



WWF

POSITION
PAPER

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ENSURING CONSERVATION AND COEXISTENCE BETWEEN PEOPLE AND LARGE CARNIVORES IN EUROPE

Technical position paper

INTRODUCTION

Large carnivores have been making a remarkable comeback to Europe's landscapes. Their return to much of their former European range is a milestone in conservation. It shows that investments in conservation and cooperation between many different stakeholders, as well as the legislative framework set-out by the EU Habitats Directive and the Bern Convention are paying off.

From a state where large carnivore populations in Europe have been significantly reduced or even completely eradicated, today nearly all mainland countries have a permanent and reproducing occurrence of at least one species of large carnivore throughout various landscapes – natural and human dominated alike.

Despite the recovery of many large carnivore populations, they continue to face significant threats such as poaching and habitat fragmentation or degradation. According to the most recent available scientific information¹ only 3 out of 9 wolf populations in Europe are listed as 'least concern' (according to the IUCN Red List). For the brown bear, only 3 out of 10 populations are in this category, while for the Eurasian lynx, only 3 out of 11 populations are of 'least concern'. Where the wolverine is concerned, both populations in Europe remain threatened (vulnerable), while the Iberian Lynx is still endangered².

WWF strives to secure long term viable populations of large carnivores as vital parts of our European ecosystems and natural heritage by protecting habitats and promoting practical and effective approaches to achieve coexistence.

In order to ensure the conservation and coexistence between humans and large carnivores, an increase in transboundary cooperation is required to identify and implement practical solutions to manage social, economic and ecological challenges. It is crucial that concerns of people living with large carnivores are considered and opportunities are created for their participation in decision making processes.

¹ Linnell, J. D. C. & Cretois, B. 2018, Research for AGRI Committee – The revival of wolves and other large predators and its impact on farmers and their livelihood in rural regions of Europe, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/617488/IPOL_STU\(2018\)617488_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/617488/IPOL_STU(2018)617488_EN.pdf)

² IUCN Red list <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/12520/50655794>

RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of challenges need to be addressed:

Large carnivore conservation and management should focus on long term viable populations as conservation goals and reaching and maintaining Favourable Conservation Status (FCS)³ for large carnivore populations in Europe. In accordance with the EU Habitats Directive, large carnivores should have a future in coexistence with people, and as an integral part of ecosystems and landscapes across Europe. An ecological, population-based approach is key as most large carnivore populations in Europe are transboundary⁴, requiring cooperation across administrative boundaries. Therefore, comprehensive, preferably transboundary multinational action plans need to be developed and regularly updated. The development and implementation of those plans will require the participation of various stakeholders and should be an inclusive process.

Effective and appropriate conflict prevention and mitigation practices need to be in place. All countries should ensure that management decisions are based on clear goals and objectives, based on science and sound data, and integrating ecological, social and economic perspectives. Decisions however, should not be to the detriment of the overarching conservation goals for large carnivore populations. An increased diligence in decision making and additional efforts for the monitoring of large carnivore populations and assessment of positive and negative effects of large carnivore presence will be necessary.

Regular monitoring of large carnivore populations is essential in order to strategically plan conservation actions, the application of preventive schemes to reduce conflicts and to evaluate the results of all the actions. The monitoring should be based on robust methodology, should promote and facilitate the participation of different stakeholders and its results should be regularly communicated to the society and the main stakeholders groups.

The presence of large carnivores can result in conflict. Conflict can range from perceived abstract risk, to damages on livestock and property, and in rare cases, unwanted close encounters.

- For damages to livestock and property, subsidies for preventive measures and financial compensation are essential in managing conflicts. There is no scientific evidence that culling, including a steered hunting regime, is an effective and sustainable solution to large carnivore-related livestock conflicts⁵.

Various preventive measures have proven effective to reduce damages (e.g. electric fences, guardian dogs, and human presence). They need to be implemented comprehensively and timely where large carnivores are present in an area. Support for preventive measures and financial compensation should also be available in migration corridors and areas of colonization.

