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# MANAGEMENT OF PROTECTED SPECIES

## Austrian “WWF Big5” barometer

English Summary  
WWF Austria, 2022



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## **Imprint**

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Contact: Mag.<sup>a</sup> Christina Wolf-Petre, WWF Österreich, [naturschutz@wwf.at](mailto:naturschutz@wwf.at)

**Please note that this translated report is only an abridged version of the report “Management geschützter Arten: Big-5-Bundesländer-Barometer. WWF Österreich, 2022”. The original document is available online at [www.wwf.at/bundeslaenderbarometer/](http://www.wwf.at/bundeslaenderbarometer/). The documents and websites referenced in this text may be available in German only.**

# 1. INTRODUCTION & MOTIVATION

## 1.1. CURRENT SITUATION

Austria's obligation to preserve and protect the diversity of natural habitats and wild fauna and flora is specified in international agreements<sup>1</sup> and legal regulations<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, Austria's animal and plant species, as well as their habitats, are in very bad condition compared to other EU countries, as the recent report "State of nature in the EU" by the European Environment Agency (EEA) shows<sup>3</sup>. **Especially the condition of the assessed animal and plant species is alarming** - more than 80% are ranging from "poor" to "bad condition". **Here, Austria ranks second to last out of 28 countries surveyed.**

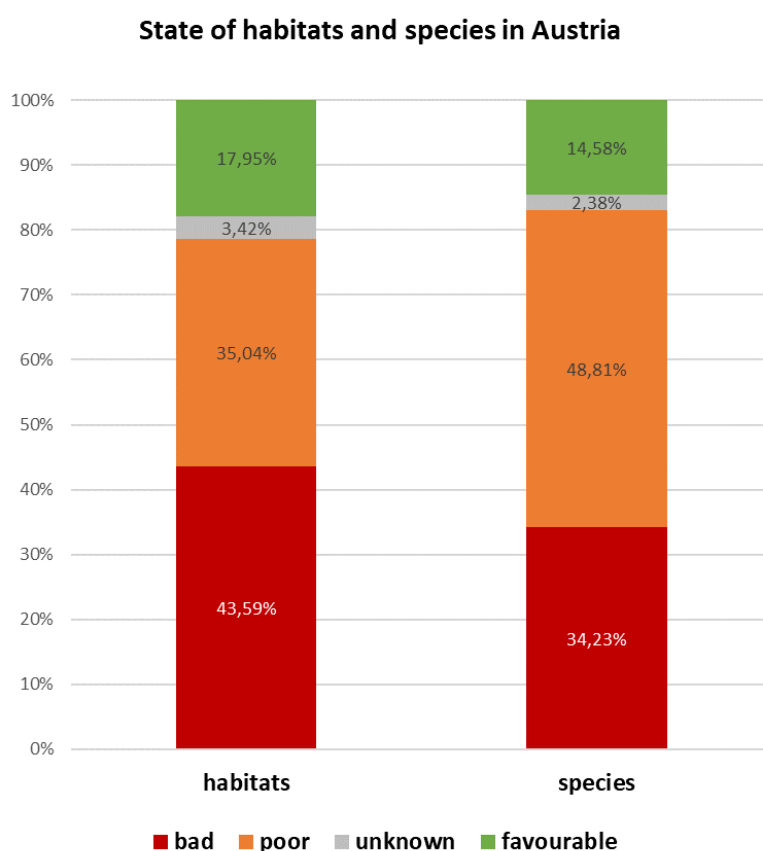


Figure 1: Status of habitats and species in Austria, WWF.

<sup>1</sup> Washington Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the UN Biodiversity Convention (Convention on Biological Diversity, CBD), the UN Ramsar Convention, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Fauna-Flora-Habitat Directive, Birds Directive, the EU Regulation EC 338/97 (Species Protection Regulation), Nature Conservation and Hunting Laws of the federal states.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state-of-nature-in-the-eu-2020>, accessed on 16.05.2022

## 1.2. THE “WWF-BIG5”

The “WWF-Big5“ include the following species: beaver, otter, lynx, wolf and the white-tailed eagle. In addition to the conservation, protection and restoration of habitats<sup>4</sup> in Austria, WWF Austria’s work in species protection focuses specifically on these species, as their return is seen as particularly controversial. Due to different interests of land use, conflicts often arise within our society between the public interest of nature conservation and other uses. Therefore, further efforts on the part of nature conservation are required in order to enable recolonisation and establishment and to minimise conflicts with other interests as best as possible. Not least because repeated cases of illegal persecution of these strictly protected species are being uncovered.

