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Bears must stick to rules — or risk to be shot

A month after neighbouring Germany gunned down an errant bear, Bruno, the government has issued guidelines on how the animals can avoid a similar fate in Switzerland.

The "Bear Strategy", published on Tuesday, maintains that bears and humans can co-exist peacefully but enables regional authorities to shoot-to-kill if public safety is threatened.

The strategy document was widely criticised by mountain communities, hunters and farmers when it was put out for consultation earlier this year. They said the federal authorities needed to make it easier to shoot troublesome animals — and the government has now taken on board their concerns.

The new guidelines, which will be issued to cantons shortly, stress that "public safety is paramount".

Bears will now fall into three categories: "unobtrusive", "problematic" and "high-risk".

A bear can be killed once it becomes "high-risk": if it is no longer scared of humans despite efforts to scare it off and if it has become aggressive toward them.

A "problematic" bear is defined as one that is not afraid of humans, starts foraging for food in residential areas or kills large numbers of livestock.

"In the case of a problematic bear we would capture it, fit it with a tracking device and try to educate it to stay away from humans and livestock. To do this, we would shoot pellets, use dogs and loud noise to try to drive the animal away when it gets close to inhabited areas," Reinhard Schnidrig, head of the hunting and game division at the Federal Environment Office, told swissinfo.

"But if the bear doesn't learn, then it becomes a risk — and as a last resort we would have to shoot

it. If ever a bear became aggressive towards humans, it would immediately be shot.

Shoot to kill

Permission to kill a bear would be granted by the cantonal authorities following consultation with an intercantonal commission and the environment office.



JJ2 makes an appearance in Switzerland last year

The guidelines, which were drawn up by the environment office, also clarify how farmers will be compensated for the loss of livestock.

Up to 80 per cent of a claim will be met by the government, with the remainder picked by the canton concerned.

Damage to beehives or animal hutches, for example, will be wholly covered by the state.

The authorities acted after a brown bear was spotted several times in Switzerland in July last year. It was the first to be seen in the country in more than a century.

"JJ2" — Bruno's brother — stirred up a fair bit of controversy, killing one calf and more than 20 sheep, before disappearing. He came from an established population of brown bears in Italy's Trentino region around 70km from the Swiss border.

"No one knows if he is still alive or where he is," said Schnidrig, who added that JJ2 would have

been classed as "problematic" under the new guidelines.

Awareness programmes

The government is to launch regional awareness programmes to educate the public on how to live with bears. These will include warnings that on no account must the animals be fed regularly.

Conservation group WWF Switzerland, which welcomed the strategy document, stressed that the public had a major part to play in ensuring that humans and bears could co-exist.

"The bear is a wild and timid animal, but if it is fed it will lose its natural shyness and approach inhabited areas," said spokeswoman Joanna Schoenenberger.

Farmers, however, remain sceptical over whether bears have a future in Switzerland. "It will be difficult for bears, humans and other animals to co-exist," said Thomas Jäggi, spokesman for the Swiss Farmers' Association.

swissinfo, Adam Beaumont

Lache isch gsond



*De Jock säät zom
Bisch: «Du, i glob i bi
alergisch uf Leder.»
«Oms tuusigs
Gottswile werom?»
frooged de Bisch. Do
säät de Jock: «Wo n i
hüte Moge im Bett inne verwached
bi, ha n i d Schue no aakha, ond de
Chopf hets me nooch vesprengt.»*

*De Chlinseepli het sini Frau
agjoomered, e hei doch jetz e
ooverockts Chopfweh. D Frau het
en tröschted: «Jo göll, du guete,
ond denn no graad am tömmschte
Oot.»*