 3000. According to the Turkish Ministry of Forestry hunting bears is necessary to control damage to grain fields and beehives.

A major threat is as well persecution by humans because of damage to livestock and beehives. Any kind of compensation system, like the Austrian one, is missing. In the Black Sea region bears are hunt for their fat which is believed to have medical affect. Occasionally bears are accidentally killed during the traditional wild boar hunt.

The projected Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline (an international pipeline from Azerbaijan through Georgia and Turkey) passes straight through intact remote mountai-



© H.Heimpel/4nature

nous brown bear habitats in the eastern provinces Kars, Erurum and Erzincan and will mean a threat in future.

WWF and the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) are now working on an educational and awareness programs on brown bears in Turkey, which should strengthen the environmental conscience of the public.

Further more Turkey, as a European Union candidate country should take implementation of management and monitoring programs, according to EU-law, into consideration. Of urgent need for brown bear protection in Turkey are protection of natural forests, anit poaching action and survey of the population along the projected Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline to prevent further loss of undistrubed forest areas.



© WWF/Canon Michel Gunther

Quarter of Norway's wolf population killed

Not beeing member of the EU doesn't release Norway from their obligation to protect the wolf

In January the Norwegian government decided to kill 5 wolves, a quarter of the already reduced, critically endangered population. According to a statement of Norwegian's minister for environment Knut Arild Hareide is was necessary to prevent the loss of domestic livestock, especially sheep. The presence of the wolves would mean constant threat to the animals. The Norwegian directorate for Nature granted licenses to hundreds of farmers to kill the wolves, even thousands of protest mails from WWF supporters couldn't prevent the action.

The wolf (*Canis lupus*) became a protected species in Norway in 1973 and is cited on the red list of endangered species as 'critically endangered'. Since then the Norwegian Government took responsibility for wolf protection.



© WWF/Canon Chris Martin Bahr

Only last May, the Norwegian government decided on a national goal to sustain at least 3 family packs. The shooting slashed them down to 2, a clear violation of the parliamentary directive. WWF is now bringing the case to court in order to test the legality of the hunt.

The wolf population in Southern Scandinavia counts maximum 120 animals, not enough for long-term conservations. Because of its small size, there is a serious risk of genetic degradation, which makes population more vulnerable to diseases and environmental impacts. For long time survival population should be up to 800 wolves. Sweden's Minister of environment Lena Summerstad severely criticized the hunt, accusing Norway of dodging its responsibility for safeguarding the South Scandinavian wolf population and claimed better co-operation in wolf conservation.

International lynx congress Windischgarsten / Upper Austria

In order to develop strategies for lynx protection and prevent a second time extinction representatives from Austria and neighbouring countries met in the National Park Kalkalpen



© WWF-Canon / Roger LeGUEN

To develop strategies against a new extinction of the Eurasian Lynx in Austria about 150 representatives of hunting, science, nature conservation, met on March, 16th to 17th at the National Park Kalkalpen in Upper Austria. The conclusion was that Austrian lynx population steadily decreased through the past years and without action near extinct.

In the Austrian Alpine region only single animals occur. The number is estimated between 5 to 20 lynx and can not be considered a real population but only a few single individuals roaming in the Kalkalpen National Park Region, the Niedere Tauern, Upper Carinthia and the border region between Carinthia, Slovenia and Italy.

In the Bohemian Forest Region the situation is much better. Together with Bavaria and the Czech Republic, Austria hosts a part of a vital lynx population. All three countries actively support scientific research on population. This cross-border co-operation is a model for other transnational projects. Further reason for success is constructive co-operation of hunters, conservationists and foresters.

In the Austrian Alps only the Kalkalpen National Park sofar established systematical monitoring of lynx population. In the remaining Austrian Alpine Region monitoring is still missing due to the EU Fauna-Flora-Habitat-Directive. Austria is obliged to monitor dispersal and trends of the lynx population. The EU also demands active action to protect the endangered cat.

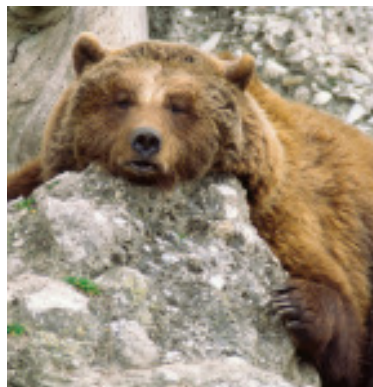
Positive examples were given by one hunter Matthäus Gelter from the Niedere Tauern Region. He referred to the positively changing attitude of hunters towards the lynx. Nevertheless, illegal hunting is still a major threat and especially hunters are demanded to take action to improve this situation.

Because of urgent need for action to save the lynx population future strategies were discussed during the second day's workshop. Despite the legal protection the acceptance through local lobbies especially hunters is crucial. Hunters, governmental authorities and conservation organizations must pull together and establish a system similar to the bear advocate. In Upper Austria the establishment of lynx consultants is considered. Conflicts between lynx and humans could so be minimized.

The conference was organized by the National Park Kalkalpen, WWF Austria, Institute of Wildlife Biology and Game Management (University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, Vienna), Upper Austrian Hunting Association, Austrian Federal Forestry Company and önj Haslach.

Awakening of bears in Austria

After a long winter first signs of bear activities were finally found



© A. Zedrosser/4nature

This year the first signs of bears appeared in Upper Austria. A forester of the Austrian Federal Forestry Company found a bear track in the snow on march, 21. Because of this year long winter much snow and low temperatures bears woke up almost 3 weeks late. The WWF bear advocate assumed that

it could possibly be bear "M", which was already seen last year in the Nationalpark Kalkalpen region.

After 5 months dormancy bears first need to get used to ingestion. Against the common opinion bears don't have ravenous appetite when they awake their alimetary system slowly needs to adapt to food.

25-30 bears presently live in Austria. The WWF bear advocates together with hunters, representatives of regional authorities and the ministry of environment aim to harmonise relationship between bears and humans.

Like every year Austria is anxious whether young bears were born or not. Hopes lie on two feamale bears, born in 2000 and 2002. WWF worries about Mona, daughter of the famous Ötscherbär. "We are concerned about missing offspring last year" said Norbert Gerstl

In the last year of the EU co-financed LIFE-bear project the focus lies on potential migration corridors between Alpine bear populations. Bears should be able to migrate without barriers from Slovenia to Austria. "Austria should provide enough space for living both humans and bears" said Gerstl.

WWF thanks Austrian Lotteries for supporting the bear project in Austria.

Internal News:

On our homepage www.wwf.at/bearlife you'll find a new section "publications", where you can download PDF versions of scientific artivels, master theses or other information material concerning Ursus arctos in Austria.

From the 15th to the 17th of April a seminar on the transboundary management of large carnivore populations will take place in Osilnica /Slovenia. The conference is organised in by the Council of Europe in co-operation with the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning of Slovenia and the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE) in association with the Austrian LIFE project on bears.

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