Wolf ecology, distribution and feeding habits in forests of Latvia

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• The wolf (*Canis lupus*) is a protected species with an allowance for restricted use in Latvia.
• Latvia is one of the few European countries where wolf harvest takes place.
• Since joining the European Union in 2004, restrictions on wolf hunting were introduced – a closed season from the 1st April till 15th July and a set hunting quota for each hunting season.
• Population status is deemed favourable.
• In order to estimate wolf numbers, age-at-harvest data and age-structured population reconstruction methods were used (Fry 1957, Skalski et al. 2005), which allow to back-calculate harvest data to year-specific and age-specific abundance levels and estimate annual abundance by totaling the age classes.

![Chart: Estimates of wolf numbers in Latvia](chart.png)
Distribution of wolves based on harvest data 2012-2016

Distribution of wolves based on harvest data in hunting season 2017/2018
Habitat

• Availability of food and safe hiding places for resting and making dens are the main requirements
• Today, forests are the main wolf habitat in Europe because carnivores feel safe there
• Often choose small islands on mineral soils in bogs as sites for safe dens due to their difficult access for humans
• Also occur in farmlands, provided that they are interspersed with forest patches and other suitable hideaways
Forests and Forestry

• Ungulate concentration and abundance
• Easier to travel – roads and ditches
• Thinning and clear cuts make it easier to locate and catch prey

• Hunting – keeps high numbers of game animals, provides supplemental feeding
• Ungulate harvest:
  – Roe deer – 17 000 – 22 000
  – Red deer – 13 000 – 15 000
  – Moose – 6000 – 7000
  – Wild boar – 25 000 – 34 000
• African swine fever – in Latvia since summer 2014.

• Lynx as a competitor
Food habits

Food habits of wolf (2008 - 2018)

Stomach content analyses of harvested wolves

Food habits of wolf until and after April 1st 2015

Food items
• Changes in the populations of the large carnivores depending on hunting pressure

• Developing a system for genetic monitoring of wildlife species

• Renewal of the grey wolf *Canis lupus* conservation plan
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