Abstract: The author of this article used to be the president of the hunting associations federation FACH in Switzerland during the time of publishing. Important changes affecting the natural environment have taken place in the second half of the 20th century, which are forcing hunters to adapt to a new social context. The author complains about the fact that the reintroduction of lynx has not been concerted by the cantonal hunting authorities and that there has been no overall plan. Concerning the effect on wildlife, the author points out that biologists overlook two facts when studying the effect of lynx on game population: first the lynx kills at random (fawns are left parentless and fetuses killed in the womb) and second the erratic behavior of the lynx has a disruptive effect on roe-deer and chamois herds, obliging females to give birth in unsuitable places. The FACH asks the Federal Hunting Service to make a study of the behavior, distribution and numbers of the ungulates on which the lynx preys. They are also calling for a management plan for the lynx.
THE LYNX AND HUNTING

Jean-Pierre BORGOI
President, Fédération des associations de chasseurs FACH
39, rue du Brise-Vent, 2800 DLEMBONT, Switzerland

1. Introduction

It is hard for a hunter to tackle and discuss a burning issue like this one. Because I know that this is one of the media's favourite topics and because I am unwilling either to fuel a controversy which does wildlife little good or to give way to a fake anthropomorphism, I feel that we must set both the lynx and the hunter in the context of hunting at the end of the 20th century.

I think this necessary because man has been a hunter for millions of years and because hunting is still a part of his genetic heritage, however limited or infrequent his normal contacts with nature may be.

It is also my feeling that nature must be safeguarded and one aspect of our ancestral culture preserved. Hunting must continue to play the economic and social role that it has always played.

2. Hunting from its origins to the 19th century

Over the centuries hunting has been closely linked with civilisation, and more especially agriculture. It was essential to defending villages against wolves, crops against the larger game, and flocks against the lynx and bear. Playing such a vital role, its organisation was determined by the thinking of the rulers and the liberties accorded the ruled. It was closely regulated when it was the aristocracy's prerogative, and, completely unregulated whenever ordinary people were able to practise it. At all times, however, hunting has been a random thing, with "culling" as its guiding principle.

Originally, the lynx was well integrated in its milieu relying, among our other indigenous wild animals, on food sources which other species contested. In the second half of the 19th century it died out in our country, its disappearance wrongly blamed solely on hunters supposedly anxious to eliminate a rival! In fact, although the causes are many and varied, they all point to one central factor: the lynx's favourite and essential prey (roe-deer and chamois) had become scarce, depriving newborn and young animals of the means of survival.

3. Hunting today

Important changes affecting the natural environment have taken place in the second half of the 20th century:

- A rift has developed between farming and hunting. Hunting, once the farmer's "natural" ally in regard to game, now has to protect game against new farming methods and the notion that only the useful has a right to exist.
- Rapid urbanisation, bringing countless existential problems in its wake, has generated a host of ideas concerning ecology, the search for happiness and the rejection of death, to mention only the main ones.

- Although the balance of nature is very precarious, hunting, an essential mainstay of that balance, is frequently contested.

All of these are new factors which are forcing hunters to adapt themselves to a new social context. They also underline the thinking of those who have had the idea of reintroducing a predator, lynx, to compete with hunters.

4. The reintroduction of the lynx

Before looking at the ways in which the introduction of a new predator has affected our wildlife, we may usefully review the fluctuating fortunes of this operation.

In 1967 the Federal Council gave cantons wishing to do so permission to introduce the lynx on their territory: this made it possible for hunters in the Canton of Obwald to release deer, while the Forestry Office reintroduced the lynx, the former operation being dependent on the latter!

This was done in 1970 on the basis of the following arguments:

- the lynx is "good for the forest" dispersing the larger herbivorous fauna and reducing damage to young trees;
- it helps to improve the quality of game.

The lynx was therefore introduced as preying on deer although its normal prey is roe-deer and chamois, numbers of which were estimated in 1972 to be low (1000 and 1500)!

In the 1970s, lynx were also released in the Cantons of Vaud and Neuchâtel, without the Federal Hunting Service being given the details. In the Canton of Neuchâtel, the authorities waited for over a year before admitting the fact. Lynx were also reintroduced secretly in the Cantons of Orions and Valais. In 1988, another lynx was "freed" near Lausanne, from a car registered in the Canton of Aargau.

Clearly, reintroduction of the lynx has not been concerted by the cantonal hunting authorities, and there has been no overall plan.

Following the release of all these animals - and also thanks to its vitality and the existence of favourable conditions in the Alps and Jura, the lynx has colonised the whole of Switzerland in under ten years!

5. Effects on wild life

In our fragile natural environment, the reintroduction of a new predator with no immediate rivals is a further destabilising factor at a time when efforts are being made to save certain species, such as the capercaillie and the hazel grouse from extinction.
More seriously, the arguments used 20 years ago are no longer consistent with what we know today about the impact of the lynx on roe-deer and chamois populations.

Biologists generally agree that the lynx accounts for 50 to 60 head of game every year. On the basis of these figures and an estimated lynx population of between 50 and 100, many calculations have been made in an effort to show that this toll is no higher than that for animals killed on the road, and can easily be accepted by hunters.

This argument overlooks two facts:

- The lynx kills at random: fawns are left parentless and fœtuses killed in the womb;
- Its erratic behaviour has a disruptive effect on roe-deer and chamois herds, obliging females to give birth in unsuitable places, with a consequent rise in kid and fawn mortality.

6. The position of Swiss hunters

For some decades now, hunters have thought in terms of "game management", rather than "culling", general acceptance of this concept being due to the total commitment of those responsible for hunting. These authorities are convinced that the lynx is no substitute for the hunter who has long since ceased killing game at times crucial for the animals. Unlike the lynx, the hunter respects the mating and breeding seasons. He is also unaffected by epizootic diseases, of which the lynx is a potential victim.

Adding to all this what we have seen concerning the mortality of newborn and young animals, we can safely say that the lynx has not - yet? - found its place in the balance of Swiss wildlife.

7. What Swiss hunters propose

- Since studies dealing exclusively with the lynx fail to provide an overall picture of its reintroduction in Switzerland, we would ask the Federal Hunting Service to make a study of the behaviour, distribution and numbers of the ungulates on which the lynx preys.
- Since hunters have helped, by their cooperation and understanding, to increase the population of larger game animals, and since they also help to protect and ensure the survival of small game, they are calling for a management plan for the lynx.

8. Conclusion

Through these proposals we affirm our wish:

- to continue playing a full and active part in the work of protecting nature;
- to manage a game "capital" and draw "interest" on it.