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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

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Standing Committee

46th meeting,
7-11 December 2026,
Strasbourg

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Bureau of the Standing Committee

17-18 June 2026,
Strasbourg

Complaint on stand-by: 2021/05

Habitat loss in Baden-Württemberg threatening the conservation of Tetrao urogallus (Germany)

- REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT -

Document prepared by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety

Ministerium für Umwelt, Klima und Energiewirtschaft Bade
Babak Miller
Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Naturschu
Referat N I 4 – Internationaler Artenschutz, Handelsarte
Robert-Schuman-Platz 3
53175 Bonn
Versand per Mail an:
HYPERLINK "mailto:babak.miller@bmukn.bund.de" b

Complaint No. 2021/5 under Bern Convention: Capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*) conservation in Baden-Württemberg

Progress report

Dear Mr Miller,

in a letter dated 19 May 2025, the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety asked for a progress report concerning the protection of the capercaillie in the Black Forest, since the Bureau of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention re-examined the case at its meeting on 8-10 April 2025 and was setting the complaint on stand-by. Furtermore, we were requested to share information on the state of play of wind energy infrastructure expansion, data available on the *Tetrao urogallus* population, including nesting and hatching, and the results of the research on predator-related mortality, with special attention to the effects of the recent invasive species, the Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*). Additionally we are requested to report specifically on the measures adopted for the restoration of habitat related with the Action Plan, the targets addressed, the results obtained so far, and to monitor the effects of the restored habitats on the capercaillie distribution and breeding behaviour.

In the following, we give information about the requested aspects and a brief progress report on capercaillie conservation in the Black Forest.

Information on the state of play of wind energy infrastructure expansion

Please find detailed background information on Wind power development, capercaillie conservation and the corresponding planning framework for the Black Forest in the report from 2024 (Az. UM72-8850-30/11/4).

The following is an update of the information provided in previous reports.

The regional planning offensive is currently being implemented in Baden-Württemberg. By December 2026, wind priority areas are to be designated to 1.8 % of the country's surface area. Up to date, just 68 hectares planned wind priority areas are located in areas with a „very high spatial resistance" and just 641 hectares in areas with a „high spatial resistance" according to the planning framework „Windenergy and capercaillie". The difference from the 2025 report stems from the regional associations' adjustment of the boundaries of the planned priority areas for wind energy.

New calculations were performed for this report to depict the wind turbines development within the categories of the planning framework „Windenergy and capercaillie". The figures from last year's report are not directly comparable with the following analyses due to a different presentation format. However, the map in Annex 2 allows for a direct comparison with the map in the 2025 report.

The analysis reveals the following picture. Number of wind turbines in areas with:

- „very high spatial resistance": 16 (13 in operation [1 was added in 2025], 3 approved but not in operation [all added in 2025]),
- „high spatial resistance": 12 (7 in operation [2 were added in 2025], 5 approved but not in operation)
- „very high spatial resistance population connectivity": 3 are approved but not in operation (see maps in Annex 2).

In those cases, compensating habitat restoration measures in suitable areas were carried out.

Data available on the capercaillie population, including nesting and hatching

In Baden-Württemberg, annual population surveys (lek counts) have been carried out since 1983. Since 1994, the number of lekking males has been constantly declining, with a recovery phase between 2000 and 2012, which was presumably caused by major storm events which improved the habitat for capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*). For several years now, it appears that the population is stabilising at a very low level (Figure 1 in Annex 1). In the Black Forest National Park, the trend of lekking capercaillie males is as follows: 17 males in 2022, 23 males in 2023, 28 males in 2024, and 30 males in 2025.

