



Bears in the Canton of Grisons 2008

Experience of the Cantonal Hunting and Fisheries Agency and of the
external collaborators in winter and spring 2008

11 April 2008

This report is a supplement to the 2007 report (situation on 1 November 2007) and comprises the same sections as the previous report. It describes the observations and conclusions for the period from 1 November 2007 to 10 April 2008.

1. Movements of the bears, especially JJ3

After being actively expelled from the region of Lenzerheide on 22 October 2007, **JJ3** again stayed on the southern hillside between Brienz and Alvaneu until the beginning of the hibernation period. Its stay in this area was presumably encouraged by the presence of a cadaver (placed there for a planned attempt to capture the bear). From 8 November, the bear established its winter quarters here at an altitude of 1720 m. This choice of a hibernation site on a sunny, southerly-exposed hillside was a surprise to those knowledgeable about bears. However, it became apparent on the spot that, based on the micro relief, in reality the small-scale site can definitely be compared with north-facing sites. Several trips made by the bear during the winter, e.g. at the end of November and the end of December, which were noted by GPS bearings but not confirmed by sightings in the field, surprised the specialists even more.

JJ3 woke up around 20 February 2008 and wandered through the areas that it has frequented in autumn, without leaving many tracks. Among other things, it visited the alpine pasture region above Lantsch / Lenz on the flank of the Lenzerhorn. The bear stayed there in the same place for several days, in cold, snowy weather. From mid-March the bear's trips extended further. It explored new regions in the direction of Oberhalbstein and began once again to visit settlements and individual houses, searching for something to eat. On 23 March it attacked a stag, which was probably injured or sick, between Brienz and Surava (photos from digital photo trap). Within a week the bear had almost completely consumed the stag. However, at the same time, it visited the surrounding villages, each time at night, investigating compost heaps, rubbish bins etc. among the houses. After Easter, the bear greatly extended its trips. These led it to Alvaschein and also to the Oberhalbstein area (as far as Saletscha in the Val Schmorras and Rona). On 9 April, the bear returned to the southern slope between Lantsch / Lenz and Alvaneu.

MJ4, a much more timid bear, was last tracked on 29 November 2007 in the Spöl valley. It was later established that, before hibernating, this bear broke into an apiary in this area. The first evidence of the bear this spring dates from 28 March, in the same area, when it visited the corpse of a chamois. It can be inferred that MJ4 spent the winter successfully on the edge of the Swiss National Park. However, on 1 April, the bear once again went looking for the beehive that it had demolished in the autumn, to eat the remaining honeycomb. The bear was photographed and filmed there. It should be added to last year's report that in the meantime the attacks on Alp Munt, Ardez have been unequivocally assigned to MJ4.

However, as before, the positive proof of bear presence in the Val d'Uina, Val S-charl and Val Sinestra cannot be ascribed with certainty to this bear. A track, documented photographically on 31 March near to Seraplana, raises questions, especially as it cannot be attributed to the bear

with certainty. Therefore, it is still an open question whether a third yet unidentified brown bear is roaming round the Lower Engadine.

2. Problems, damage and prevention

No further attacks were observed after the **attacks on sheep** on Alp Munt near Ardez between 26.10.2007 and 2.11.2007. This is not surprising, as to date hardly any small livestock have kept been outside. As a result, no flock protection measures had to be taken. At least there were no break-ins observed into open sheepfolds, chicken coops or other buildings harbouring live animals etc. However there is some concern about one case (on 27.3.2008), when the bear got through an open window 33 cm high into an empty barn, in order to search through the rubbish bags stored there.

There has unfortunately been greater damage to **beehives**. Both JJ3 and MJ4 helped themselves to unprotected apiaries, causing considerable damage. Although beehive protection was promoted well locally, in some places it has not been carried out sufficiently rigorously.

