

6. Hunt management system and its importance in obtaining extremely ecological food

The topic of today's lecture is hunting management systems and their importance in obtaining extremely organic food.

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In today's lecture, information will be given in the introduction about the development of hunting, hunting management in Slovakia in the conditions of state and military forests, where the right to hunt is part of the profession of foresters employed in the forests under their management, as well as the conditions of hunting management at the level of hunting associations, which represent the voluntary organized activities of associations, clubs and societies associated in the Slovak Hunting Chamber with long-lasting tradition. The role and expertise of the hunting manager and his/her position in relation to the existing legislation will be defined, and information will be given on the most important game species in Slovakia.

Game hunting is as old as mankind itself. It was part of the livelihood of emerging prehistoric man as well as later social formations.

It was a driving force in the development of human activities, a school of courage and bravery.

Very soon hunting became the prerogative of kings, an expression of power and wealth, and even at the beginning of the 20th century it was almost exclusively the preserve of certain privileged noble families.

As the social and class composition of society changed, so did the view of wildlife and hunting, and the important function of management in protecting the game and its environment was particularly emphasised.

At the beginning, it is necessary to define hunting and the position of hunting in society.

Hunting is a set of activities aimed at preserving, improving, protecting, and making optimal use of the game gene pool as a natural asset of the EU. It is part of the creation, protection, and use of the environment and, while respecting its guiding principles, should not interfere with the rational management of forest and agricultural land.

In addition to providing funding for nature conservation, hunters play an important role in assisting government bodies and biologists involved in managing the population sizes of certain animal species.

Regulated hunting is one of the most effective tools that state conservation authorities can use to address the overpopulation of a species.

In Slovakia, hunting management can be categorised into two parts.

On the one hand, there are professional hunters in the form of foresters, who are in charge of the Slovak Forests or the Military Forests of the Slovak Republic, who carry out hunting as a professional activity, very often with a commercial result.

On the other hand, a large part of the hunting public exists in the form of voluntary hunters who are associated with a hunting chamber and are organised in various associations, clubs, or societies.

Every hunting ground must have an appointed hunting manager. Later we will learn about his roles, competencies, and duties in relation to hunting management and the government authorities.

The hunting manager usually models population growth and based on field research and collected data, sets management rules, which may include season length or hunting quotas. Once these regulations are in place, hunting managers monitor the population, conducting ongoing surveys and adjusting future management decisions based on the data.

The user of the hunting area is obliged to propose to the regional hunting authority a hunting manager to ensure professional hunting management in the hunting area.

It does not matter whether it is a hunting ground managed by the Slovak Forests or the Military Forest of SR as professional hunters, every hunting ground must have an appointed professional hunting manager, and all associations and clubs that use a hunting ground must have an appointed hunting manager as well.

Let's take a look at the tasks of a hunting manager.

Hunting manager:

- is legally competent
- has a valid hunting licence and has held a hunting licence for at least five consecutive years
- has a valid Group D firearms licence
- has passed the hunting manager's examination or a higher vocational hunting examination or is a graduate of a secondary forestry school or a graduate of a university at which hunting is a compulsory subject and has passed an examination in that subject
- has not committed a hunting offence in the last five years
- is not a hunting manager in another hunting ground/club/society

As I have said before, every hunting ground whether private or public, whether professional, commercial or otherwise, must have an appointed hunting manager.

There are a number of ways of obtaining an examination or authorisation to act as a professional hunting manager under (d).

It is possible to apply to the district authority, the Department of Land and Forestry for an examination, whereby an examination board is set up in cooperation with the hunting chamber and, after completing the prescribed amount of theoretical training, the examination is passed, this examination being of the level of a higher professional examination sufficient for the performance of the function of a professional hunting manager.

The other alternative is to graduate from a secondary forestry school where hunting is a compulsory subject or from a university where hunting is taught.

The Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra is one of the universities in Slovakia where hunting is a compulsory subject in the study programmes Special Breeding (Bc.) and Special Breeding Branches (MSc.).

After completing the subject in the prescribed range of theoretical and practical parts, after completing the theoretical training and practical shooting, students are issued diplomas, which are worth higher professional examination and thus they can perform as professional hunting managers.

Let's take a closer look at the roles of a hunting manager:

- He is the key person in the field of hunting.
- As we have already said, each hunting ground has an appointed professional hunting manager, and he can not carry out this activity in more than one ground.
- He has extensive competencies, but even more responsibilities and work.
- He is responsible for the organisation:
 - annual/seasonal animal census - spring and autumn in our conditions
 - drawing up a draft breeding and hunting plan
 - the allocation of individual hunting licences in the particular hunting area, entitling them to hunt ensuring that shooting is carried out
 - checking that members of the hunting association are disciplined when hunting and that they comply not only with the law but also with ethical principles
 - the procurement of seeds and seedlings and the cultivation of fields, the preparation of fodder in general for the emergency period
 - mowing meadows, preparing roughage, grain and other feed (roots) for periods of lack of natural feed sources
 - keeping records of hunted game, venison, services for hunting guests and their guiding
 - plans and organises the construction of hunting facilities (feeders, feeding troughs, salt pans and hunting equipment, various seats and sitting areas)
 - organises collective hunts
 - is responsible for implementing the guidelines of the Forestry Authority and the State Veterinary and Food Administration
 - submit trophies for the annual inspection
 - combats poaching and protects game animals
 - controls animals harmful to hunting

Very often conflicts and disagreements arise in the field of professional hunting management due to lack of professional knowledge and ignorance of the legislation, which are more frequent in private or leased hunting grounds that are used commercially.

