



Would Baltic wolves vote for the EU?

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Throughout the centuries wolves have been hated and persecuted everywhere

in Europe. The Baltic region is no exception. However, thanks to the proximity of vast forests of Russia they always managed to come back and restore their numbers as soon as the hunting pressure diminished (usually when humans were too busy fighting each other during wars). This traditional perception of the wolf as a pest that should be eradicated by all means persisted until the end of the 20th century. Often bounties were paid for to hunters. When a dead animal means a lump of money to the hunter the outcome is too easy to predict. In Latvia, bounties were stopped as late as in 1999. The present numbers for all three species of large carnivores in the Baltic are shown in Table 1.

When all three Baltic countries – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – joined the European

Table 1. Population sizes of large carnivores in the Baltic, 2004 (official numbers).

* - data for 2002

	Wolf	Lynx	Bear
Estonia	90	740	500
Latvia	670	750	<10
Lithuania	255*	111*	-

Union in May 2004, it was good news for our large carnivores, especially wolves. The EU stricter nature conservation rules mean that unrestricted hunting will no longer be possible. But, does it mean that the dark past is left behind?

During the accession stage, the new hunting regulations were elaborated (Table 2). They determined the hunting season and quota, as well as the hunting methods. Changes regarding the status of lynx and brown bear were rather insignificant. The wolf was the species that gained most from the legislative changes as up

until then it suffered an all-year-round persecution without any quota.

In the hunting season of 2003/2004, the hunting quota for wolves in Latvia was 150 animals. The actual number hunted was a bit lower – 140. The same quota was kept for 2005. The quota is given for the whole country as it was found impractical to distribute quota between individual forestry units. As soon as the quota is fulfilled, the hunting season for the species is over. But even if the quota is not reached, the hunting is stopped from 1 April to mid-summer.

Table 2. Legal status of large carnivores in the Baltic after the EU accession.

	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
Bear	Generally protected, but hunting allowed in some places for damage prevention 1.09–31.10 (excluding females with cubs)	Protected	Protected, extinct
Lynx	Season open 01.12–28.02, quota	Season open 1.12–31.03, quota	Protected
Wolf	Season open 01.01–31.03, quota	Season open 15.07–31.03, quota	Season open 01.09.–01.04., no quota



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