Since 1989, every 5 years all available data on the capercaillie population has been collated to map the distribution area in the Black Forest. A new distribution area was delineated for the time period 2019-2023. Whereas in the first time period (1989-1993) capercaillie still occurred in approximately 60,000 hectares, the total area decreased to only 27,090 hectares for the period 2019-2023. The next delineation of the distribution area will take place in 2029 for the time period 2024-2028. The Forest Research Institute (FVA) has launched a new platform to enhance the collection and management of citizen science data primarily contributed by hunters, foresters, and ornithologists with the objective of enabling continuous monitoring while minimizing additional disturbance. This initiative is complemented by systematic surveys conducted within the reference areas of the management scheme during the summer months, thereby avoiding disturbance-sensitive periods. Furthermore, the FVA is currently undertaking pilot studies on capercaillie monitoring employing automatic recording units and the genetic analysis of capercaillie droppings. Currently no data is collected on capercaillie nesting or hatching success. The search for nests in the nesting period would cause high levels of disturbance. As anthropogenic disturbance is considered a threat for the capercaillie population, this research is not being carried out.

Since the year 2014, the Black Forest National Park has been monitoring the capercaillie reproductive success (measured as the number of observed chicks per observed female capercaillie) in the Northern Black Forest subpopulation (find some background information in 2024 report). The monitored breeding success in 2025 is expected to bring a further modest recovery for the population in the Black Forest National Park, at least among the females. The positive trend in reproductive success in the last years is reflected in the slightly increasing number of lekking males within the Black Forest National Park.

Results of the research on predator-related mortality, with special attention to the effects of the recent invasive species, the Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)

While studies on nest predation from other regions (e.g. Pyrenees: (Palencia & Barroso 2024)) report ground nest predation rates of over 60 %, in the Black Forest, there exist no studies on predator-related mortality of capercaillie. A study on capercaillie range loss in the Black Forest, however, showed that red fox (*Vulpes*

vulpes) abundance had a negative influence on capercaillie range persistence (Kämmerle et al. 2017). The main predators of capercaillie in the Black Forest are red fox and pine marten (*Martes martes*) (Kämmerle et al. 2019) but also badger (*Meles meles*), stone marten (*Martes foina*) and wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) are potential nest predators (e.g. Jahren et al. 2016). Although spreading rapidly in Baden-Württemberg, the raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) does not yet play a major role in the Black Forest and therefore also as predator of capercaillie (MLR 2025). Nevertheless, it should be noted that since January 2026, a regulation implementing the Hunting and Wildlife Management Act has declared some invasive species (including raccoons, raccoon dogs and minks) to be huntable throughout the year in order to mitigate the spread of these species. Additionally, the hunting season for foxes has been adjusted in areas where conservation associations are working on the protection of capercaillie. To further mitigate the influence of predation on the capercaillie population in the Black Forest, two predator managers were hired, a trap subsidy was introduced for more effective hunting of predators and an exemption was created allowing the use of audio equipment as decoys for predator hunting in capercaillie areas. Furthermore, a research project was implemented at the Forest Research Institute (FVA) to systematically review the effectiveness of predator management to reduce predators and to ensure the continuous adaptation of strategies to protect the capercaillie population in the Black Forest. First results of this project are expected in 2027.

Measures adopted for the restoration of habitat related with the Action Plan, the targets addressed, the results obtained so far, and to monitor the effects of the restored habitats on the capercaillie distribution and breeding behaviour

Since 2023, there exist a new management scheme, which identifies the most important measures for capercaillie protection:

1. Preservation and restoration of habitats
2. Reduction of anthropogenic disturbances
3. Reduction of predator-related mortality through hunting management
4. Coordination and monitoring of implementation

Great efforts are being made, particularly in the implementation of the measure “preservation and restoration of habitats”: In the management scheme 2023-2028, reference areas, mainly located in state forests, were disclosed where the measures of this management scheme are to be implemented comprehensively and ideally. Furthermore, the Ministry of Food, Rural Affairs and Consumer Protection (MLR) allocates funding each year to enable habitat management measures to be implemented in the state forest. During the forestry year 2024/25, the state forest spent 540,170 € on habitat management measures on 438.7 ha. However, in order to achieve the goals of the action plan, 215 ha of clear-cuts and 446 ha of open structures must be created annually until 2028 in the state forest. Funding for habitat

