

Newsletter  
February 2025

# MAMMAL

## CONSERVATION EUROPE

### Protecting Europe's Mammals: Challenges and Progress

Dear Readers,

Welcome to second edition of the Mammal Conservation Europe newsletter. This month, we cover crucial developments in large carnivore protection, habitat restoration, and key policy updates affecting Europe's mammals.

Mammal  
Conservation Europe  
is launching a funding  
and awareness  
campaign to protect  
this critically  
endangered species.

DONATE

to save

ONE

endemic

European mammal  
species

<https://www.geef.nl/nl/actie/30141/donateurs?ref=geef-sharebutton>

### Croatia's Rarest Mammal Rediscovered

Blind mole-rats (Spalacidae) are unique, fully blind rodents that live underground and are solitary except for breeding. Thought extinct in Croatia since 1984, their presence was confirmed in 2023 when one was caught stealing vegetables from local gardens.

*The Vojvodina Blind mole-rat captured at the newly discovered site. Photo: Dušan Jelić.*



A recent [study](#) identified Croatia's mole-rats as the **Vojvodina blind mole-rat (Nannospalax montanosyrmiensis)** - a rare species previously known only from isolated populations in Hungary. With just 20 individuals, the Croatian colony faces severe threats from habitat loss and inbreeding.

Conservation efforts, led by BIOTA Ltd., Mossy Earth, and the Vukovar-Srijem Nature Protection Authority, aim to restore habitat, reconnect fragmented areas, and explore translocation if needed.



*A possible relocation site near Bapska, Croatia. Photo: Dušan Jelić*

We are pleased to  
invite you to the

## Second annual meeting of Mammal Conservation Europe

**Save the date:**

**Mon, 3 March 2025**

12:00 – 14:00 CET

Link to the meeting:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/mammal-conservation-europes-second-general-meeting-registration-1232756972289?aff=oddtcreator>



### Wolf Protections Downgraded: What's Next?

The recent decision by the Bern Convention to downgrade wolf protections has sparked debate among conservationists and policymakers. Despite the species' remarkable recovery, concerns persist about increased human-wildlife conflict. Conservation organizations stress that any management measures must be scientifically grounded to ensure long-term population stability. Meanwhile, legal challenges and ongoing monitoring efforts continue across Europe. **Read more below**

*Canis lupus* Photo: Rollin Verlinde/Vilda

### Lynx Reintroduction: A Success Story?

Several countries are making strides in Eurasian lynx reintroduction efforts. In France, newly released lynx are adapting well, while Spain's Iberian lynx population, once critically endangered, has surpassed 2,000 individuals. Conservationists credit habitat restoration and anti-poaching measures for this success, but genetic diversity remains a key concern for future stability. **Read more here:**

<https://iucn.org/news/202407/recovery-iberian-lynx-conservation-success-spain>



*Lynx Lynx.* Photo: Jillis Roos

### European Bison on the Rise



*Bison bonasus.* Photo: Lars Soerink/Vilda

Once on the brink of extinction, the European bison continues to make a comeback. Recent reports show populations expanding in Poland, Romania, and Germany. However, human-wildlife conflict and habitat fragmentation remain challenges. Conservation groups are calling for better land-use planning to facilitate coexistence. **Read more here:**

<https://rewilding-rhodopes.com/rewilding/>

### New EU Funding for Habitat Restoration

The European Commission has announced new funding initiatives to support habitat restoration projects across the continent. The focus will be on improving connectivity between protected areas, ensuring safe corridors for migratory species, and mitigating the impact of climate change on fragile ecosystems.

Read more here: [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/news/nature-restoration-law-enters-force-2024-08-15\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/news/nature-restoration-law-enters-force-2024-08-15_en)

The European native mammals share similar threats: habitat destruction, pollution, conflicts with humans and/or invasive species.

Together, we can provide better evidence and advocacy, and ensure their sustainable future.



## Tracking Bats Across Europe

By Fiona Mathews

Static radiotracking masts are being installed across Europe to monitor bat migrations, revealing extraordinary long-distance journeys. Studies since the 1960s have shown common noctules (*Nyctalus noctula*) migrating over 1,500km, while a Nathusius' pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus nathusii*) holds the record at 2,486km from Russia to the French Alps.

*Pipistrellus nathusii*. Photo: [Rollin Verlinde/Vilda](#)



Migration patterns vary by region and sex, with females often traveling further. Traditional banding has provided valuable insights but relies on human reporting, while GPS tracking requires tag retrieval. A breakthrough has recently come from the Max Planck Institute, using Internet of Things (IoT) technology to wirelessly transmit data when bats pass base stations, offering new insights into migration routes for some of Europe's larger bats.

For smaller species that are only able to carry very tiny tags, The Motus radiotracking network, originally for birds and managed by Birds Canada, is expanding across Europe. Countries like Germany and the Netherlands have dense receiver networks, whilst others are just beginning to install receivers. Recent tagging of 200 Nathusius' pipistrelles has shown movements along the North Sea coast and from the UK to continental Europe: a remarkable achievement for bats that weigh only around 8g.

Wind turbines pose a significant collision risk to bats, particularly with the rapid development of wind farms in the North Sea, Baltic, and English Channel. The research aims to map key migration routes to inform conservation efforts. Follow bat movements on the Motus Network at [www.motus.org](http://www.motus.org).