A look at the current conservation status reported by Austria to the EU according to Art.17 of the Fauna-Flora-Habitats Directive<sup>5</sup> and the assessment according to Art.12 of the Birds Directive<sup>6</sup> shows that further efforts are necessary to achieve the objectives of the EU Directives, namely a favourable conservation status of the species and habitats listed in the Annexes of the Directive. For the species considered in the present report, the current conservation status is given in Table 1.

*Table 1: Conservation status of wolf, lynx, beaver and otter according to Article 17 of the Habitats Directive (2013-2018); grey: no rating, FV: favourable, U1: unfavourable-Inadequate, U2: unfavourable-bad and rating of white-tailed eagle according to Art.12 of the Birds Directive (2013-2018); I-Increasing (+)*

Species	Continental biogeographical region	Alpine biogeographical region
Wolf	No classification <sup>7</sup>	No classification <sup>7</sup>
Lynx	U1	U2
Beaver	FV	U1
Otter	FV	U1
White-tailed eagle	I - Increasing (+)	

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.wwf.at/das-schuetzen-wir/>, accessed on 16.05.2022

<sup>5</sup> <https://nature-art17.eionet.europa.eu/article17/species/report/?period=5&group=Mammals&country=AT&region=>, accessed on 16.05.2022

<sup>6</sup> [https://nature-art12.eionet.europa.eu/article12/summary?period=3&subject=Haliaeetus+albicilla&reported\\_name=](https://nature-art12.eionet.europa.eu/article12/summary?period=3&subject=Haliaeetus+albicilla&reported_name=), accessed on 16.05.2022

<sup>7</sup> Austria reported the wolf as a "newly arriving species" in the last Article 17 report.

## 2. MATERIAL & METHODS

### 2.1. DATA COLLECTION

For the data collection, the same topics and criteria were used as in the first "WWF Big5 federal states barometer 2019". However, based on feedback from the federal states and experience from the first survey (low response to questionnaires by the states), the **process was further optimized**.

In the preparation for the discussion with the representatives of the federal states, the data from the 2019 federal state barometer was updated to the year 2021 as far as possible. Consequently, a **research on the websites of the federal states** and a query on the Internet using predefined search terms was carried out. In addition, the research was expanded by the WWF experts' knowledge. This collection of information was used as a basis for the direct discussions with the responsible authorities, which made it possible to ask specifically about changes in management and to supplement any missing information provided by the federal states. This enabled a proactive presentation of what the authority considers to be significant improvements since the last survey. Due to the prevailing pandemic situation, the interviews took place in the form of online meetings. In any case, the aim was to minimize the effort for all persons involved in the survey.

From WWF's point of view, the discussions were constructive and characterized by an effort on the part of civil servants to explain the current situation in the federal states as best they could in order to facilitate a good overall picture of the management of the "WWF Big5".

This approach also resulted in federal countries that had recently provided little or no feedback sharing more information on management actions that could be incorporated into the assessment. In some cases, this led to an improved rating due to an enhanced level of information, not due to an improvement in management since the 2019 survey.

### 2.2. EVALUATION CRITERIA

The same evaluation criteria that had already been used successfully in the first "WWF Big5 federal states barometer 2019" (cf. Table 2) were again applied. Thus, it is possible to show a development of management over time. If criteria were not relevant for a species under the specific framework conditions, they were not considered in the assessment and marked with the color "grey". All evaluations were carried out at the federal state level and specifically only for those species that also have a corresponding occurrence on the respective federal state area. The evaluation of the sub-elements of the management was also coordinated with this. In the following, the evaluation criteria are listed as already described in the "WWF-Big5-federal states barometer 2019".

In a first step, the items listed in the document "Requirements for Effective and Efficient Management of Protected Species<sup>8</sup>" were subdivided into six sub-elements and these were assigned a total of 33 evaluation criteria.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.wwf.at/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Effektives-und-effizientes-Management-geschuetzter-Arten.pdf>, accessed on 16.05.2022, only available in German

Table 2: Evaluation criteria for effective and efficient management according to WWF (2019).

