



Bear-Newsletter 1/03



Editorial

This is the first international edition of our Bear-Newsletter. A German newsletter is published 4-times a year, providing information about the Austrian brown bear population and the latest news of the Austrian LIFE-project on bears. This international edition will give a short overview about the ongoing LIFE-projects on brown bears in the EU.

With the LIFE-programme the European Union has not only created a financial instrument for nature conservation projects but it should also serve as a possible platform to improve the cooperation and the network between different projects all over Europe.

At the moment there are 8 projects in Europe concerning the brown bear specifically. Next to these projects there are also several projects for habitat conservation, which do indirectly serve the conservation of brown bears.

For the Austrian brown bear project the cooperation between its neighbour countries Italy and Slovenia is very important. Because at least in theory the possibility exists, that the brown bear populations of Northern Italy, Slovenia and Austria will become a connected population in the future.

Bears do not know about borders, LIFE-projects should not either!

With European greetings,

Beate Striebel (Project assistant)



What is LIFE?

LIFE is the financial instrument for nature conservation projects and thus one of the spearheads of the environmental policy of the European Union. It finances there different kinds of projects: **“LIFE-Nature”** supports nature conservation projects. **“LIFE-Environment”** supports new developments in environmental policy. **“LIFE-Third countries”** promotes sustainable development in third countries.

Started in 1992, the LIFE-programme is now in its third phase. In the period from 2000-2004 the European Union has a budget of 640 million Euro for the support of projects. About 300 million of this budget go into LIFE-Nature projects.

Through LIFE-Nature, projects are supported, that aim at the conservation of natural habitats and the wild fauna and flora of European Union interest. LIFE-Nature also supports implementation of the nature conservation policy and the Natura 2000 Network. The legal framework of the projects are the Bird and Habitat directives, for the conservation of natural habitat and threatened animal and plant species.

LIFE-projects in Italy.

In Italy there are two projects on brown bears at this moment. LIFE-project Ursus in the National Park Adamello Brenta and a LIFE-project in the Sirente-Velino Regional Park.

The **LIFE-project Ursus**, is a project to conserve the brown bear population of the **National Park Adamello Brenta**. In a previous LIFE project 5 bears were captured in Slovenia and released into the Brenta Park, with positive results. This new project is continuing these actions and aims to help the brown bear population to reach a viable population. This population should consist of 40 to 60 individuals. To achieve this goal more bears have been released. So far a total of 10 bears have been released in the national park.

After releasing the bears, monitoring is a crucial factor in order to judge their dispersal. Each released bear had for this purpose a radio collar.



Release of Danica in 2000

Archivio Fotografico, Ufficio Stampa, Provincia Autonoma di Trento

However the last bear lost his collar in August 2003. Now the monitoring is carried out by the collection of tracks, scats and hair samples. With scat and hair samples it will be possible to do DNA analyses.

Other important objectives of the project are an awareness and education campaign for local people. Leaflets have been distributed, school lessons are given and numerous public meetings

are taking place. At the website of the project www.parcadamellobrenta.tn.it/Life%20English/indexenglish.htm a lot of information can be found about the project, including latest news. This will hopefully result in further acceptance by local people.

As in all large carnivore projects damage prevention in order to prevent conflicts between humans and bears, is also important. These measures include e.g. the installation of electric fences to protect livestock. When bears have, despite these measures, caused some damage, there will be compensation.

The second Italian brown bear project is the **conservation of the brown bear in the Sirente-Velino Regional Park in the Abruzzese mountains**. The project is carried out by the park itself. This project is also a follow up of another LIFE-project. The first offspring was one of the successes in this previous project. Other results were greater awareness of the local public towards the brown bear and a reduction of human induced disturbance in the areas of potential importance for the population of 50-80 Abruzzan bears. There was however a setback, for one of the bears was found dead, killed by poisoned bait used illegally by local farmers against stray dogs.

The running project will continue to reduce human disturbance in bear areas, which will be done by leading hikers onto new alternative paths. To improve the quality of bear habitat, 7000 fruit trees will be planted. To prevent conflict between cattle and bears, three water troughs for wildlife will be constructed. Furthermore electric fences will be distributed to the farmers. Also for the stray dogs has a solution been found. The park will organise a programme in which the dogs will be captured and sterilized.

Last but not least an awareness campaign will be targeted at the local population and in particular at local schools. Further Information about the project can be found on the Italian website <http://www.sirentevelino.org/>

LIFE-projects in Spain

Spain has a project to conserve the Cantabrian brown bear and the Ancares project.



In the **Cordillera Cantábrica** in Northern Spain a population of brown bear survives, some 80 individuals divided in two

groups. But these populations are under threat because of their low reproduction rate and a high mortality rate among females. The causes of death are illegal hunting or the use of other illegal methods like steel traps for catching wild boar and the use of poison against predators.

