

Appetite spells three wolves' doom in Switzerland

August 28 2009, by Agnes Pedrero



Wolves are seen here in Nantes, western France. Swiss authorities have issued a death warrant for 3 offending wolves originating from Italy and France that violated Swiss law by killing more sheep than they should.

It is unclear if the three wolves were too greedy or simply hungry, but what is certain is that by killing more sheep than they should, they have violated Swiss law.

Swiss authorities have issued a death warrant for the three offending [wolves](#) originating from Italy and France, and wardens have 60 days to hunt them down.

Over the last few weeks, herders raised the alarm that their sheep were being attacked.

Dozens have been reported to have fallen prey in western Switzerland's canton Valais, with some 15 sheep killed on the night of August 1 and 2 alone. Meanwhile, 27 sheep were killed in July in the central Swiss canton of Lucerne.

Unbeknownst to the predators, the rampage had exceeded those tolerated under the official quota.

Swiss law allows predators to kill only 35 animals in four months, while in a month, the quota is 25.

However, that limit falls to 15 a month for protected herds, as in the case of the wolves' [prey](#).

Animals violating this law can be shot.

Taking into account the recent damage, cantonal authorities in Valais and Lucerne in early August gave their nod to hunt down the three guilty wolves.

The first was killed on August 20.

"When the wolf was on the way back in the early morning, it was less suspicious. It was at this moment when the warden surprised it. He was alone, 150 metres from the wolf, when he shot it," said Jacques Blanc, deputy chief of Valais' [hunting](#) service.

The other two wolves may have to raise their guard, as some 20 wardens from the two cantons will be lying in wait through September.

Environment groups are however up in arms against the cantons' decision.

For conservation group WWF, the decision to hunt these wolves was made "too quickly." It has therefore put forward an appeal to the judicial authorities.

"In most cases, the sheep which were attacked had not been efficiently protected," said WWF's spokeswoman Pierrette Rey.

She added that if the wolves had such a good haul on the night of August 1, they were perhaps aided by fireworks set off amid the Swiss National Day celebrations that prompted the [sheep](#) to wander out of their pens.

But farmers want the animal eliminated from Swiss soil.

Wolves had disappeared from Swiss territories in the last century but after several appearances since 1995, they seem to have returned more permanently.

For the head of the association of herders in Valais Romand, Florian Volluz, wolves "have no place here."

He said he was "exasperated by a situation that has lasted 15 years," adding that protection measures proposed by the authorities, such as installation of enclosures, guards, and watch dogs, were "inefficient."

"These measures are like bandaging a wooden leg," said Volluz, who believes that the only solution is to root out the wolves.

His troubles may be far from over.

While the 12 wolves known to be in Switzerland have not formed into a pack, they may soon do so, said the Swiss Federal Office of the Environment's species management chief Thomas Briner.

"At the moment, the young males are looking for new territories and the first packs will form because there are two females," he said.

Once the first cubs emerge, the wolf could once again become a permanent resident of the Swiss alps.

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