



Strasbourg, 28 January 2025

T-PVS/Files(2025)2021-5_comp

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee
45th meeting
Strasbourg, 8-12 December 2025

Bureau of the Standing Committee
8-10 April 2025
Strasbourg

Stand by File: 2021/5

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

- REPORT BY THE COMPLAINANT -

Document prepared by NABU

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Bern Convention – Stand by case 2021/5: Habitat loss in Baden-Württemberg threatening the conservation of *Tetrao urogallus*

Dear Ms. Saporito, dear
Sir / Madam,

unfortunately, during the past year the situation of capercaillie in Baden- Württemberg has further deteriorated.

The information requested in our last letter would have facilitated a more detailed situation assessment. Thus, we would like to ask again if the information could be obtained and be made available also to us. Given the current lack of this information, our assessment is largely based on data officially published by the state Forest Research Institute Baden-Württemberg (FVA, <https://www.fva-bw.de/en/homepage>) which is responsible for forests and forestry in Baden- Württemberg under the Ministry of Food, Rural Areas, and Consumer Protection.

Further decrease in capercaillie distribution

In 2024, FVA has at last published the following map of the capercaillie range during the 1988–1993 period (green) and during the 2019–2024 period (pink).



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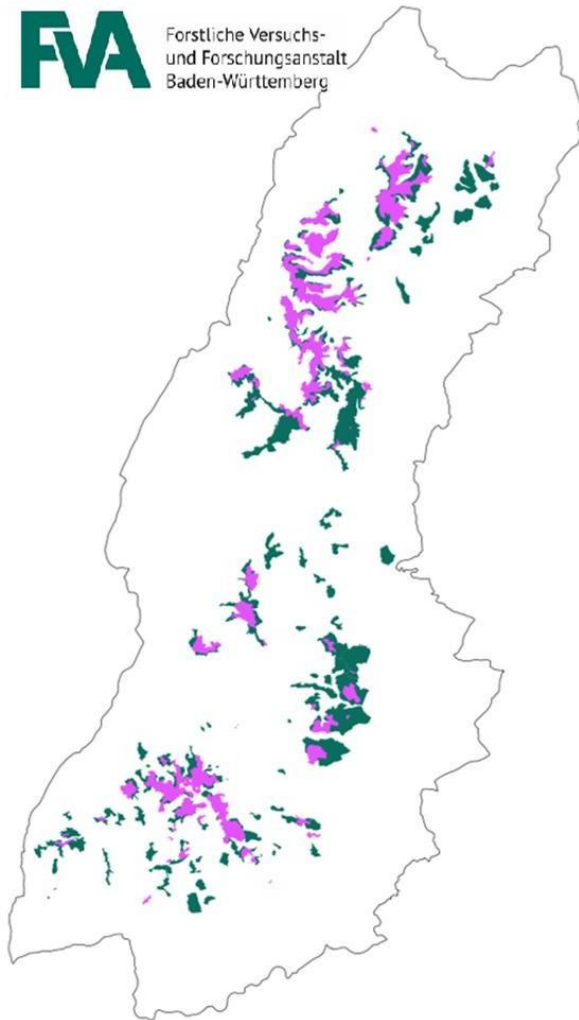
Getragen von

den Gruppen im Bodenseekreis, den Kreisen
Konstanz, Schwarzwald-Baar, Sigmaringen
und Tuttlingen

Geschäftskonto

Sparkasse Bodensee
BLZ 690 500 01
Konto 1 022 961
IBAN DE45 6905 0001 0001022961
BIC SOLADES1KNZ

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The area inhabited by capercaillie has decreased from 60,500 hectares in 1988 by 33,500 hectares to only 27,000 hectares today. The respective breakdown of habitat loss is:

Period 1988–2008: minus 9,000 hectares, i.e., an average loss of 450

hectares/year 2009–2018: minus 17,100 ha, i.e., 1,710 ha/year

2019–2023: minus 7,400 ha, i.e., 1,233 ha/year

It is to be noted that after the start of the "Capercaillie Action Plan 2008–2018" habitat loss has been almost 4 times higher than during the preceding period of 1988–2008. In this regard, ecological and scientific flaws of the Capercaillie Action Plan 2008–2018 had been pointed out since its conception. The most important flaw is that threshold values and minimum habitat requirements for a population that is supposed to increase and survive in the long term cannot be derived from the same population being both in long-term and in short-term decline. Ignoring this flaw and still deriving thresholds from a declining population highly likely results in insufficient and too low values.

