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Autor: [s.n.]
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Winter tourists urged to respect wildlife

The increasing popularity of such winter sports as free-ride snowboarding or snowshoe walking is threatening the survival of wild animals in mountain regions.

The federal authorities have joined forces with environmental and nature conservation groups, as well as hunters and sports organisations. The cooperation with tourist officials and mountain transport operators appears to be successful in major winter sports resorts. The campaign has been coordinated with neighbouring Austria, and there are also plans to extend it to other alpine countries.



Deer are particularly sensitive to the presence of humans in their winter habitat

The unpredictable behaviour of humans is the main difficulty for the wildlife population. Animals can get used to human presence off-piste but only if people stick to the same routes and zones. But they risk losing their crucial space for retreat when tourists crisscross the countryside as they please. The instinctive reaction of an animal is to flee when approached by a human. It requires a lot of physical energy to run away through high snow and freezing temperatures. Added to this is food scarcity and often there is not enough time to rest because of the stress.

Some animals, notably red deer, switch to a hibernation-like status to save energy. They lower their body temperature, but only if they are not disturbed. They do not recover sufficiently and fail to reproduce after a hard winter

or they starve to death or die as a result of exhaustion.

The Federal Environment Office and the Swiss Alpine Club have launched a campaign to draw attention to the needs of wildlife during the winter season.

It appeals to people to respect the following four rules:

- To keep out of specially marked zones for animals
- To keep to the footpaths in the forests so animals have a chance to get used to humans
- To stay clear of snow-free spots near the edges of forests
- To put dogs on a leash when walking through the wintry countryside.

However, there are considerable differences as to how the protective measures are implemented and how violations of the rules are treated in different regions of the country.

Alcohol poisoning rises among older drinkers

It's not only teenagers who are drinking themselves into trouble - more and more older people are being brought to hospital with alcohol poisoning.

Typically it's 30 to 40 year-old male alcoholics who exceed their limits even more than normal. These patients have often lost their jobs.

The number of 16 to 25 year-olds who turned up in the emergency ward increased from 29 in 2000 to 74 in 2007, but "repeat offenders" were mostly older than 25.

A diagnosis of alcohol poisoning was based not only on the level of alcohol in the blood, but also on factors such as inability to walk, aggressiveness or unconsciousness.

from swissinfo

Swiss Post helps out Christchindli

Swiss postal workers gave a helping hand to the Christ Child over the 2009 Christmas season, delighting thousands of youngsters.

Swiss Post said that its six-person team had answered 97 per cent of the 16,401 letters sent by children to the figures traditionally associated with bringing presents.



One of Christchindli's helpers (in Swiss Post yellow!) with the mailbag addressed to Christchindli

The only letters that didn't get a reply, and a little gift, were those with illegible or incomplete addresses that thwarted the team's best efforts to track the writers down.

More than half the letters came from the French-speaking part of Switzerland, followed by 3,258 from the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino.

German-speaking children were less keen, or more sceptical. Although German-speakers account for nearly two-thirds of the population, they wrote only 16 per cent of the letters - 2,619. There were just 13 from the Romansh-speaking area.

The team responded in any of the four national languages or in English, sending 245 responses to children abroad.

The Christmas answering service has existed for nearly 60 years. When it started in 1950/51 it received 450 letters, of which 250 came from abroad.

from swissinfo