management measures is also provided for private and communal forests (Verwaltungsvorschrift des Ministeriums für Ländlichen Raum und Verbraucherschutz über die Gewährung von Zuwendungen für Nachhaltige Waldwirtschaft (VwV NWW)). In addition, since 2019 there has been the society for capercaillie protection (Auerhuhn im Schwarzwald e.V. (AiS)) whose main task is to assist forest owners with the application process. With the help of this funding instrument and the AiS, 278 ha of habitat management were carried out in private and communal forests in 2025. Research on the effectiveness of habitat management measures in the Black Forest shows that these measures (small clear-cuts) have positive effects on the probability of capercaillie presence (Kochs et al. 2025). These results are supported by a wide range of anecdotal reports on the positive effects of local habitat management on capercaillie.

In the Black Forest National Park (approx. 10,000 hectares in size, accounts for about 25–30% of the capercaillie population in the Black Forest) intensive efforts have been made in recent years in order to improve the capercaillie habitats. Here, habitat has been restored with a focus on rearing and breeding areas, but also around capercaillie leks in areas that are generally not subject to forestry intervention due to their strict conservation status. Between 2020 and 2025, approx. 574 ha of capercaillie habitat were restored in the Black Forest National Park (2020: approx. 40 ha, 2021: approx. 60 ha, 2022: approx. 100 ha, 2023: approx. 140 ha, 2024 approx. 125, 2025 approx. 109). In addition, more areas suitable for the capercaillie are also created naturally in the Black Forest National Park as a result of recent bark beetle infestation and storm damages.

We hope that we have been able to answer all your questions and are happy to answer any further queries you may have.

Yours sincerely,

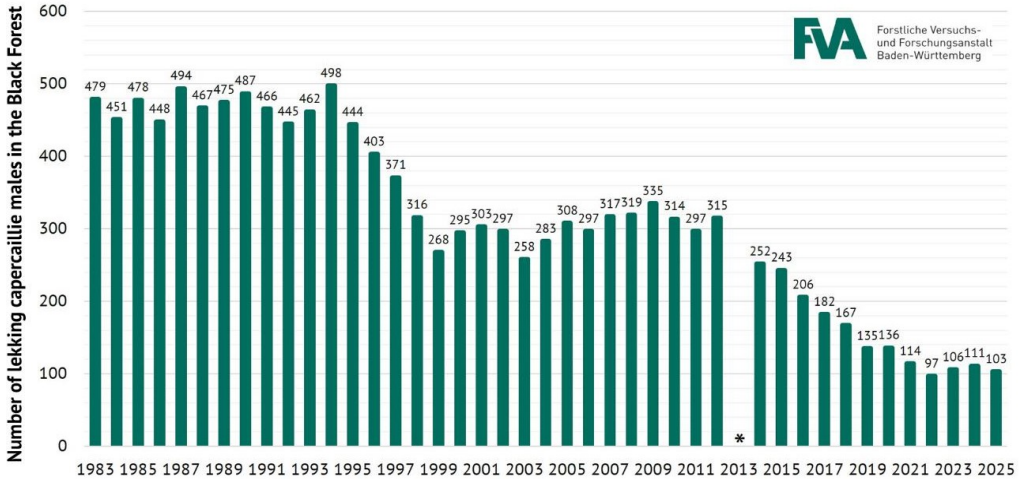
gez. Karl-Heinz Lieber

Head of the Department Nature Conservation

Annex I

Number of capercaillie males recorded at the yearly spring census in Black Forest (period 1983-2025)

Figure 1: Annual number of lekking capercaillie males in the Black Forest (incl. Black Forest National Park). In the year 2013 no complete assessment was possible due to adverse weather conditions.