A lot of different LIFE-projects are aimed at the conservation of the brown bear in this area. The actions in these projects include the acquisition of land in feeding and refuge areas, as well as rent of hunting and timber cutting rights to avoid disturbance and habitat degradation. Disturbance and illegal hunting are addressed by increasing surveillance staff. All legitimate claims for damages inflicted by bears receive compensation. Awareness raising activities are implemented by means of campaigns targeted at local population and children and by the creation of information centres.

The other project in Spain is the **Ancares project in the province of Galicia**. The objective of this project is to ensure coordinated management of two adjoining protected areas under different regional authorities. The biggest threat facing these bears is rejection by the local population. Next to this the bears are disturbed by growing tourism and hunting activities. Finally the intervention by the authorities in management and conservation of the site also poses a threat.

In particular, actions will be taken against the tourist pressure and hunting, by introducing a monitoring system and concluding agreements with hunting associations and the tourist industry. Attempts will also be made to promote expansion of the species throughout the Ancares and the creation of biological corridors with the aid of measures to restore forest habitats. Also an extensive awareness-raising campaign will attempt

to involve all sectors of society in conservation of the site.

LIFE-project in Greece

Greece is running a project in the northern Pindos National Park

The **Northern Pindos national park** is one of the three areas in **Greece** that host a population of bears. The habitat is however threatened by timber extraction and accidental or criminal forest fires. The bears themselves are threatened by human-caused mortality, which has successfully been reduced in the last years, but is still presenting a threat.

The project will therefore focus on the brown bear itself and on two of the bear's priority habitat types, the Mediterranean pine forests with endemic black pines and Tilio-Acerion forests.

The project will be carried out by Arcturos, a Greek non-profit organisation, aiming at the protection and management of natural environment and wildlife. The activities started focusing on the brown bear, because the bear can be used as a measurement for the quality of environment.

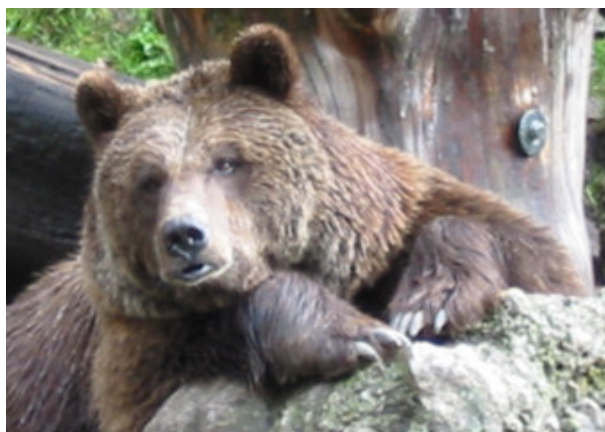
This project aims to keep the human-caused bear mortality low and to maintain the size of the bear habitat. They hope to improve habitats and species monitoring systems. For the prevention of forest fires, Arcturos wants to improve detection mechanisms for criminal and accidental forest fires. Finally the number of people that visit the place, will be controlled.

The public awareness program includes several booklets, a website, <http://www.arcturos.gr/enhome.htm>., education material for schools, consisting of videotapes, posters and a book with different sorts of activities.

LIFE-project in Slovenia

Slovenia has one of the largest bear populations in Europe. To conserve this population Slovenia has started a LIFE-project in 2002.

Slovenia is among the few European countries with a well-preserved population of brown bear.. 54% of Slovenia consists of forests, therefore Slovenia is an ideal place for bears. The Slovenian bear population is very important for populations in neighbouring countries like Austria and Italy. This population offers an opportunity for the resettlement of an Alpine population. The size of the brown bear population is increasing increased in the last decades and consequently, there has been an increase in the number of bears along the main migration routes towards Italy and Austria.



Slovenian bears: The future for the Alpine population

This has however created situations of conflict, and consequent negative public attitudes. Another threat to the species is fragmentation of the habitat, which includes the Ljubljana-Trieste railway and parallel highway, where several bears are killed every year. The LIFE-project for the conservation of brown bears in Slovenia will deal with these threats

The main objective of the project is to promote measures which will improve public attitude towards the brown bear. So a considerable part of the budget will go towards the development of a communication strategy, the launch of a public awareness campaign, a new information center and compensation of damages. Measures to direct bears away from settlements, such as removal of garbage dumps which attract bears, installation of fences and other protective devices , will be tested in 2 pilot areas. Finally, equipment for a rapid

intervention group, to handle problem bears, will be purchased and training for such a group will be provided.

Further information:
<http://www.sigov.si/zgs/medved/index.php>

LIFE-projects for the brown bear in Austria

Next to the LIFE-project of the WWF, Austria has a project in Schütt-Dobratsch.