Evaluation criteria	Description
Info on current situation & distribution of the species	Scientific standards are met, requirements of EU nature conservation directives are covered, data are up to date, results are comparable nationally and internationally, spatial requirements are met, methods and results are accessible to interested parties
Other management-relevant bases for decision-making	Information on costs for prevention, compensation measures, information on losses within the population (monitoring of carcass finds, illegal removals, removals through notices, etc.) are collected systematically and centrally, as is information on costs of applied management forms, and serve as a basis for management decisions
Participation & Communication	Participatory working and decision-making bodies are established, information and communication systems are in place and provide information to the interested public in a proactive and transparent manner
Prevention	A nationally consistent/comparable program for the prevention of damage has been established, financial resources are available for the promotion of preventive measures, training & information on the correct selection & professional application of preventive measures is offered by contact persons with appropriate expertise, quick and simple procedures are in place, regular adaptation to the state of knowledge takes place
Compensation	A nationally consistent/comparable program for the compensation of damages is established, financial means for the promotion of compensation measures are available, training & information for the correct selection & professional application of compensation measures is offered by contact persons with appropriate expertise, quick and simple procedures are given, regular adaptation to the state of knowledge takes place
Management plans & species protection programs	An up-to-date, state-of-the-art management plan is available, which is EU-compliant and regularly adapted. The plan takes into account all relevant levels (international/national/federal states/regional/local/protected area level)

The implementation of the management was evaluated by assigning points for the individual criteria. When awarding points, a value between 0 and 3 was assigned according to the implementation (cf. Table 3). The scores were then added up and compared with the maximum achievable points (target-performance comparison).

Table 3: Rating scale for the status of implementation (fulfillment of the criteria).

Rating scale	
0	not fulfilled, no data
1	deficiently, poorly fulfilled
2	average fulfilled
3	largely fulfilled

By comparing the points achieved with the theoretically possible maximum number of points, a relative proportion was calculated. The achieved proportions were assigned according to a four-point color scale (cf. Table 4), thus providing an overall result for each species in the federal states. Hence, on the basis of a kind of "barometer", a distinction can be made between bad (red), poor (orange), partial (yellow) and good implementation (green). For a more differentiated view, the sub-areas of management mentioned further above were also assessed using the same method. Since the classification was made in quartiles (25% sections), a certain range is possible within the respective levels (red-green). At the same time, it should be emphasized that despite a four-stage evaluation, only the "green range" (76%-100% of the requirements are met) means at least approximately good management from WWF's point of view.

Table 4: Four-level color scale for grading current management: The percentages represent the quartile distribution of results, based on the maximum achievable evaluation points.

Classification of the current implementation of the management	From	To
Bad implementation	0%	25%
Poor implementation	26%	50%
Partial implementation	51%	75%
Good implementation	76%	100%

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. OVERALL ASSESSEMENT & DEVELOPMENT

A total of 35 overall assessments were again carried out (see Table 5). Compared to 2019, **no assessment** was conducted for **lynx** in **Salzburg** due to a lack of evidence of occurrence. Added was the assessment of the **white-tailed eagle** in **Upper Austria**. Looking at the result of the overall assessment for the "WWF-Big5" species in the provinces, there is, **as already in 2019**, a classification in the category "**good implementation**" (green) **only for one species**, namely **the white-tailed eagle**.

Table 5: Ranking of overall "WWF-Big5" assessment ratings by federal state; red=bad implementation, orange=poor implementation, yellow=partial implementation, green=good implementation, grey= no rating due to lack of occurrence or no distribution range.

Species	Lower Austria	Carinthia	Burgenland	Upper Austria	Salzburg	Tyrol	Vienna	Vorarlberg	Styria
Beaver	Red	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Yellow
Otter	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Red	Grey	Yellow
Lynx	Yellow	Orange	Grey	Yellow	Grey	Yellow	Grey	Yellow	Orange
Wolf	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Grey	Yellow	Yellow
White-tailed eagle	Green	Grey	Green	Green	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Green

Even for the white-tailed eagle valuations, the requirements for an effective and efficient management (WWF, 2019) were not fully met (scoring 100% of the available points), but rather the critical level of 75% of the requirements to be fulfilled was reached. Across all species, **31 of the 35 assessments**

**have a rating of bad, poor or partial implementation.** Therefore, **88%** of the management is **rated as “not good”** in terms of implementation (see Table 5).