Owners and users (lessees) of hunting land often interfere in the activities of the hunting manager due to their position

they relegate him to the role of a statutory officer whose task is to keep hunting records so that everything is in order 'on paper'

The owners or users of many hunting grounds are solvent and influential people who are engaged in various business activities and are certainly experts in their profession.

It is logical that one cannot be an expert in all fields and the activity of a hunting manager is a very specialised job that requires a "master of his craft" and an expert in hunting and regulations, as well as in nature and the environment.

Therefore, interfering in the tasks and competencies of a hunting manager is out of place. The regulations and rules in hunting management are the results of decades of experience and tradition of previous generations of hunters and hunting managers.

In hunting grounds with the best trophy game, where national or world records were achieved, the head of the hunting ground - the hunting manager, was always a top expert, a strong personality whose principles and rules of breeding were accepted by all

otherwise, it is impossible to achieve the breeding goals, to maintain the game population in the optimal age and sex structure and to ensure the permanent production of strong trophies.

I dare add that without the professional activity of the game manager and intervention in the population structure, it is not possible to maintain game populations at sustainable sizes, especially in terms of numbers.

Let's take a closer look at the differences in hunting management.

On the one hand, we have professional hunters.

Professional hunting is operated in the State Forests and the Military Forests of the Slovak Republic under the management of the respective Ministry.

State hunting grounds in the administration of the State Forests under the administration of individual enterprises (units), have appointed hunting managers who manage the execute of hunting rights in these grounds.

or lease hunting areas to private persons or companies which execute the hunting right on the basis of a lease agreement.

In addition, there are designated or reserved hunting grounds which are used for educational and research purposes.

They are affiliated with educational and research institutions.

The Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra also has 2 reserved hunting grounds which are used for educational and research purposes. Of course, they are used for practical training of hunting adepts.

Overview of numbers and development of population structure of the most important game species according to official statistics of hunting planning and hunting reports in Slovakia.

Red Deer - Cervus Elaphus

According to reports from the 2020/2021 hunting season, 70,380 individuals were reported in Slovakia, which represents a decrease of 551 individuals compared to the previous year. In 2021, according to reports from hunting farmers in Slovakia, 49,558 deer were hunted, which is 3,506 more than in 2020. In addition, 76 deer were captured, and 4 349 deer died by accident.

The total decline was therefore 53 983 deer. Even in the context of the well-known fact that game populations are on an upward trend, we can see that there is also an almost 10% increase in hunting in terms of hunting management.

Dama dama

23,877 individuals (+ 1,453). A total of 23,024 fallow deer (4,779 more than in 2020) were recorded in the hunt. In addition, the capture of 123 and the mortality of 1,049 fallow deer were recorded. The total decrease of fallow deer was 24 196 deer (+ 5 016 deer compared to 2020).

Woodland mouflon - Ovis musimon

A recorded population of 14,097 individuals, which is 639 more than in 2020. In 2021, the reported harvest of mouflon was 6,715 individuals, which is 510 more than in 2020. In the long term, we have a problem with the decline of the non-trophy (females and young) in the forest mouflon, mainly due to the lack of interest of hunters in hunting, but we also register in the hunting associations that the age structure is not sufficient because we have few individuals at an old age.

Roe deer - Capreolus capreolus

In the case of roe deer, which is the most numerous game species in Slovakia, the registered number is 104 811 individuals. The reported hunting of roe deer was 25 889. In the case of roe deer in Slovakia, we distinguish between the so-called field and forest populations.

Wild boar - Sus scrofa

36,761 individuals were recorded (2,504 fewer than in 2020). The reported hunting was 58,186 individuals, 1,470 fewer than the previous year. In the case of wild boar, it should be noted that this intensive hunting is also due to the African swine fever epidemic, which in the context of the current regulations of the Regional Veterinary and Food Administration has been ordered, where we hunt wild boar of all ages and sexes all year round without restriction in order to prevent the transmission of the disease to domestic breeding.

In the case of small game hunting for field hares, 165 354 hare were reported and the population increased by 8 333 individuals compared to the previous year. In the 2021/2022 hunting season, 14 525 hunted and 39 captured hares were reported. Again, trapping has a long tradition in Slovakia but during the pandemic, these joint actions were not carried out, hence the low hare capture in 2020/21.

Brown bear - Ursus Arctos

In 2021, 2 997 (+237) brown bears were reported from the level of individual hunting grounds. Based on the reports, 6 individuals were shot (based on a request for a problem individual exemption.), and 48 individuals were culled (carcasses, mortalities and individuals that came into conflict with traffic). For comparison, 835 brown bears were reported in 1990.

DRAGON WOLF - Canis Lupus

In 2021, a total of 3,291 wolves were recorded. No hunting was carried out because the wolf has become a protected carnivore year-round. 24 deaths based on reports. In the past, a hunting quota of 50 wolves per season was allowed, and in recent years this quota has not been met.

Lynx lynx

The count of 804 lynx in 2021 is 81 more than the previous year. The lynx is currently classified as a strictly protected animal. Slovakia is in a consortium of countries that are implementing lynx reintroduction in the Alpine regions of Switzerland and other Western European countries.

Briefly on the legal regulation of hunting management in Slovakia

or the management of hunting by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Slovak Republic resp. Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic

State authority at the county level - county land and forest office - hunting department and subsequently

district authorities - Department of Land and Forestry

State administration and management in the field of hunting management is delegated to these, e.g.:

register of lease/ownership of hunting grounds

approval of annual game censuses

approval of breeding and hunting plans

approval of hunting pheasant/ game hides

cooperation with the State Veterinary and Food Administration in the field of food safety and protection

In the following courses and modules, you will certainly get further information concerning animal genetic and food resources in the European Union, as hunting and game are also part of the national wealth and cultural heritage and contribute to the diversity of food resources and the nutrition of the population.