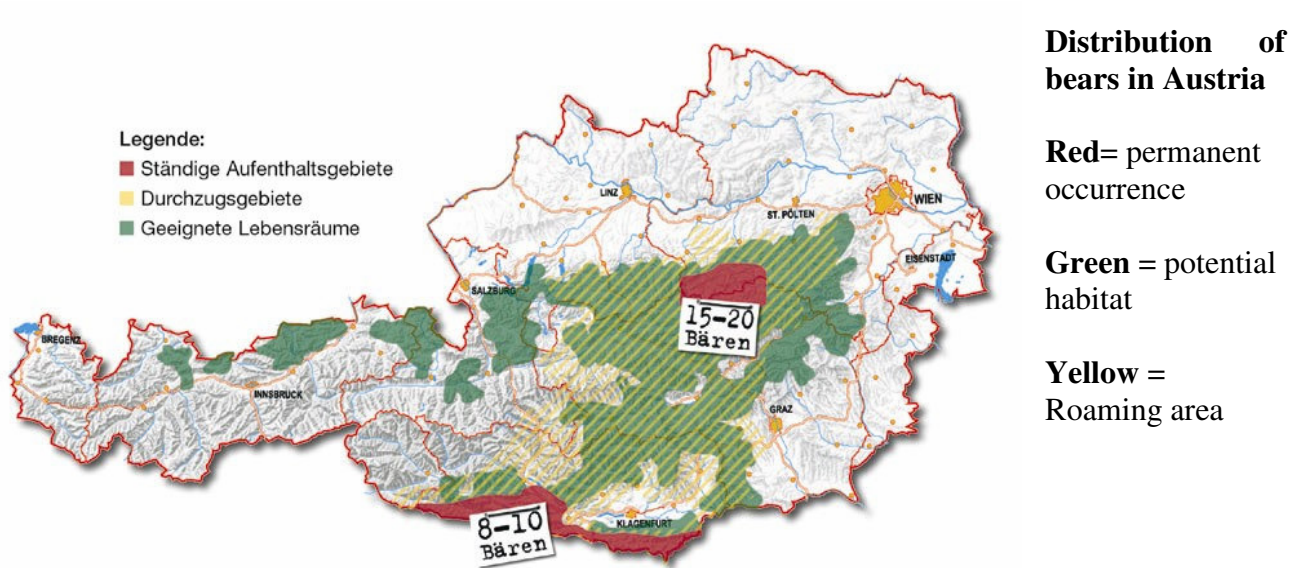
Schütt-Dobratsch is an area in Carinthia, Austria just a few kilometres away from the point where Austria borders on Italy and Slovenia.

The Non-governmental Organisation ARGE-Naturschutz is carrying out the LIFE-project in the Schütt-Dobratsch area, where the main corridor for bear and lynx coming from Croatia and Slovenia is passing through. There is clear evidence that in the course of the last few decades brown bears (and lynx) have been wandering into the Austrian Alps from Croatia and Slovenia via this corridor. This LIFE-project aims to connect 2 parts of a Natura 2000 site which is divided through the highway A2.



The main objective is to construct a 95 metre wide greenbridge to overpass the highway A2 for fauna. Judging by the monitoring data of bears in the area so far, and from experience with a similar structure in Croatia, there is every reason to believe it will not be long before the brown bears start using the overpass. This way the overpass should help reinforce the Alpine population of the brown bear.
www.schuett.at

LIFE Project for the management and conservation of brown bears in Austria



Starting in 2002 WWF Austria is now running the second LIFE-project concerning brown bears in Austria. Austria hosts only a small population of 25 to 30 individuals.

One nucleus of the population lives in the middle of Austria in the 2 neighbouring provinces Styria and Lower Austria. In this area at least 26 cubs were born since the beginning of a reintroduction in 1989. An other nucleus is in the South of Carinthia, where migrating bears from Slovenia occur.

The acceptance of brown bear in Austria is quit high as long as damages are low. In the last years damages have been on an average level, about 5.000 € per year and only in new areas like the province of Salzburg, where bears haven't occurred in the last decades, bears are reason for uproar.



The objectives of the ongoing LIFE-project are: An analysis of the existing and future barriers on brown bear migration ways, a revision of the management plan for Austria and a genetical analysis of the population. The genetical monitoring of the population might help to identify a future threat that could occur because of inbreeding.

The public awareness work is done through leaflets, constant media work, a school program, conferences and seminars and a website in German and English.

International cooperation especially with the neighbouring countries Slovenia and Italy is an other important and crucial task. because in the long term the future of the Austrian bears is depending on migrating bears from Slovenia.

Further information: www.wwf.at/bearlife

The LIFE-project is supported by the Ministry of Environment, the Federal Environmental Agency, and the Nature conservation and Hunting right authorities of Lower Austria, Styria and Carinthia.



Das Land
Steiermark



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