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Unfortunately, flawed minimum values of the old Action Plan were adopted in the new “Capercaillie Action Plan 2023–2028”. Some of the values have even been further downgraded, to the detriment of capercaillie: E.g., the required ground vegetation cover is no longer “at least > 40 %” but only “at least 30 %”. Also, ground vegetation known to be unfavourable for capercaillie above 20-30 cm in height no longer needs to be “less than 40 cm” tall but may now “ideally grow up to 50 cm”.

Furthermore, the recommended minimum proportion of open forest stands is only 30 %, whereas with certainty significantly higher values are required for population recovery and secured long-term persistence, not least in the face of other increasing pressures, such as increasing human recreational activity or wind power development in capercaillie habitat. Thus, in their capercaillie habitat quality assessment for the reporting under the Habitats Directive, the Bavarian State Institute for Forestry and Forestry Research sets the open forest threshold of high-quality capercaillie habitat at > 50 % (LWF 2014). Last but not least, the Baden-Württemberg Capercaillie Action Plan 2023–2028 recommends a forest canopy cover of 50–70 %, while in the Bavarian/Bohemian Forest with a rather stable or even increasing capercaillie population, most records occur at canopy covers of only 10–50 % (Urban et al. 2020). Thus, Baden-Württemberg values are lower than in neighbouring areas although the capercaillie’s species ecology is the same throughout central Europe. These examples also highlight flaws and discrepancies of the Capercaillie Action Plan 2023–2028.

No further decrease in numbers, but in population density

The official number of male capercaillie reported has slightly increased from the historic minimum of 97 in 2022 to 111 males in 2024. However, this is still 24 fewer birds than only five years ago, and far away from a minimum population of 500. Furthermore, it is not possible to determine to which extent this slight increase can be attributed to weather conditions favourable for reproduction in the springs of 2022 and 2023 alone, and whether or not is also supported by habitat improvements through targeted management measures, and / or by “natural” forest thinning due to drought or bark beetles. Here, we would like to mention again that to our knowledge the number of hectares of habitat restored through habitat management measures has not yet been published.

Thus, at the moment there is no clear evidence that may support optimism. In this context, false information broadcasted in the press and on television is startling and worrying. E.g., on 8th August 2024, the Minister of Food, Rural Areas, and Consumer Protection Mr. Peter Hauk stated on Baden-TV that there are currently “a strong 200 males and an equal number of females” in the Black Forest. It is unlikely that Mr. Hauk is unaware of the official figure of 111 males, and a question mark remains as to the reasons for false reports.

In fact, current capercaillie population density is probably at its lowest in more than 25 years, as shown by the following figures:

Period	Average number of males	Habitat area (ha)	Population density (males/100 ha)
1988–1993	467	60,500	0.77
2004–2008	305	51,800	0.59
2014–2018	210	34,400	0.61
2019–2023	117	27,000	0.43

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Habitat loss and fragmentation have resulted in increasing population fragmentation, genetic isolation, and loss of connectivity. E.g., the gap between the northern sub-population and the central and southern sub-population is now well over 30 km linear distance. Capercaillie can hardly or not at all bridge a gap this wide. Thus, by now most likely two separate capercaillie populations exist in the Black Forest, with only about 45 and 65 males, respectively. This significantly increases individual sub-population and overall extinction risk.

Numerous wind turbines already erected and continuing to be erected within the capercaillie range have contributed to the loss of habitat and population connectivity. This trend is even increasing as future capercaillie habitat is currently being "negotiated" with the wind energy industry. Here, the debate is more focused on politics than on ecological aspects including the conservation of capercaillie and other species.

We are deeply concerned about the overall continuous negative development and that there is nothing more positive to report.

Yours sincerely,

Dietrich Weller

Literature

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