

Bears may be back in the Swiss Alps

27 July 2005

Brown bears may have returned to Switzerland, more than 100 years after disappearing from the Swiss Alps.

Reports indicate a bear was spotted high in the Alps, near eastern Switzerland's border with Italy, where there is an established bear population, the BBC reported Wednesday.

Officials say they are looking for evidence, such as bear droppings, hair or tracks to confirm the sighting.

The presence of brown bears in Switzerland is controversial since conservationists would welcome them but some shepherds fear for their flock's safety.

The Swiss government is reportedly eager to see the return of the bears, which the BBC said were hunted to extinction along with wolves and lynxes in the Alps during the 19th century.

Switzerland's capital, Bern, is named after a bear, although the BBC notes its medieval founder was inspired by the first animal he killed during a day of hunting.

The last bear in Switzerland was believed killed in 1904.

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