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Abstract: Alps are the world's most intensively used mountain region. Today, 250'000 sheep are aestivated mainly unguarded in the Swiss Alps. They face about 70 lynx, which are however not evenly distributed. Depredation on livestock occurs in fluctuations, depending on lynx and roe deer abundance: Years with few lynx kills are followed by periods of increased numbers of kills. When many predators face few wild prey, lynx tend to kill more sheep. However, even in peak years, the losses of sheep due to lynx predation never exceeded 0.2-0.4% of the local stock.

## **Eurasian lynx depredation on livestock in Switzerland – a lasting controversy 30 years after the reintroduction**

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Almost a century after extinction, lynx was reintroduced in Switzerland 30 years ago. The ecological conditions for the lynx had considerably improved – there is more wild prey available than ever before. However, the Alps are the world's most intensively used mountain region. Today, 250'000 sheep are aestivated mainly unguarded in the Swiss Alps. They face about 70 lynx, which are however not evenly distributed. Depredation on livestock gives rise to a controversy, and may provoke retaliation killings which are a serious conservation problem.

Depredation on livestock occurs in fluctuations, depending on lynx and roe deer abundance: Years with few lynx kills are followed by periods of increased numbers of kills. When many predators face few wild prey, lynx tend to kill more sheep. However, even in peak years, the losses of sheep due to lynx predation never exceeded 0.2-0.4% of the local stock. Nevertheless, some flocks have been affected regularly by lynx attacks and suffered considerable losses. These flocks typically occupy scrubby parks or pastures, in the middle of the woodland and far from human settlements. The reappearance of attacks on these sites within a few years clearly indicate a *site effect*. Removing stock-raiding lynx from such pastures did not solve the problem – the succeeding lynx continued to kill livestock on the same pastures. Under such conditions, only the protection of the flocks can ameliorate the situation – e.g. with shepherds or guarding animals.

The problem is rather emotional than economical. To promote the coexistence of people and lynx, we need a pragmatic approach, considering also the socio-cultural aspects of the controversy. Conservation of the lynx population can only be achieved when the complaints of local people are considered. Therefore, a management plan implemented by the Swiss government in 2000, aims for a compromise: Lynx remain legally protected, but individuals specialising in livestock killing can be shot. Compensation is paid for depredation cases. In hot spots, where lynx attacks reappear again and again, the implementation of prevention measures can be ordered. Furthermore, local “over”abundance of lynx can be reduced by translocating lynx to not yet occupied areas.