

Expansion of golden jackal across Europe creates tricky legal issues

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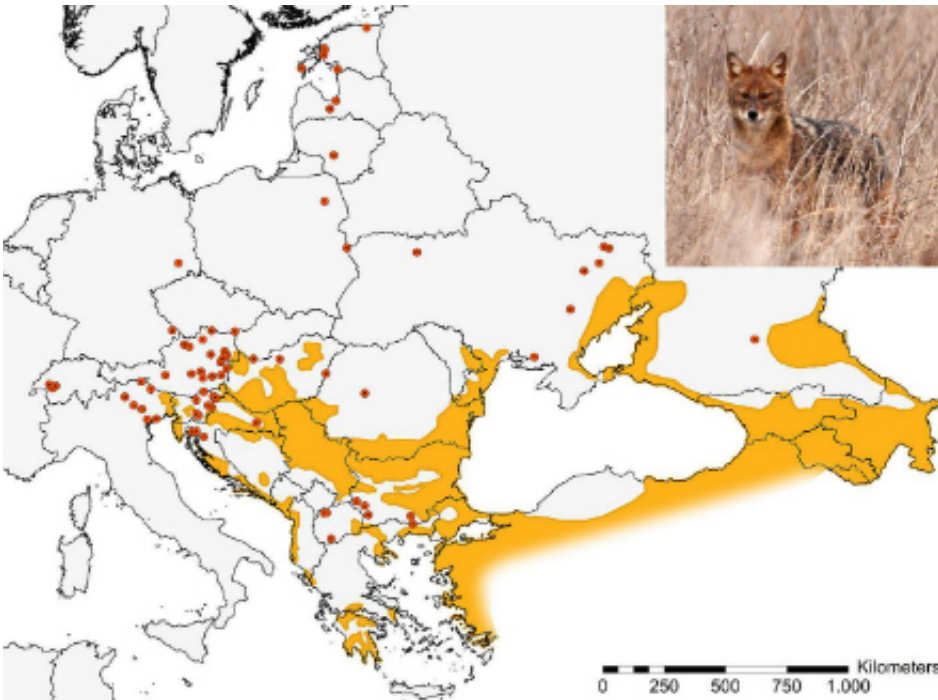
For a long time jackals have been known to most Europeans only through documentaries on African wildlife. But one species – the golden jackal (*canis aureus*) – is now advancing northward and westward across Europe from its traditional range along the Mediterranean and Black Sea coasts as far as Switzerland and Estonia. This has resulted in considerable confusion – should jackals be protected as a native species everywhere in Europe? Yes, says legal scholar Arie Trouwborst of Tilburg University.

Trouwborst studied the expansion of jackals with biologists of the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia) and the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (Trondheim). The results have recently been published in *Biodiversity and Conservation* (open access).

The golden jackal, also known as 'European coyote', has so far been spotted in thirty European countries including ones without historic records of the [species](#) (see distribution map below). The drivers of this expansion are not yet fully understood. Other large carnivores such as the wolf are also spreading, but they can be characterized as comebacks (recoveries).

The case of the golden jackal is different from the ongoing European range expansions of wolves and other large carnivores. The latter can be properly characterized as comebacks (recoveries), whereas the northern and western parts of the jackal's expansion concern countries without historic records of the species. In this connection, the question whether golden jackals appearing outside their known historic range are to be considered alien species – whether invasive or not – has been a source of confusion.

However, widely accepted definitions agreed under international legal instruments (e.g., Convention on Biological Diversity, Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats) make it quite clear that the term 'alien species' only encompasses creatures originating from introductions outside their regular range made by man. Examples include raccoons and muskrats on the European mainland. Since the golden jackals are expanding throughout Europe on their own feet, they should not be regarded as an alien species.



Distribution of the golden jackal in Europe (yellow = permanent, orange circles = individual observations). Source: Trouwborst, Krofel & Linnell 2015; Credit: Miha Krofel.

The study shows that current international legal obligations, under the Bern Convention and the EU Habitats Directive, limit the freedom of countries to decide how they wish to deal with golden jackals. For EU member states in particular, this entails that:

- Hunting of golden jackals is possible, but only if (1) hunting is compatible with the maintenance or achievement of a Favourable Conservation Status and (2) the species is systematically monitored;
- Legal obligations are similar for countries with historic presence of jackals, and for the countries to which jackals have naturally expanded in recent years.
- National policies preventing golden jackals from establishing and

aiming for the species' eradication are incompatible with legal obligations.

The case study of the jackal in Europe has broader implications, says Trouborst: "As more and more species can be expected to expand or shift their historic ranges under the influence of global environmental changes, for instance climate change, the studies' findings are relevant also beyond the golden jackal."

More information: "Legal implications of range expansions in a terrestrial carnivore: the case of the golden jackal (*Canis aureus*) in Europe." *Biodiversity and Conservation* [DOI: 10.1007/s10531-015-0948-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-015-0948-y)

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