Looking at the development since 2019, one can summarise that the number of ratings **“poor implementation” (red) has decreased significantly.** Conversely, many of the **ratings** have moved **towards “partial implementation” (yellow).** The amount of valuations at this level has increased and currently represents the most frequent ranking. However, not all cases are indeed actual improvements in management. Due to the **adapted survey method** by means of direct interviews, it was possible to collect **more information** and to obtain an even clearer picture of the management in the federal states. Looking at the development at a federal states level, one can see that **Carinthia is the only federal state that cannot show any improvement in the management of the “WWF-Big5”.**

It should be noted that the overall assessment can only be seen as an initial rough overview, as significant **improvements in sub-elements** of management can lead to an improvement in the overall assessment due to the accumulation of the individual sub-assessments, even if other sub-elements have deteriorated in the meantime. **In order to be able to look at the changes since 2019 in more detail, the main focus should therefore be on the ratings and developments in the sub-elements.**

The positive trend of improvements in sub-elements of the management is meanwhile contrasted by **numerous exemptions for the removal of wolf, beaver and otter,** which have already been **confirmed as illegal by courts several times.** Recently, exceptions have also increasingly been issued within the framework of ordinances. In these cases, the right to be a party was circumvented. Austria has already received a letter of formal notice<sup>9</sup> due to the lack of implementation of the **Aarhus Convention**<sup>10</sup>, **which also provides the participation rights for NGOs in these cases,** and infringement proceedings<sup>11</sup> have been initiated by the European Commission in this regard. WWF Austria sees this as a confirmation of its repeated criticism.

## 4. SUMMARY

Since 1995, Austria is a member of the European Union. Therefore, it is obliged to implement the EU directives on the protection of native habitats and species. However, more than 20 years after joining the EU, the current situation of our natural heritage is dramatic, as the latest report of the European Environment Agency on the state of the natural world in the EU for the reporting period 2013-2018<sup>12</sup> shows.

Although many species and habitats show a negative development trend, there are at the same time individual species returning to Austria to colonise suitable habitats after a long absence. While this is an enrichment from an ecological point of view, it can also lead to conflicts, as the natural behaviour of these species are often in competition with other interests of society.

For a good coexistence and the balancing of different social interests, such as nature conservation and various forms of land use, suitable management and appropriate framework conditions are needed to enable coexistence between humans and nature (so-called “human wildlife coexistence”).

<sup>9</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/EN/INF\\_21\\_2743](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/EN/INF_21_2743), accessed on 16.05.2022

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.bmk.gv.at/themen/klima\\_umwelt/eu\\_international/aarhus.html](https://www.bmk.gv.at/themen/klima_umwelt/eu_international/aarhus.html), accessed on 16.05.2022

<sup>11</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/atwork/applying-eu-law/infringements-proceedings/infringement\\_decisions/index.cfm?lang\\_code=EN&typeOfSearch=false&active\\_only=1&noncom=0&r\\_dossier=INF\\_R%282014%294111&decision\\_date\\_from=&decision\\_date\\_to=&EM=AT&title=&submit=Search](https://ec.europa.eu/atwork/applying-eu-law/infringements-proceedings/infringement_decisions/index.cfm?lang_code=EN&typeOfSearch=false&active_only=1&noncom=0&r_dossier=INF_R%282014%294111&decision_date_from=&decision_date_to=&EM=AT&title=&submit=Search), accessed on 16.05.2022

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state-of-nature-in-the-eu-2020>, accessed on 16.05.2022



WWF Austria's understanding of this was summarised and published, based on technical and legal guidelines, at the end of 2017 in a document entitled "Requirements for Effective and Efficient Management of Protected Species"<sup>13</sup>.

The purpose of the present "WWF-Big5 Bundesländerbarometer 2022"<sup>14</sup> is to illustrate the implementation of EU nature conservation directives, which in the view of WWF Austria is currently technically insufficient and in some cases illegal, as well as to point out possible steps for improvement. It is in no way an evaluation of the civil servants working on-site. The assessments and the criticism based on them are directed at the responsible politicians and decision-makers, who should prioritise the conservation of our natural heritage and our livelihoods in the interest of the general public and on the basis of legal requirements. In 2019, the management of the so-called "WWF-Big5" across Austria's federal states was assessed for the first time in the "WWF-Big5 Bundesländerbarometer 2019"<sup>15</sup>. Subsequently, in 2021 the current management status and the development since 2019 was surveyed. Improvements as well as deteriorations in management are presented and, as far as possible, a trend is derived. In the "WWF-Big5 Bundesländerbarometer 2022", suggestions for steps to further develop management are again made for each of the five species, and the identified problem areas are presented in summary form in order to work constructively towards improving the current situation.

