

Conservation status

Brown bear conservation status in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic - the past

Habitat destruction and intensive persecution of large carnivores were the main causes of significant bear population decline and sometimes even extinction of these animals on the Czech territory. Brown bears and other carnivores were systematically persecuted during the reign of Maria Theresa and Joseph II when the regulation on 'extermination of large carnivores by hunters and subjects' came into force. In 1786 under the patent of Emperor Joseph II Habsburg everyone became allowed to kill carnivores and similar laws were introduced in gentry hunting laws in the Czech state (1866), Moravia (1912) and Silesia (1903) (Hell & Sládek, 1974). This led to bear extinction at the turn of the 18th Century. Bears managed to survive longer in eastern Moravia and Silesia thanks to connection to the Carpathian population, but eventually the last individual was officially shot in 1887 in the central Moravian-Silesian Beskids (Andreska, 2012).

The situation was a bit different in Slovakia, but even there since 1883 the Hungarian hunting laws were in force which allowed killing carnivores and pests at any time. Unfortunately, the brown bear was counted among both. After critical decline of the population to as little as 20 individuals, the brown bear was declared protected all year round in 1932 (Hell & Sládek, 1974). The situation changed in 1962 when, after the population increased, bear trophy hunting was once again allowed, though limited (Janík et al., 1986).

Current brown bear conservation status in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic

The brown bear is protected within the European Union through the Habitat Directive nr 92/43/EEC (Annex II and IV). It is also protected under the Berne Convention (Appendix II) and in the Czech Republic it is protected in the Beskids within the Natura 2000 network. In Slovakia as many as 66 Natura 2000 sites protecting brown bears were established.

In accordance with the Czech law the brown bear is a species under special protection, critically endangered (Act nr 114/1992 Sb. on nature and landscape protection, Regulation nr 395/1992 Sb.). In this case compensation for damage in apiaries and livestock caused by bears is paid by the state (Act nr 115/2000 Sb.) Under the Czech hunting law (Act nr 449/2001 Sb.) bear hunting is forbidden.

In Slovakia the brown bear is under protection all year round under the Act nr 543/2002 Zb. on nature and landscape protection, in accordance with Regulation 24/2003 Zb. it is a species of European importance. The social value of a bear has been estimated at 2,655,51 €. However, pursuant to § 40 (2) and (3), it is possible to lift its protection. Between 2000 and 2009 70 such decisions were granted annually. On average 27 bears were shot what constituted 39% of the allowed quota (MŽP SR, 2010). In this case it was allowed to hunt only individuals under 100kg, only with the use of plant bait and only in autumn (Pavlišín, 2008).