

Gray wolf conservation status

Gray wolf 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 wolf population decline and sometimes even extinction of these animals on the Czech territory. Wolves 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 wolf extinction at the turn of the 18th Century. Wolves 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 1914 in the *Jablunkov* region (Hošek, 1976).

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 gray wolf was counted among both. What's more, up until 1980's substantial awards were paid for every killed wolf (Hell, 2003; Hell et al., 2001). In 1973, after a significant decline of wolf population size, the amount of the award was reduced from 1000 Kčs to 500 Kčs and in 1975, pursuant to Regulation nr 172/1975 Zb., partial wolf protection was introduced which only allowed wolf hunting between September 16th and the end of January (Hell & Sládek, 1974; Hell et al., 2001). In the 1990's wolf hunting period was further reduced to 2,5 month (Nov 1 – Jan 15), but up until 2009 wolf hunting was under no control in terms of time and numbers of individuals killed.

Current gray wolf conservation status in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic

The gray wolf 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 under protection in the Beskids within the Natura 2000 network.

In Slovakia the wolf population is excluded from the Annex IV – a list of specie for which, according to the Art. 12, 'all forms of deliberate capture or killing of specimens in the wild are prohibited'. The wolves in Slovakia are still, however, listed in the Annex II – the list of 'species of Community interest whose conservation requires the designation of special areas of conservation' and for which articles 1-6 of the Directive apply. They also require that the 'Member States take appropriate steps to avoid, in the special areas of conservation, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated.' In Slovakia 79 Natura 2000 sites protecting gray wolves were established.

In accordance with the Czech law the gray wolf 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 livestock caused by wolves is paid by the state (Act nr 115/2000 Sb.) Under the Czech hunting law (Act nr 449/2001 Sb.) wolf hunting is forbidden.

In Slovakia the gray wolf is not protected under the Act nr 543/2002 Zb. on nature and landscape protection. However, § 37 of the Act defines special conditions of wolf management. In accordance with § 9 of Regulation 24/2003 Zb. wolf hunting with the use of loops, snares, nets and poisons is forbidden.