COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 30 November 2018 **T-PVS(2018)7**
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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

38th meeting
Strasbourg, 27-30 November 2018

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RECOMMENDATION
ON THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL FEEDING AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL OF LARGE CARNIVORE POPULATIONS AND THEIR PREY, WITH A PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON THE BROWN BEAR

Document
prepared by
the Directorate of Democratic Participation

COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Convention on the Conservation
of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats

Standing Committee

Recommendation No. 198 (2018) of the Standing Committee, adopted on 30 November 2018, on the use of artificial feeding as a management tool of large carnivore populations and their prey, with a particular emphasis on the brown bear

The Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, acting under the terms of Article 14 of the Convention,

Having regard to the aims of the Convention to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats;

Recalling in particular Articles 2, 3, 6 and 7 of the Convention;

Recalling its Recommendations No. 74 (1999) on the conservation of large carnivores, No. 82 (2000) on urgent measures concerning the implementation of action plans for large carnivores in Europe, No. 115 (2005) on the conservation and management of transboundary populations of large carnivores, No. 137 (2008) on population level management of large carnivores populations, No. 162 (2012) on the conservation of large carnivores populations in Europe requesting special conservation action, and No. 163 (2012) on the management of expanding populations of large carnivores in Europe;

Wishing to promote co-existence of viable populations of large carnivores with sustained development of rural areas in appropriate regions;

Aware that, particularly where large carnivores are culled by hunting, feeding is variously used to modify carnivore density and distribution as well as facilitate efficient, safe and humane killing;

Aware that the rise in the artificial feeding of all wildlife, including large carnivores, and particularly brown bears, is causing conservation concern, mainly for the risk that the practice negatively changes wildlife density, health and behaviour and may have unintended consequences for protected species or ecosystems;

Worried that artificial feeding may spread without control of the possible negative consequences of the practice for the populations of target species, their prey, other species and ecosystem dynamics;

Recommends that Contracting Parties to the Convention:

1. Examine where appropriate the impact on ecosystems of artificial feeding of large carnivores aiming to better understand the way in which it may affect other species and the behaviour, numbers and health of the target large carnivores;
2. Regulate as appropriate artificial feeding practices aimed at large carnivores, taking into account the position statement of the IUCN's Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe which is available in appendix to this recommendation.

Appendix

Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe policy support statement on the use of artificial feeding as a management tool of large carnivore populations and their prey, with a particular emphasis on the brown bear

Artificial feeding of wildlife[1] has been a widespread tool used to promote wildlife conservation, particularly for supporting threatened populations, including large carnivores like the Iberian lynx or the Gobi brown bear. Wildlife feeding is aimed at drawing animals away from undesired places to avoid conflicts (diversionary feeding), at improving population viability or densities (supplementary feeding) and at concentrating animals to facilitate their observation and photography (recreational or tourism feeding) or hunting (game baiting). In recent decades, the amount of food provided to wildlife, as well as the number of sites and length of the period where and when is provided, has considerably increased worldwide. These anthropogenic food subsidies can also potentially have important unintended negative consequences for species and ecosystems, such as alterations of social and trophic interactions, behavior, activity and movement patterns, reproduction, spread of exotics, and pathogen transmission. Therefore, the rise of this practice is of increasing conservation concern and needs to be evaluated on a case by case basis.

Artificial feeding of game animals has been a common practice in many European countries. Hunting is the main motivation for wildlife feeding, followed by supporting animal populations. Wildlife feeding occurs year-round in many cases and mostly occurs at established feeding sites. These artificial food subsidies are also used by many non-target species of birds and mammals. Currently, more than 80% of the European countries where large carnivores occur feed them intentionally or unintentionally. Being omnivores, brown bears are particularly affected by this practice as they often also use the food provided to ungulates and to other carnivores. The main reasons for bear feeding are bear viewing/photographing, followed by hunting, and then for damage management and population monitoring. Corn and livestock (whole carcasses and slaughter remains) are the most common foods used to feed bears in Europe. Artificial feeding may help decrease damages, keep bears away from human-dominated areas and facilitate bear monitoring, viewing and hunting. On the other hand, there is evidence that artificial feeding affects brown bear biology, ecology and behavior, including for instance, diet, home range, hibernation or movements.

In Europe, artificial feeding practices are currently not always properly regulated. More than 60% of the areas where targeted bear feeding occurs have regulations regarding the type and amount of food that can be provided and the periods during which it may be provided, although often such regulations are not properly implemented and feeding is not controlled in practice. This is happening also in countries where bears are not the primary target of feeding. In most cases, these practices have not been subject to an appropriate impact assessment, even if they occur in Natura 2000 sites, Emerald Network areas or other protected areas. In both Emerald and Natura 2000 sites, national authorities have a legal obligation to ensure that feeding is in conformity with the ecological requirements of bears and other species for which the sites are designated, and that any significant adverse effects on these species are avoided.

The LCIE highlights the urgent need to reevaluate the practice of artificial feeding of large carnivores from cultural, ecological, conservation and legal perspectives. While recognizing that in some situations it can be an appropriate management tool and that further scientific evidence of the impacts of this practice should be gathered, in general, the LCIE does not recommend artificial feeding of large carnivores and would like to see a progressive decrease in the practice. Unintentional feeding of large carnivores, for instance where large herbivores are fed, should be minimised where possible.

[1] We consider here "artificial feeding" to include all deliberate food provisioning by humans to wildlife (large carnivore) species in natural habitats and which is considered a wildlife management tool, independent of the aim (baiting for hunting, diversionary feeding to decrease conflicts, recreation, support of populations). The use of rubbish dumps, containers and human waste are excluded.

In areas where it is currently practiced, the LCIE recommends a detailed case by case evaluation of the intended goals and the potential impacts on target and non-target species, as well as wider ecosystem effects. Proper monitoring of positive and negative impacts is essential to permit adaptive modification of the practice. There is also a need to develop, and enforce, clear regulations to govern the practice that relate to periods of the year when feeding should be conducted, the location of feeding sites, and the type and amounts of food that can be used.