Kernerplatz 9 - 70182 Stuttgart
Hauptstätter Str. 67 - 70178 Stuttgart
E-Mail: poststelle@um.bwl.de
Telefon: +49 711 126-0
Telefax: +49 711 126-2881

Homepage: um.baden-wuerttemberg.de
Serviceportal: service-bw.de
Datenschutz: um.baden-wuerttemberg.de/datenschutz
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Annex II
Map of running and approved wind turbines in Black Forest (status 01.02.2026)

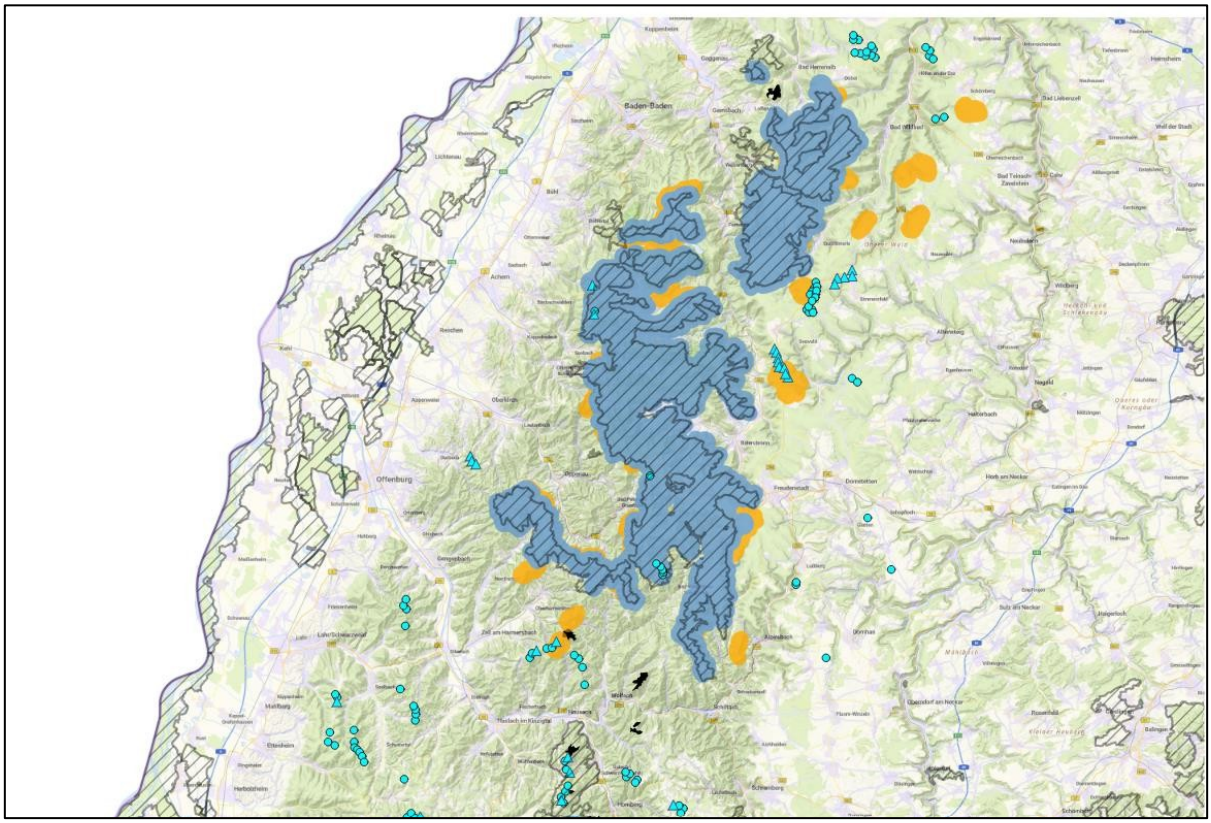
Approved (but not yet built or operating) and operating wind turbines in the Black Forest (status 1.2.2026; districts of Baden-Baden, Breisgau-Hochschwarzwald, Calw, Emmendingen, Freiburg, Freudenstadt, Lörrach, Ortenaukreis, Rastatt, Rottweil, Schwarzwald-Baar-Kreis and Waldshut). The spatial resistance categories of the planning framework „Windenergy and Capercaillie“ are also shown.

