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FAQs Shooting of Bear JJ3

Why was bear JJ3 shot?

Normally bears are shy and avoid the proximity of people. MJ4, the second bear, which has been wandering around the Canton of Grisons for almost a year, behaves in this way. On the contrary, JJ3 kept looking for food in settlements in the area of the Albula valley, Lenzerheide and Savognin. The competent authorities made several attempts to harass the bear and scare it off so that it would stay away from settlements (aversive conditioning). To do this, the bear was fired at using rubber shot and petards. However, these actions were largely ineffective. Although, after each harassment action, JJ3 avoided the immediate vicinity of the site where the attempt had occurred, it repeatedly advanced into settlement areas in other places. Thus JJ3 became a big risk. There was the danger that, because of its lack of fear, a dangerous situation could arise, where people could be attacked and hurt. Since this is an unacceptable risk, JJ3 had to be shot for safety reasons.

Who decided that this bear should be shot? How is this procedure regulated?

The competent Intercantonal Commission (IKK) assessed the situation from the specialist point of view, based on the Swiss Bear Plan. In the present case, the IKK consisted of the Hunting Administrator of the Canton of Grisons and the Head of the Wildlife and Forest Biodiversity Management Section of the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN). The IKK made a recommendation to the competent Councillor of the canton concerned. The Councillor then made a political decision based on federal legislation whether or not to authorise shooting of the bear. The bear was shot by the enforcement agencies of the canton and the Confederation.

Why was the bear not anaesthetised and put to sleep instead of being shot?

To anaesthetise a bear and then put it to sleep with an injection is much more difficult than to shoot it: one must be able to approach it at a distance 30 metres or closer, whereas a bear can be shot dead up to a distance of about 200 metres. Since it was not possible to approach the bear to within 30 metres, it was necessary to shoot it. Once a bear has been classified as risky, the competent authorities had to act rapidly.

Bears are protected. So why can we shoot them?

Bears are protected in accordance with an international convention and the Swiss Hunting Act. However, one has to weigh the protection of the bear with the danger it represents. In order to carry out this assessment, the FOEN drew up the "Swiss Bear Plan" which defines how to deal with bears. This plan is about prevention, flock protection, compensation for damages and finally how to deal with animals that cause problems. Shooting a bear is an option also considered in other countries (e.g. Slovenia) if the bear becomes dangerous for people.

In dealing with bears that come into Switzerland, the authorities are in a conflict situation between the goals for individual bears and those for the bear population as a whole. To give the population the chance of establishing itself in Switzerland, it may, under certain circumstances, be necessary to remove an individual. To ensure a safe habitat for inconspicuous bear MJ4 and for others like it, which it is hoped will migrate into Switzerland, risky bear JJ3 had to be shot.

Why was there no period of appeal against the shooting?

Because of JJ3's lack of fear and its repeated search for food in settlements, this bear represented a safety risk for people, which could no longer be borne. Therefore the bear had to be shot at the first opportunity, if it started roaming again through settlements.

What is the purpose of the Swiss Bear Plan?

The bear plan defines how to deal with bears, prevent damage, protect flocks, and how to compensate the damage. According to this plan there are three categories of bear:

1. Unobtrusive bears (such as MJ4, the second bear in the Canton of Grisons); behave inconspicuously, live in remote areas and avoid settlements.
2. Problem bears: cause damage, are not very afraid of people. Therefore they are fitted with an emitter if possible and subjected to targeted harassment (aversive conditioning).
3. Risky bears: either have no fear of settlements and of people, despite repeated subjection to harassment actions or they have become directly aggressive to people. Therefore, on safety grounds, they are either shot or anaesthetised and then put to sleep.

JJ3 was never aggressive towards people, but as the harassment action did not basically change the bear's behaviour, there was an increase in the risk that a situation dangerous for people could occur.

How dangerous really was this bear?

JJ3 was a young male that showed very little fear of people and settlements from the beginning. Therefore it was caught on 12 August 2007 and fitted with a collar emitter. In this way its position was always known, and its wanderings could be followed and the harassment actions better planned. In summer and autumn 2007 the federal and cantonal specialists tried to chase bear JJ3 out of settlement areas by all possible means. Several times JJ3 was caught red-handed, opening rubbish bags or overturning containers and was subjected to targeted harassment. Further harassment actions were carried out in March and April 2008, but they also proved ineffective. Although the bear never acted aggressively towards people, it became a

safety risk for people because it showed no fear at all and kept looking for food in or near settlements.

Why was this bear dangerous?

The responsible authorities assume that JJ3 learnt its difficult behaviour from its mother, Jurka. Because of its lack of fear, Jurka was captured some time ago in Italy, and has since been kept in an enclosure. Jurka's other offspring, JJ2 "Lumpaz" (the first bear to migrate into Switzerland for over a hundred years, and which disappeared in 2005) and JJ1 "Bruno" (shot in Bavaria in 2006), showed the same difficult behaviour. It is known that it is hardly possible to correct behaviour acquired at an early age.