This year, it has again been standard for JJ3 to **approach inhabited dwellings and settlements**. Starting in mid-March, the bear visited the settlement areas of almost all towns and villages (Alvaneu, Surava, Brienz-Brinzauls, Lantsch/Lenz, Alvaschein, Burvagn, Savognin, Tinizong, Oberrona), and various alpine pasture areas (Propissi, Aclas, Radons, Tigia, Plaz Beischen, Dafora, Proschen). Within these populated areas the bear managed to get access to beehives, compost heaps, rubbish bins, bird-houses and supplies (e.g. candles and food). It is becoming ever clearer that the bear feels comfortable in settlement areas. So it visits settlements or individual buildings even if it has clearly eaten enough already. For instance this happened when the bear was eating the stag that it had killed. From this we can deduce that JJ3 is not only inappropriately influenced concerning its idea of where to search for food, but also in its as regards its habitat requirements.

Extensive **harassment actions** are brought into play immediately after the first appearance of the bear in a settlement area, which certainly prevents even greater conflicts. There are repeated **meetings with people**. As last year, the bear has acted very indifferently towards people. Thus, on the Radon, the bear circled round a hotel with many guests on the veranda, during the daylight hours, at a distance of about a hundred metres.

During the first months of this year, Mario Theus and Paolo Molinari worked out a plan for dealing with **waste** produced by people. With a view to the forthcoming summer, bear-safe rubbish bins have been evaluated. In connection with this, contacts have been made with the Cantonal Public Works Agency. WWF Switzerland has signalled it is considering ordering bear-proof rubbish bins from a Swiss firm.

Since last autumn, the information campaign have been progressively reinforced. The population has been informed in many different places. Specific events have been held for different interest groups such as farmers, beekeepers, those involved in the tourist industry, nature protection organisations etc.

3. Monitoring of JJ3 and the application of harassment techniques

The **monitoring** of JJ3 was carried out using a GSM/GPS system, or with conventional bearings from the ground (VHF system). In order to save energy, in winter – in other words until the end of hibernation at the end of February – the interval between individual determinations of position by GPS was greatly extended.

The **harassment actions (aversive conditioning)** were carried out using rubber shot, petards and warning shots (7x65). The result of the harassment actions in 2008 were as follows:

- In the case of certain harassment actions the bear fled a long way, even through deep snow (Radons – Saletscha).
- The experience from last year, that the bear avoids localities where harassment actions were carried out successfully was confirmed.
- However, it was not possible, even in the smallest way, to stop JJ3 from actively searching for food in settlement areas.
- It must be assumed that JJ3 feels comfortable in settlement areas and views this as part of its habitat.
- It became increasingly difficult and costly to carry out successful harassment actions.

This year's harassment actions were also very costly and the bear repeatedly gave its pursuers the slip. The gamekeepers often had the feeling that JJ3 recognised the sound of their vehicles, and interpreted this as a sign of danger or of forthcoming "punishment". The Italian gamekeepers had reported a similar adaptation in the case of Jurka.

In the case of JJ3, who was often led by Jurka into settlements to get food when it was a cub, this bear has been inappropriately influenced concerning obtaining food and what it regards as its habitat, and this effect can no longer be corrected.

4. Staff involved

Over the past five months the Hunting and Fisheries Agency of the Canton of Grisons has been able to continue to rely on highly motivated, competent staff. They showed great commitment, devoting themselves for innumerable hours, mainly in the evening and at night, to monitoring and managing the bears in the Canton of Grisons. They immediately exchanged new experience together, which led to a high level of knowledge. Those at the front were supported by the experts consulted, and the field assistants. The fact that it was possible to carry out this work in addition to all the other work is thanks to much overtime and great commitment on the part of the gamekeepers.

At the beginning of this year, as before, the Hunting and Fisheries Agency of the Canton of Grisons has been able to learn a great deal about bears, as a result of JJ3's lack of fear. In this sense, it can only be repeated that this is an important investment in order to face up to future tasks. It has been possible to show the population that the gamekeepers do their job professionally, even in the presence of bears, and that they are highly committed to solving conflicts between wild animals and human beings.

It was not possible to "re-educate" a young bear, which had been inappropriately influenced, to produce a bear with the necessary respect for people and their facilities, an obligatory prerequisite if bears and human beings are to live together in the alpine cultural landscape.