The valuation method was applied according to the procedure used for the "WWF-Big5 Bundesländerbarometer 2019". Simultaneously, the federal states' feedback was taken into consideration and the collection of information was optimised compared to the first round.

Due to numerous permits for the culling of the strictly protected species wolf, beaver and otter, this aspect was given appropriate attention in a separate chapter (cf. Chapter 5<sup>16</sup>). In this context, permits for interventions in the habitat and beaver population (**individual notices**) were also examined with regard to their **deficiencies** and presented in summarised form (cf. Chapter 5.3<sup>17</sup>).

The results show that only the management of the white-tailed eagle could be rated as good ("green") in all relevant federal states (at least 75% of achievable points were achieved). Therefore, only four out of the 35 assessments were good, all other species assessed received lower scores. No species reached the maximum possible score of 100%. For some species, improvements were noted in individual sub-areas of management, which added up to an improved overall rating. However, these advances are offset by various negative changes, especially in the form of legally questionable exemptions for the culling of strictly protected species.

Comparing the current situation with **WWF Austria's recommendations stated in the "WWF-Big5 Bundesländerbarometer 2019"**, it shows that these have only been partially taken up.

Although the current situation for the species studied can be assessed differently in detail, five key points can be summarised as follows:

1. No uniform and comprehensive monitoring of the "WWF-Big5":  
In some cases, the data basis has been improved, but there is still a lack of **uniform monitoring at the national level and the compilation or publication of data at the national**

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.wwf.at/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Effektives-und-effizientes-Management-geschuetzter-Arten.pdf>, accessed on 16.05.2022, only available in German

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.wwf.at/bundeslaenderbarometer/>, accessed on 27.07.2022, full version only available in German

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.wwf.at/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/WWF-Bundeslaenderbarometer\\_2019.pdf](https://www.wwf.at/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/WWF-Bundeslaenderbarometer_2019.pdf), accessed on 16.05.2022

<sup>16</sup> For more information, please refer to the original report (only available in German).

<sup>17</sup> For more information, please refer to the original report (only available in German).

**(biogeographical) level** as a basis for targeted management for all five species. This is legally binding and appears to be particularly important in the light of now widespread culling.<sup>18</sup>

2. No adaptation of the protected area network and protected area management:

Due to the positive development and spread of some species, it is legally and technically necessary to **adapt** the **protected areas network** and therefore also the **protected area management** to the new conditions. This applies in particular to otters and beavers, for which the "lists of protected species" have to be updated in existing Natura 2000 sites and, if necessary, new sites need to be designated. However, it also includes the lynx, which is increasingly establishing itself in western Austria, as well as the wolf, for which there is no Natura 2000 site to date, although the formation of a pack at the Allensteig military training area has been observed since 2016, as well as regular breeding in the following years.<sup>19</sup>

3. Insufficient participation:

Progress in the area of communication and the presentation of information on the five species contrasts with few participatory approaches to resolving land use conflicts and measures taken by some federal states that deliberately limit opportunities for **participation**, especially in legal procedures. This has since led to the instigation of infringement proceedings by the European Commission.<sup>20</sup>

4. No uniform prevention and compensation measures:

There is still a lack of a uniform, nationwide approach to prevention and compensation measures. Furthermore, some federal states still lack these measures completely.

5. No uniform and comprehensive management plans:

There is also a lack of nationally coordinated **management plans or species protection programmes** (beaver, otter and lynx) that ensure a uniform approach towards the species. In practice, existing **management plans and species protection programmes** are not taken into account as can be seen by the examples of wolves and otters in selected federal states.



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Umweltverband WWF Österreich (WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE)  
Ottakringer Straße 114-116, 1160 Wien  
ZVR-Zahl: 751753867  
Spendenkonto: AT26 2011 1291 1268 3901  
[wwf@wwf.at](mailto:wwf@wwf.at) | [www.wwf.at](http://www.wwf.at)

<sup>18</sup> Art. 16 Abs (3) FFH-RL

<sup>19</sup> Art. 3 FFH-RL

<sup>20</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/inf\\_21\\_2743](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/inf_21_2743) (Nr. 2021/4003 & Nr. 2014/4111), accessed on 16.05.2022