*Pipistrellus nathusii* with radio transmitter.  
Photo: Fiona Mathews

More on:

### Wolf Protections Downgraded

The wolf, long emblematic of human-wildlife conflict, has made a remarkable comeback in Europe, expanding its range by 25% in a decade. Now present in all mainland states, its population exceeds 23,000, compared with 20,000 brown bears and 9,000 Eurasian lynx. Germany alone has grown from having a just a single pack to 209 in 25 years. Unlike the U.S., Europe lacks vast wilderness, making human-carnivore coexistence essential — but also increasing conflict risks.

Since 1979, the Bern Convention has strictly protected large carnivores under Annex II, with exemptions for economic or public interest concerns. The 1992 EU Habitats Directive reinforced these protections. Yet, recent government-backed culling in Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Austria — often breaching these rules — has raised conservation concerns. In response, the Bern Convention and the EU Court of Justice have launched investigations.

Despite no clear scientific justification, the Bern Convention has now accepted the EU's proposal to downgrade wolf protection to Annex III, allowing more culling. A

similar shift is expected in the EU Habitats Directive. This unprecedented downlisting could set a trend for other species. While conservation treaties should evolve with new data, such decisions must be evidence-based. The IUCN's Large Carnivore Initiative disputes claims that rising wolf populations have led to increased livestock attacks. Furthermore, liberalized hunting risks destabilizing packs, pushing young wolves into farming areas and worsening conflicts.

Any policy changes must be guided by scientific and socio-economic monitoring to ensure Favourable Conservation Status remains intact. Culling should not undermine local, national, or international population viability. Controversy surrounds European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's personal involvement in advocating this change after a wolf killed her pony, prompting an Ombudsman inquiry into procedural transparency. Moving forward, decision-makers, scientists, NGOs, and communities must collaborate to ensure conservation policies are driven by science, not by politics.



Wolf / *Canis lupus* Photo: [Rollin Verlinde / Vilda](#)

## Upcoming Events

**Stay engaged with us as we work toward a future where Europe's mammals thrive!**

**[Wolves Across Borders](#)**: Wolf ecology and management - 2-5 June 2025

<https://www.wolvesacrossborders.com>

The first edition of Wolves Across Borders was held in Stockholm, Sweden in 2023. Over 300 researchers, policymakers, managers, students and stakeholders joined. Now, the Wolves Across Borders conference is coming to the Netherlands in June 2025!

**[IX European Congress on Mammalogy](#)** 31 March - 4 April, 2025, Patras, Greece

<https://ecm9.com>

EMC9 will include a workshop looking at forest management and mammal conservation. It will bring together people working on bats, dormice, squirrels and mustelids and address topics such as:

- Managing forest fire and tree disease risks: can we make more wildlife-friendly strategies?
- Where are the conflicts and synergies between the habitat needs for different species – can we talk with a unified voice?
- Tree veteranisation and nest boxes– do they enhance the conservation value of woodland, or are they a distraction?

**[36th annual European Cetacean Society Conference](#)** 12 - 16 May, Ponta Delgada (São Miguel Island, Azores, Portugal)

The motto of the conference: "**[Navigating Waters of Change](#)**" aims to reflect the multifaceted nature of current marine mammal research, exploring and showcasing its challenges and opportunities, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation.

Mammal  
Conservation  
Europe  
  
is a network of  
organisations  
working to the  
increase our  
knowledge and  
improve the  
conservation of the  
European mammals

## Mammal Conservation Europe

Mammal Conservation Europe has the bold goal of uniting efforts, knowledge and resources to achieve thriving native mammal populations across the continent. We are keen to facilitate the sharing of knowledge, and the transfer of skills between mammal conservation organisations across Europe.

Although mammals are very diverse, many share similar threats, such as habitat destruction, pollution, and conflicts with humans and/or invasive species. By acting together, we will provide robust evidence, be in a better position to apply for substantive funding, and act as effective advocates for a sustainable future for Europe's mammals.

MCE includes so far 17 organisations from UK, The Netherlands, Italy, Albania, Spain, Germany, Hungary, Greece, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, Romania, and Portugal, together with three organisations that work across national borders. Visit the [MCE website](#) for more information

### How You Can Help

- Support conservation organizations through donations or volunteering.
- Advocate for science-based policies in wildlife management.
- Promote coexistence strategies in your community to reduce human-wildlife conflicts.

**In addition, individuals and organisations can support our work by [making a donation](#).** You can also contribute directly to our [current campaign for Blind mole-rats](#).

### Upcoming!!! 3rd March 2025



We are pleased to invite you to the  
**second annual online meeting of Mammal Conservation Europe.**

**Monday, 3rd of March 2025, 12:00 – 14:00 CET**

The first hour will feature talks from our guest speakers, and this will be followed by a closed session for MCE members for our General Meeting.

#### Guest speakers:

**Dušan Jelić and Gabor Csorba.** *Find out about the incredible Blind-mole rats and what we can do to save some of Europe's most imperiled mammals.*

**Abi Gazzard and Nida Al-Fulaij.** *Hedgehogs in decline? The new European Red List, and updates on hedgehog monitoring and conservation in the UK.*

Reserve your place for the meeting here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/mammal-conservation-europes-second-general-meeting-registration-1232756972289?aff=oddtcreator>