³ As suggested by: Large Carnivore Initiative of Europe (2008). Guidelines for Population Level Management Plans for Large Carnivores

⁴ Only 4 of the 32 populations of European large carnivores occur within a single country's border, while some of the populations span as many as 11 countries (source: see ¹ Linnell, J. & Cretois, B. 2018)

⁵ Large Carnivore management Plans of Protection: Best Practices in EU Member States, Research for PETI Committee [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/596844/IPOL_STU\(2018\)596844_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/596844/IPOL_STU(2018)596844_EN.pdf)

Agri-environment and rural development measures should include financial support for preventive measures and advisory support to livestock breeders. Any subsidies must safeguard against practices inconsistent with, or detrimental to the presence of large carnivores - for example subsidies for livestock farming without functional prevention measures in areas with regular occurrence of large carnivores. Compensation models can for instance be risk based, i.e. positively linked with the number or presence of large carnivores living and breeding in the area and they need to be conditional to the use of recommended prevention methods. Compensation systems must also safeguard against conditions or situations, in which a perverted incentive to increase or exaggerate damages would be created.

- In the last decades, fatal incidents and injuries to humans by large carnivores have been very rare in Europe. They mainly concern the brown bear (65 attacks of brown bear have been reported in Europe since 1955⁶) and 8 fatal attacks of wolves since 1950⁷, all of which involved rabid or food conditioned animals. In the human dominated landscapes of Western Europe, large carnivores and humans often share the same space. Incidents and encounters can therefore not be excluded and effective mitigation strategies need to be in place to prevent incidents and to have appropriate responses when they occur.

There are three main reasons that can explain incidents between humans and large carnivores. First, the animal is being provoked by humans e.g. attempts to kill, deter, capture or corner the animal. Especially in the case of brown bears, conflicts can also arise when the animals are being surprised or when humans stand between female bears and their cubs. Second, the habituation to human presence and food conditioning that can alter the behaviour of some wild animals, which means they can go too close to human settlements. Third, those cases of animals affected by diseases (i.e. rabies, which is the main reason behind wolf attacks), or wounded animals that can make them more aggressive or getting closer to human settlements looking for food. Understanding the individual context and history for an encounter or incident is therefore critical for an adequate and effective response.

Any response has to be considered on a case-by-case analysis and following 4 basic principles: prevention, documentation, intervention, and information. There is a wide variety of different measures, which can go from monitoring the specimen, removing the cause of attraction, aversive stimuli, and as a last resort, lethal control. Education needs to be in place to prevent food conditioning and inappropriate or provocative behaviour towards wild animals.

Both the Habitats Directive and the Bern convention offer sufficient flexibility to Member States to allow for lethal measures for populations that are strictly protected in exceptional cases and based on clearly defined conditions. However, in many Member States such derogations are misused. Derogations should be conducted following the provisions of the Habitats Directive and the Bern convention, on a case-by-case basis, when all other alternative solutions have failed and the derogation is not detrimental to the maintenance of the populations of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.

⁶ Penteriani, V. et al. (2016). Human behaviour can trigger large carnivore attacks in developed countries. *Scientific Reports*, 6, 20552.

⁷ Linnell, John, et al. (2002). The fear of wolves: A review of wolf attacks on humans.

Illegal killing and poisoning of large carnivores is a wildlife crime and needs to be taken seriously by all countries, as these activities pose a serious threat to large carnivore populations around Europe. There needs to be an enhanced trans-boundary coordination across administrative units to prevent illegal killing and to identify and prosecute those responsible for these activities.

Providing comprehensive, factual and up-to-date information and communicating honestly to the public and stakeholders is crucial to improve the societal acceptance of large carnivores. The effect of large carnivores on social, economic and environmental perspectives should be presented in a transparent and balanced way, e.g. including status, abundance, range, benefits and conflicts, and possibilities to mitigate these. Concerns and fears of people, may their lives be directly impacted or not, need to be addressed in an effective and appropriate manner.

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Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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