

Guiding Principles for the Management of Hoofed Game in Austria's National Parks



lebensministerium.at



Preamble

Based on the objectives and visions of the “Austrian National Park Strategy” the present “Guiding Principles for the Management of Hoofed Game in Austria’s National Parks (NPs)” were worked out in several workshops of the representatives of the protected areas. They were adopted on 5 July 2011 by the coordination group of the six Austrian national parks which, by doing so, decided on and laid down joint objectives, principles and standards for hoofed game management (HGM) in Austrian national parks.

The rules for the implementation of the Guiding Principles in the individual national parks are set out in the relevant management plans.

1. General principles

The overarching objective in Austria’s NPs is to allow nature to develop freely on the greater part of the protected area and to avoid, or reduce, interventions in natural processes. Other objectives of relevance to hoofed game management include species protection, the maintenance of genetic diversity, the protection of the natural habitats of the wild animals as well as education and to make wild animals an attractive experience for visitors.

As a consequence of these objectives, which, in turn, are based on the IUCN guidelines for category II protected areas (national parks), hunting is basically prohibited in all Austrian national parks.

Abstaining from hunting, for which the owners of the relevant properties are compensated, involves the following benefits and expectations for the natural developments of the national parks:

- Equal treatment and equivalence of all wild animals, whether or not they are regarded as huntable.
- Natural or close-to-nature selection, more natural behaviour and completion of the full natural cycle of life for all wild animals.
- Free choice of location by wild animals inside national parks due to the elimination of all measures to link animals to specific territories.
- Safeguarding the populations of rare and sensitive animal species. Avoidance of any competition of use with natural predators, better conditions for raptors and for the return of lynx, bears, wolves, and wildcats.
- Making autochthonous wild animals better experientable for visitors, smaller flight distances and higher activity during the day through the avoidance of hunting pressure by man.
- Calming of the area by the elimination of hunting infrastructure. Impulses for an ecologically optimised and ethically motivated use of wild animals outside the national parks and for a modern understanding of wild animals.

Furthermore, national parks can

- play an important role as core areas, reserves and areas of retreat for large coherent wildlife populations in an extensive network of habitats;
- in certain cases also improve the value of neighbouring territories in terms of hunting.

In natural areas and core areas of Austrian NPs none of the species are hunted at any time. In the case of hoofed game (red deer, roe deer, chamois, wild boar, ibexes, etc.) an active hoofed game management may for various reasons be necessary in the national parks, which includes also a regulation of the numbers of hoofed game by hunting.

2. Reasons and objectives for active hoofed game management in NPs

As a result of the marked change in landscapes characterised by human impact, the natural conditions of life for big wild animals exist no longer, or only to a limited extent; natural regulatory methods are significantly reduced and natural migratory movements are disturbed. Simultaneously, unregulated populations of hoofed game can severely affect the ecosystems of national parks and of the areas surrounding them.

An active regulation of hoofed game species may therefore be needed in the event of

- danger to the site-appropriate vegetation on the greater part of the area of their occurrence due to browsing by hoofed game (making impossible site-appropriate development and regeneration of the forest communities in their typical structures and species combinations, reduction of biodiversity, maintenance of the protective effect);
- severe adverse impacts on the land surrounding the national parks (unacceptable damage to forestry and agriculture caused by hoofed game in areas surrounding the national parks;
- occurrence of alien hoofed game species (fallow deer, moufflons or sika deer).