Couldn't this bear have been captured and kept in a zoo or large enclosure?

According to the federal Swiss Bear Plan it is never an option to "capture a bear and put it in an enclosure or to resettle it". Considerations of animal ethics are not in favour of keeping wild bears in captivity:

- Even if an enclosure is set up appropriately for bears, it is only possible to get young bears (at the most) used to this existence. In all cases, captivity puts wild animals under considerable stress.
- Bears born in the wild quickly develop stereotypes, behavioural disturbances such as always walking the same route by the enclosure fences, moving their heads around near the grating, etc. Experience with Jurka, the female wild bear kept in an enclosure in Italy confirm this.
- If a wild bear is classified as a "risk", for safety reasons responsibility cannot be taken for days of attempts to capture the bear. In such a case, the enforcement authorities must be able to respond quickly.

This position was discussed fully with wild bear experts from Switzerland and other countries, the cantons and nature conservation associations, when working out the Swiss Bear Plan.

Couldn't this bear have been taken back to Italy?

The FOEN negotiated with Italy whether the bear could be taken back to that country, to live there in freedom. However, the Italians refused this option. The Italian authorities showed understanding for the actions of the Swiss authorities. It should once more be possible for bears to live in Switzerland as the example of MJ4 shows: this second bear living in the Canton of Grisons is shy and unobtrusive.

Did the bear that was shot cause much damage?

The material damage amounted to approximately 50,000 CHF in total. It consisted of sheep killed and beehives plundered. 20% of these damages are covered by the canton and 80% by the federal government. Prevention measures for sheep flocks and beehives are paid for by the federal government from the current flock protection programme (800,000 CHF per year for lynx, wolf and bear). The harassment actions are financed by the federal government and are carried out by cantonal gamekeepers. The expenses are divided in this way because the costs caused by large carnivores cannot be covered by the region alone. However, in this case, the

reason for shooting the bear is not the damages and costs, but the risk that the bear might hurt or even kill a human being.

Why have the other bears in Switzerland not been shot?

The other bear (MJ4) behaves unobtrusively. It is shy and rarely comes near settlements. Although it has from time to time killed sheep and plundered beehives, it avoids people and settlements, so it does not represent a risk for people. This shows that bears can live in Switzerland.

How many bears are there in Switzerland? Where are they living?

The presence of one more bear in the area of the Engadine and Münster valleys and the Swiss National Park has been ascertained: this is MJ4, a three-year old bear which is shy and unobtrusive.

What is now going to happen to the dead bear?

The dead bear is the property of the Canton of Grisons, and will be autopsied for scientific purposes in the Canton of Grisons, and then preserved.

How does the international collaboration for the management of bears operate? What contacts existed before JJ3 was killed, in particular with Italy?

The Game and Hunting Section of the FOEN maintains regular contact on the subject with the corresponding authorities in Italy and other alpine countries, such as France, Austria, Germany and Slovenia, and also with the local authorities and experts concerned. The Italian authorities are represented by the Direzione per la Protezione della Natura, Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Tutela del Territorio (the Directorate for Nature Conservation of the Ministry of the Environment and Territory).

The experts last met on the 29th of October 2007 in Bologna, for a coordination meeting (including, among others, representatives of the FOEN, the Italian alpine provinces and the Italian Ministry of the Environment). At this meeting, the Swiss representatives enquired of the Italians orally if they were disposed to take JJ3 back into the Trentino, within the context of their reintroduction project. The Italian delegation refused. Italy offered its help to Switzerland in handling the problem bears, but not to take them back.

The FOEN Board of directors is also in regular contact with the competent Italian authorities. In particular, during the week preceding the shooting of JJ3, there was a communication by phone with a representative of the Direzione per la Protezione della Natura. At this occasion, the FOEN informed their Italian colleagues that the bear had renewed his disturbances with increasing frequency and that measures would soon have to be taken.

Following this, on the 14th of April 2008, the FOEN received a letter from the Direzione Generale per la Protezione della Natura, Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Tutela del Territorio e del Mare.

In this letter, the Italian authorities expressed their hope that the Swiss authorities would refrain from shooting the bear and expressed themselves in favour of catching the bear and releasing it in the south-eastern part of the Canton of Grisons, inside the Swiss National Park. This alternative had already been tested by the competent

Swiss authorities in the autumn of 2007, and been rejected. As the GPS bearings of JJ3's movements show, the bear would have found its way back to its previous surroundings in the space of a few days. Furthermore, it could also have penetrated again into settlements in the area of the National Park.

From Italy, Switzerland has received no official or unofficial offer to take JJ3 back.