

Bear population in Latvia not threatened

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Translated by machine translator



Brūnais lācis. Foto: Jānis Zilvers

Brown bears (*Ursus arctos*) are protected animals throughout the European Union, including Latvia. They once disappeared from Latvia, but in recent years, as a result of targeted and scientifically based decisions and actions, including a hunting ban, the bear population is steadily recovering, reaching the number of 60-70 individuals. The recently reported case of a bear waking up from hibernation, causing it to leave its nest with cubs, is sad, but not critical from the point of view of the species' population.

After the information was spread on social media, the Nature Protection Board has started an administrative violation process to evaluate the intentional disturbance of a protected species. Currently, all the necessary explanations are expected from those involved in the situation, and the case is still in the process of consideration.

Forest maintenance work in the vicinity of the den was stopped immediately after the discovery of the den. The workers took prompt action to prevent the recurrence of similar situations and additional disturbances for the specific bear family. When surveying the outer boundary of the block, no traces of a wandering bear were found, raising the hope that the mother bear is staying near the den or even has already returned to it.

Bears are the most unsociable predators. They live alone, communicating with each other, only leaving behind evidence of marking the territory. The exception is the time of mating and raising young. The individual territory of an adult male bear varies between 500-1300 km², in some cases reaching even 4000 km². Female territories are smaller - from 130-780 km². In addition, bears are nomads - they change both their living and sleeping places. Evaluating the living space, active movement and solitary life necessary for bears, it is not possible to create a separate specially protected natural area with constant borders for the protection of this species in Latvia. The existing protected areas with large marshes and forest massifs, such as the Northern

Marshes, the Teiču Nature Reserve, already partially provide the necessary living space for bears. Here the human presence is limited, but the animal cannot be "confined" in a certain space. In addition, wild animals do not respect national borders - the range of life of the bears listed in Latvia can be in both Estonia and Russia.

Based on the experience of Estonian scientists and nature protection institutions, rescuing cubs abandoned by mother bears is not effective, because bears fed by humans cannot later become full-fledged wild animals. Due to their changed behavior, they always return to humans in search of food, threatening people and their property. This was also confirmed by Latvia's experience in recent years with two teenage bears, which showed atypical behavior for the species.

Keeping bears in captivity, on the other hand, is prohibitively expensive. Carrying out detailed calculations, the construction of the necessary aviary for the bear, including all safety and welfare requirements, would cost about 0.5 million. EUR, in addition, it would also require maintenance of the bear - feeding, veterinary care, general animal work, etc. – costs over 30 years. Since the bear population is growing steadily, bears are not bred in captivity in Estonia either.

Analyzing historical data and Latvian folklore, it can be seen that the bear has been a part of our nature since time immemorial. He felt awe and respect for the bear. It has not been attributed the negative qualities of the wolf and the fox, showing that historically society has been able to live with the presence of this animal. Taking into account the return of bears to Latvian forests, modern society will also have to learn to live with it, taking the experience from Estonia, where the bear population is stable and ten times larger than the population of Latvian bears, reaching up to 1000 individuals.

☞ "The claims made by animal protection societies that bear dens should have been inspected and guarded to prevent such a situation are false and confusing to the public. There are both humans and animals in nature, and the encounter between these two species is inevitable. Bears build their dens in a different place from year to year, it is not possible to identify them in advance and define a protection zone - a bear den can be on public land, on private property, in a specially protected natural area, or outside it," explains Gita, director of the Nature Protection Department of the administration. Strode.

Please note that a puffin disturbed from hibernation can become aggressive while protecting its nest and babies, therefore, according to the recommendations of leading experts, neither foresters, nor researchers, nor administrative employees or other interested parties are allowed to go to the specific forest area until May.

In everyday life, the bear is not aggressive, it avoids meeting with people. To prevent the possibility of a bear visiting your homestead, you need to carefully consider composting sites and waste management. Garbage should be kept in closed containers, without creating a situation where people themselves provoke wild animals to come to the farms. Food leftovers left in the forest or readily available fruits and vegetables regularly piled up in farms near the forest can cause not only the bear, but also other wild animals to perceive the human farm as a source of food.

To avoid an encounter with a bear:

- stay on forest paths and roads while walking;
- do not disturb other nature lovers and forest dwellers with their behavior, but occasionally climb a branch, speak or sing;
- carefully observe the nature around him, so that the presence of an animal can be noticed in time;
- if you cross an impenetrable place in the forest, make your presence felt more strongly;

If you have spotted a bear:

- do not approach the bear, try to reach it or touch the animal or its cubs;
- leave the meeting place as quickly as possible, but without running;
- don't turn your back on the bear - retreat backwards;
- behave quietly until the animal goes on its way.

<https://www.daba.gov.lv/en/article/bear-population-latvia-not-threatened>