

Platform
“Large carnivores and wild ungulates”
mandate, reasoning behind and working methods
Felix Näscher, Chair

THE CHALLENGE AHEAD OF US

Large carnivores are part of the Alpine natural heritage; the Alpine countries are welcoming their comeback. This fact is expressed in national legislations, in the EU Habitats Directive, in the recommendations of the Bern Convention as well as in the Alpine Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The coming back of large carnivores can happen in several ways: by natural spread, by restocking or by reintroduction. Bear, wolf and lynx have the ability to move over large distances - and they will not stick to national borders. Although the natural spread of a population may be a slow process, a process which has to be expected to last for decades, finally, as a consequence, all alpine countries will share parts of an alpine wide population - an alpine wide population, which needs to be managed harmoniously in accordance to a transboundary strategy.

In general, the present ecological conditions in the Alps are favourable for large carnivores – even more favourable than during the times of their eradication. However, the environment has also changed significantly in the course of the last hundred years: The forests have expanded; the natural food resources have improved; the Alps have turned into one of the most intensively exploited mountain ranges in the world. Thus, the natural habitats are becoming increasingly fragmented due to intensified use of the valleys and due to the development of transport and tourism infrastructures.

Nevertheless, and I am sure about this, wildlife species are much more tolerant to disturbances and they are much more able to adapt in a short-term to a changing environment than we are ready to acknowledge: Maybe some of our many interest groups are still too successful in using this line of reasoning for securing their egoistic purposes: Some groups are using this argumentation, to prevent the

coming back of large carnivores, when these species start feeding on their livestock, while other groups are using this argumentation to prevent people from entering their hunting ground, when they are hunting on ungulates.

To ensure the continued existence of viable populations of large carnivores, regional planning must start taking their needs into account, e.g., by guaranteeing migration corridors, by defining tranquillity wildlife areas, by conserving functioning ecosystems, by applying adequate management strategies and measures as demanded by the protocols on “Spatial planning and sustainable development” and “Conservation of nature and the countryside”.

A functioning ecosystem comprises both large predators and their prey species. Therefore, any concept for the conservation and management of wildlife species – be it large carnivores or wild ungulates – has to be based on a holistic and integral approach. Thus, speaking about large carnivores, you have to take into account the status of possible prey populations and of their habitats over the entire area occupied by these species; and, speaking about wild ungulates, you have to reflect the influence of predation by large predators over the entire area occupied by these species: Finally and above all, you have to go beyond a strictly ecological approach.

Any successful determination of development targets, strategies and measures with respect to these wildlife species will have to take it for granted, that economic and social aspects are duly taken into account on an equal level: Sustainable conservation and exploitation of wildlife can only be ensured when respecting and assessing all of these ecological, social and economical parameters, which are determining the system at stake.

Sustainable wildlife management can't never be a question of purely scientific knowledge – far away from it: Sustainable wildlife management has to be an expression of a will, how to deal with our wildlife species - by taking into account, by balancing and by harmonising ecological, economical and socio-cultural interests: A decision of all stakeholders involved is required - or let's just say, a decision by society.

And this society has to be aware of the fact, that there is an antagonism, which steadily wants to be dealt with: Wildlife – Society. There is a need that we learn again – as it practised our predecessors – to respect the demands of wildlife

species. In my understanding, respecting the demands of wildlife species means, to give them a chance, to keep their own character or to give them a chance to continue their being “wild” even, or even so, in our cultural landscape.

There can be no doubt that the maintenance of large carnivore`s and ungulate`s populations in a human-dominated landscape like the Alps implies active and coordinated management measures, such as monitoring activities, management and regulation of populations, conservation, improvement and networking of habitats, mitigation of destructive impacts or damages as well as disturbances, prevention and compensation of damages provoked by ungulates as well as prevention and compensation of depredation on livestock done by large carnivores.

Several of the Alpine countries have already developed and are implementing guidelines or concepts for dealing with large carnivores and with wild ungulates. All of them are sharing generally accepted principles with respect to conservation and wildlife management; but these principles are differing in details depending on the situation in each country. However, a clear consensus does exist on the fact, that the conservation, recovery and survival as well as - and above all – the sustainable use of these populations require close cooperation of all of the Alpine countries. In future, the Alpine countries will have to further combine efforts and to strengthen cooperation in order to develop a transboundary and population based policy for the conservation and management of wildlife species – of wildlife species, which do not respect and actively spread over national boundaries.

Cooperation should include a mutual “learning” process leading to a continually adaptive management. Thus, this cooperation should focus on exchanging of information, unifying monitoring procedures, maintaining common databases and harmonising management measures. Therefore regular meetings should be focusing on exchanging experiences, discussing questions of common interest and preparing proposals for decisions taken by the ministers forming the Alpine Conference.

MANDATE

as decided by the ministers, gathered on the occasion of the Alpine Conference in March 2009 in Evian

The guiding principles of the platform are the following:

- The platform is expected to deal with questions referring to the conservation, protection and management of large carnivores and wild ungulates.
- The platform is expected to propose solutions in order to balance different interests and different utilization demands – especially within the sphere of coordination between physical planning, agriculture and forestry , nature protection and game management.
- The platform is further expected to work on cross-cutting issues within the context of some of the protocols under the Alpine Convention.
- To achieve the goals, the platform actively strives for a dialogue und a cooperation with representatives of governmental and non-governmental institutions/organisations.
- To reach the targets, the platform develops coordinated strategies and concepts with due respect to ecological, economical and socio-cultural circumstances or realities.

MAIN TASKS

- International cooperation, exchange of knowledge and information, harmonisation of methods and management plans.
- Establishment of a forum to discuss issues of conservation, management and exploitation of large carnivores and ungulates.

- Ensuring information exchange between relevant partners.
- Conservation of wildlife and habitats on a transnational and population level.
- Investigation of the biological and ecological requirements of particular species.
- Consideration of the needs of local stakeholders.
- Development of common long-term goals for the conservation of wildlife species.
- Development of a common management and communication strategies, e.g., on upcoming “crisis”-situations.

WORKING METHODS

The platform

- works on a strategic level and initiates projects and working programs;
- cooperates with experts and relevant institutions;
- elaborates appropriate documents and reports to the Alpine Convention;
- prepares an annual report on current projects for the permanent committee of the Alpine Convention.

The platform

- consists of representatives of the responsible national and/or regional authorities, contracting parties and of representatives of the official observers.

The platform

- meets at least once a year. One of the contracting parties, in this first period, Liechtenstein, takes the lead and chairs the platform for at least two years.

SOME PERSONAL REMARKS

This mandate only sets a frame; a meaningful picture within this raw frame we have to sketch, to delineate and to colour ourselves.

Let's meet the challenge ahead of us in a way, which is characterized by mutual openness, mutual respect and mutual trust. We have a chance to make progress in a field, where substantial progress too long has been missed.

Me personally – I do not like and I am not used to work within too strict corsets. Thus, if need arises, let's stretch or even cross the borders of this today's frame or mandate, if nobody else can better take care of a challenge ahead of us.

We are a group of individuals – individuals with a common interest. Let us make best use of our individual capacities and individual deliberations by bringing in our respective standpoints at any point of the discussion – the more differentiated viewpoints we get on the table the more balanced the result of our common work will be: I encourage you to present the standpoint of your individual institution, not necessarily an already nationally harmonised one, at any feasible moment of our discussion.

As regards my working style, there is only one precondition – and let me stress this quite frankly – which I will not set aside at any time: Within the scope of our mandate, I will not leave the path of an integrated and cross-sectoral approach.

Thank you for your continuous tolerance and your understanding.