

Conservation status

History of the brown bear conservation

In middle ages brown bears were present throughout the country. The first national regulations concerning bear protection reach as far as XII century (Jakubiec and Buchalczyk 1987). The brown bear was protected as a king's game species which means only the royal family and the aristocracy could officially hunt it. In spite of the official ban, brown bear was considered a vermin and ruthlessly exterminated with all available means, also for meat and fur. Excessive hunting and habitat degradation led to gradual species decline throughout large areas. Starting from XVI century the species extermination became even more intensive. In XVII century this carnivore was on the verge of extinction in the most parts of lowland Poland, its range remaining compact only in the Carpathians. In Poland the last bear refuge in the Sudetes were the Jizera Mountains, where the last individual was killed in 1783 (Stec 1963). The last bear in the Karkonosze Mountains was shot on the Czech side of the border at the foot of the southern slopes of the Śnieżka Mountain between 1802-1804 (Dyrcz et al. 2013, Flousek et al. 2014). In the Świętokrzyska Forest the last bear was killed in 1867 (Kosman 1934). The last brown bear refuge in the lowland Poland was the Białowieża Forest, where the last individual was shot between 1873-1878 (Karpiński 1949).

The first laws concerning partial protection of the brown bear were introduced in Poland after World War I when the species range had already been reduced to the Carpathians. The Regulation of the President of Poland of 1927[1] introduced hunting law which put the brown bear on the list of game species with year-round hunting season. This regulation, however, also introduced a ban on killing females with cubs and thus cubs too. 10 years later an attempt to reintroduce bears in the Białowieża Forest was made (Karpiński 1947). This action was successful - in 1946 5 individuals were recorded. Barely a year later, mostly because of poachers, there were no no-migratory bears there anymore. The very last time a bear was spotted in the Białowieża Forest was in 1963 but it was most probably a migrating individual (Buchalczyk 1980). The brown bear was put under full legal protection not until 1952, after a Regulation of the Minister of Forestry on introducing species protection[2] came into force. Pursuant to the decree on the hunting law [3] the brown bear was crossed out from the list of game species. Since that time the brown bear has been legally protected. In 2001 it was granted the status of a strictly protected species.

Current protection status

In accordance with the requirements of the Act on Nature Protection of April 16, 2004, and the Regulation of the Minister of Environment on the wild species of animals under protection of September 28, 2004, the brown bear has been a strictly protected species which requires active conservation. Moreover it is obligatory to establish protective zones with a 500 m radius around dens between November 1 and March 31. In the amended Regulation on the protection of species of 2011 the period of establishing the zones was extended to May 30[4].

[1] Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 3 grudnia 1927 r. o prawie łowieckim. ([Dz.U. 1927 nr 110 poz. 934](#))

[2] Rozporządzenie Ministra Leśnictwa z dnia 4 listopada 1952 r. w sprawie wprowadzenia gatunkowej ochrony zwierząt. ([Dz.U. 1952 nr 45 poz. 307](#))

[3] Dekret z dnia 29 października 1952 r. o prawie łowieckim. ([Dz.U. 1952 nr 44 poz. 300](#))

[4] Rozporządzenie Ministra Środowiska z dnia 12 października 2011 r. w sprawie ochrony gatunkowej zwierząt. ([Dz.U. 2011 nr 237 poz. 1419](#))