

Hungary's anti-migrant fence disrupts wildlife habitats

October 14 2016, by Eldar Emric



In this photo taken on Sept. 17, 2016, provided by Romulic & Stojcic Studio, a deer stands in front of a fence near Knezevo, northeast Croatia, near the border with Hungary. Thousands of deer and other wild animals have had their natural habitat disrupted by kilometers of barbed wire fence erected last year on the border between Hungary and Croatia to stem the flow of refugees and migrants. (Photo by Mario Romulic/Romulic & Stojcic Studio via AP)

Hungary's razor-wire border fence aims to keep refugees from entering

the country—but it's also blocking the natural migratory patterns of thousands of deer and other wild animals.

Large herds of red deer used to roam freely across the Croatia-Hungary border, their numbers steadily expanding in this wildlife-rich corner of Europe. But environmental protection activists and hunters in Croatia now warn the numbers have begun declining since the border fence went up last year.

At first, deer would get tangled in the wire and killed, but animals soon began recognizing the danger.

But Croatian animal activists warn the long-term impact of the fence on the deer population in the protected natural area of Baranya—especially the smaller chunk located in Croatia—is severe and will go far beyond the agonizing animal deaths in the barbed wire.

Croatian photographer and environmentalist Mario Romulic has spent months documenting the plight of animals in Baranya.

"It is clear to everyone that (the fence) is no obstacle to the men it had been put up to stop. ... It creates problems only to animals, by preventing them from migrating in search of food and other things they need," Romulic said.

The deer habitat is on both sides of the border, but a major part of it lies in Hungary. Now that it is fragmented by the border fence, the deer trapped in Croatia cannot access grazing areas or mating partners in Hungary.



In this photo from Sept. 17, 2016, provided by Romulic & Stojcic Studio, a deer roars in front of a fence near Knezevo, northeast Croatia, near the border with Hungary. Thousands of deer and other wild animals have had their natural habitat disrupted by kilometers of barbed wire fence erected last year on the border between Hungary and Croatia to stem the flow of refugees and migrants. (Photo by Mario Romulic/Romulic & Stojcic Studio via AP)

Tibor Mikuska of the Croatian Society for Bird and Nature protection warns that this will become a major problem in the winter, when food sources for the deer become scarce.

"Because (they) ... will be prevented from going to the larger area where there is still some food left, they are likely to grow weak and die," Mikuska said.

The Hungarian government has rejected the concerns, saying that animals adapt well to man-made habitat changes. The statement also

noted that deer populations had been growing for decades in Hungary and across Europe, causing crop damage and road accidents.

"During the decades of the Iron Curtain, the scarce presence of people and limited human disturbance allowed wildlife to flourish in the border area," the Hungarian government said. It added that if the "illegal presence" of humans could be controlled near the new border fence, accidents suffered by big game would also cease.

The government said the border change was a "temporary phenomenon" that would not affect wildlife genetics, but hunters in Croatia say the barrier has already disrupted mating.



In this photo from Sept. 17, 2016, provided by Romulic & Stojcic Studio, a deer roars, near Knezevo, northeast Croatia, close to the border with Hungary. Thousands of deer and other wild animals have had their natural habitat disrupted by kilometers of barbed wire fence erected last year on the border between Hungary and Croatia to stem the flow of refugees and migrants. (Photo

by Mario Romulic/Romulic & Stojcic Studio via AP)

Female deer typically travel together in herds while bucks stay with a herd only during the breeding season. But this year the bucks' access to females was blocked, said Pavo Damjanov of the Belje-Dubosevica hunters club in Croatia.

"The mating season this year was not like the last. We had an insufficient number of bucks," Damjanov said.

Croatian nature-lovers insist the negative trends for wildlife can be reversed only if the fence is removed.

"I hope the large herds of deer will again be allowed to roam freely across the borders that should not exist at all if we are really a part of one, shared Europe," Romulic said.



In this photo from Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016, a doe looks back in the forest near Knezevo, northeast Croatia, near the border with Hungary. Thousands of deer and other wild animals have become the unintended victims of Hungary's attempts to prevent migrants crossing the border from Croatia—their natural habitat is disrupted by kilometers of barbed wire fence. (AP Photo/Darko Bandic)



In this photo from Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016, Croatian photographer and environmentalist Mario Romulic who has spent months documenting the plight of animals in Baranya and rising alarms on social networks, sits next to the border fence near Knezevo, northeast Croatia, on the border with Hungary. Thousands of deer and other wild animals have become the unintended victims of Hungary's attempts to prevent migrants crossing the border from Croatia—their natural habitat is disrupted by kilometers of barbed wire fence. (AP Photo/Darko Bandic)



In this photo from Monday, Oct. 10, 2016, deer run through agricultural fields near Dubosevica, northeast Croatia, near the border with Hungary. Thousands of deer and other wild animals have had their natural habitat disrupted by kilometers of barbed wire fence erected last year on the border between Hungary and Croatia to stem the flow of refugees and migrants. (AP Photo/Darko Bandic)



In this photo from Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016, deer stand next to the border fence near Knezevo, northeast Croatia, on the border with Hungary. Thousands of deer and other wild animals have become the unintended victims of Hungary's attempts to prevent migrants crossing the border from Croatia—their natural habitat is disrupted by kilometers of barbed wire fence. (AP Photo/Darko Bandic)

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