

France to step up wolf culls as population surges

June 7 2019, by Amélie Bottollier-Depois



Gray wolves in the semi-wild animal park at Les Angles, in the Pyrenees mountains of southern France.

Wolf populations in the wild jumped in France last year, a faster-than-expected increase that will prompt the government to increase hunting

quotas and take other measures to protect livestock herds, officials said Friday.

The ONCFS hunting and wildlife agency said on-the-ground tracking and [mathematical modelling](#) had determined 479 to 578 adult wolves on French territory during this year's winter count, or an average of 530.

It was a 23 percent jump from the average of 430 adults counted the previous winter.

Wolves were hunted to [extinction](#) in France by the 1930s, but gradually started reappearing in the 1990s as populations spread across the Alps from Italy.

They are now found mainly in the Alps and other mountainous regions of the southeast, where most of the recent pack increases were found, as well as in pockets of central France.

But wolves have also been detected recently in the Pyrenees mountains that separate France and Spain.

The population growth has infuriated French farmers who say the predators are decimating their flocks, despite a series of measures financed by the state to limit the damage and compensation owners for losses.

Last year 3,674 [wolf](#) attacks led to the deaths of some 12,500 animals, mainly sheep.

No longer at risk of extinction

Under a "Wolf Plan" adopted in 2018, the "viability threshold" of 500 animals, the level at which the population is likely to avoid becoming at

risk of extinction over a 100-year period, wasn't expected to be reached until 2023.

Projections of rapid growth had already prompted President Emmanuel Macron to announce in March that 17 to 19 percent of the [population](#) would be culled each year, up from 10 to 12 percent.

"We now consider that the wolf is no longer a species at risk of extinction, which is a good thing in terms of biodiversity," Agriculture Minister Didier Guillaume said Wednesday.

"However in terms of the high levels of preying... we have to fully and strongly support our farmers. Their well-being is our priority," he said.

The government's administrator for the Rhone department of southeast France said Friday it was lifting the 2019 cull limit to 53 animals—38 have already been killed so far this year.

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