

STATUS OF LYNX AND WOLF IN LITHUANIA

Rimantas R. Budrys

*Šiauliai University,
Lithuania*

Aspiring to join the European Union and beginning harmonisation of its laws according to the EU standards, Lithuania has to solve the problem related to the status of large predatory mammals – brown bear, lynx and wolf. The two latter species – lynx and wolf - inhabit Lithuania.

The lynx is listed in the Red Data Book of Lithuania and is under protection. Moreover, this wild animal in Lithuania is rare (about 60-80 individuals); its contacts with people are rare, and public opinion about the lynx should be neutral or at least not hostile.

The situation of wolf is another. According to P. Bluzma (1999), the real size of the wolf population at present is about 400-500 individuals. In 1995, according to the results of questionnaire and cartographic research wolves were registered in 130 forest massifs and the mean population density was 7.8 1.0 ind./ 10 000 ha of constantly inhabited forest area. In 1999 wolves inhabited 43 (of 44) administrative regions of Lithuania. The amount of hunted wolves according to official statistics was about 100 wolves per year, and in the opinion of mammal researchers these data reflect the real number of hunted wolves. The optimal size of wolf population can range approximately from 150 to 300 individuals. We can see that hunting is not a threat to its survival. Now in Lithuania the wolf hunting season is fixed from the 1st July till the 1st of April. In Soviet times, the hunting of wolves was formally permitted all year long with killing cubs in their dens and payment of money rewards. The number of wolves in those times in Lithuania fell to about 20-40 individuals.

Taking into account the EU standards with wolf included in Annex IV (Animal and plant species of Community interest in need of strict protection) of the European Council directive

on the conservation of natural habitats of wild fauna and flora (EC Directive 92/43/EEC) as a priority species, efficient and strict protection of wolves in the member states is also needed. Situation of wolf in all three Baltic States is similar; so, after debates on this issue at the IV Baltic Theriological Conference (18-20 April, 1999, Sagadi, Estonia), it was stated that all three Baltic States would need exemption from Annex IV and transfer to Annex V (Animal and plant species of Community interest whose taking in the wild and exploitation may be subject to management measures) of EC Directive mentioned above. Arguments for this are the high reproduction rate of wolves, spreading of rabies, damage to livestock, damage to wildlife and constant migration from Russia and Belarus. Except this, the prohibition of hunting causes poaching and public opinion is in favour of management of the species.

With the respect to the wolf, Lithuania has a double-side task. To enter the European Union, Lithuanians need to bargain for the right to regulate the wolf population size and to keep it in optimal limits. The society is to be informed and educated in order that more favourable public opinion about the wolves is formed. Even the establishment of a wolf protection society might be desirable, following the practice of other European countries.

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VILKŲ IR LŪŠIŲ STATUSAS LIETUVOJE

Pranešime aptariamas dviejų stambiųjų plėšrūnų – vilko ir lūšies – statusas Lietuvoje ir problemos, kylančios ruošiantis stojimui į Europos Sąjungą. Pabrėžiamas visuomenės švietimo programų šiais klausimais poreikis.