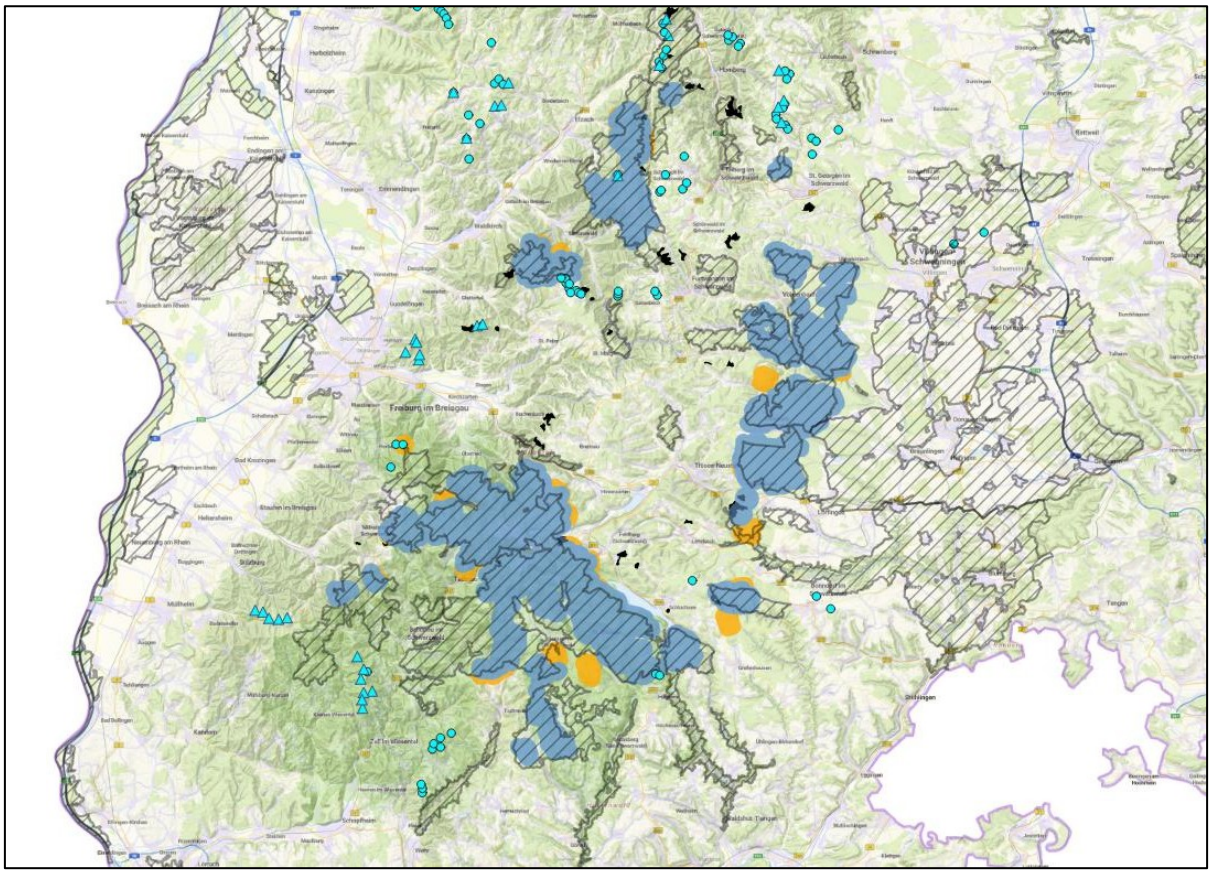
Legend:

- Wind turbine approved, but not yet built or operating
- Wind turbine in operation
- Special protection area (SPA)

categories planning framework „Windenergy and Capercaillie“

- high spatial resistance
- very high spatial resistance
- very high spatial resistance (stepping-stones for population connectivity)




Freiburg im Breisgau
Villingen-Schwenningen

Annex III
Literature

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