3. Concrete principles of hoofed game management by the NP administration bodies¹

- NPs have large and coherent non-intervention game reserves which ideally comprise the entire core area/natural zone of the NP which, according to IUCS criteria, should make up 75% of the surface area of the NP. The necessary management and regulation measures in hoofed game management are taken outside the game reserves, respectively outside the national parks.
- All interventions are limited to the extent absolutely necessary and are carried out in a way which causes as little disturbance as possible, is appropriate to the needs of the individual species and adjusted to natural conditions and processes.
- In general, regulation should take place through interval-based interventions with as short regulation periods as possible and longer periods of rest, or in priority hunting areas.
- The infrastructure which is needed to meet the shooting quotas must be reduced to the extent absolutely necessary. Infrastructure which is no longer needed has to be removed.
- Shooting is by qualified and well-trained employees of the NPs. There is no hunting against payment. Antlers and horns of game killed by disease, hunger or cold and of shot animals as well as shed antlers are made available for scientific and educational purposes according to the requirements of the national park administration.
- Most the shootings are in the junior class and in the group of female animals. Mature trophy carriers are not shot.
- In national parks unleaded ammunition is used to shoot the animals that have to be killed.
- In national parks all hoofed animals can move around freely all over the year.
- Winter and other natural regulatory mechanisms (floods etc.) are regarded as natural regulation and have to be considered accordingly in hoofed animal management. The return of large predators also as a natural regulatory mechanism for hoofed game is desired and promoted.
- In national parks game diseases and parasitoses are regarded as part of the natural cycles of life. Only upon official order (e.g. in the event of unacceptable economic damage, epidemics, or if there is a risk for human health) are interventions admissible, even in game reserves.

¹ Concerns those areas of the entire NP area for which the relevant NP administration has the right to hunt or can exercise influence on this hunting right.

- Interventions which need to be taken in hoofed game management are documented continuously. Based on the analysis of this documentation and based on a game impact monitoring, the measures of the hoofed game management (which hoofed game species to which extent) are planned.
- Game impact monitoring in the NPs and the observation of the population development of hoofed game in the surroundings of the national park are important bases for the HGM. They are carried out by technically competent, experienced persons who are familiar with local conditions in cooperation with external experts and rely on a long-term concept. Stakeholders concerned are integrated.
- The NPs aim at a wide cooperation with neighbouring hunting territories across the limits of hunting grounds, wherever possible in the form of concrete agreements and the use of existing structures (such as hunting communities).
- The NPs ensure information supply and the dialogue with all stakeholders concerned. For this purpose project-related working groups are established and/or existing bodies, like NP boards of trustees, advisory boards, hunting communities, and authorities, are used.
- NPs also take efforts to promote the desired developments over large areas which do not only concern the area of the protected areas. For example, efforts to promote the return of lynx, bears, wolves, and wildcats, the maintenance of rare species like, for example, grouse, the establishment of game corridors, or for the development of an ecological network.
- Hoofed game management in national parks is based on the provisions of the national park laws, the national park ordinances and the management plans as well as on the applicable hunting and nature-conservation provisions.

4. Exemptions granted under special conditions

The national park administration bodies are aware of the fact that, with permanent and consistent implementation of the principles mentioned under point 3, it will not always be possible to fully achieve the objectives set out in point 2. For this reason the HGM in individual NPs provides for concrete, reasonable, temporary and localised exemptions from the above rules. Reasons for such exemptions include the shape and size of the protected area, the consequences of earlier human interventions, or special conditions in the area surrounding the NP.

These exemptions concern:

- Limited interventions in game reserves: If it is not possible to reduce the numbers of hoofed game sufficiently outside the game reserves or outside the NPs at the moment, targeted regulatory shootings may, on individual days of a year, be permitted also in game reserves.

- Specific forest conversion areas inside game reserves: HGM interventions can be made until the conversion of the forest has been completed; this applies by analogy also to other areas worth being protected. These areas must be designated separately; separate planning is required.
- Winter feeding: Red deer finds suitable summer habitats in the mountainous NPs, while the winter habitats outside the NPs are in most cases no longer accessible. The goal is to make the natural wintering areas accessible to red deer again. Until this is possible, red deer is fed during the winter time outside the game reserves for the wintering of red deer populations whose numbers is in line with the summer habitat of the red deer. The provision of feed is limited to roughage of excellent quality.
- Shootings by qualified hunters who are not employees of the NP (for example if the NP administration does not have the whole hunting rights required, or in the case of big driven hunts in the framework of a cooperation with neighbouring hunting grounds).