



**Large Carnivore
Initiative for Europe**
IUCN/SSC SPECIALIST GROUP



Letter on the prevention and management of bold wolf behaviour in the Netherlands

14 August 2024

To:

- Mr Jean Rummenie, State Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature, staslvvn@minlnv.nl
- The Governments of the Provinces of the Netherlands, communicatie@ipo.nl

Since the return of wolves to the Netherlands, there have been various instances of problematic, or potentially problematic behaviour by wolves, in the form of wolves repeatedly approaching people and/or dogs, and even interacting with them in some cases. Some of these instances are clear examples of scenarios wherein, according to the current international best practice guidelines, intervention is urgently called for.

Effectively preventing and addressing problematic behaviour by large carnivores such as wolves is important anywhere, but especially in a place like the Netherlands, with high densities of people and dogs, and of human (recreational and other) activities in areas where wolves occur or might occur in the future. Such an effective approach is important from various points of view, including the maintenance of long-term public support for wolf conservation. As wolves are expected to increase in number and spread over larger parts of the country, the chances of incidents with wolves showing bold behaviour will also increase.

The Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE), in its advisory capacity as a specialist group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission, hereby calls on the competent authorities in the Netherlands to put in place and operationalize, as a matter of urgency, an effective, uniform, well-coordinated policy to prevent and address situations involving (potentially) problematic behaviour by wolves (and by people). Wolves have large spatial and temporal dynamics, often moving across administrative boundaries. It is therefore paramount to ensure a consistent national approach, avoiding fragmentation due to differing provincial initiatives.

First, effective prevention is of the utmost importance, in the form of information and awareness campaigns, as well as adequate, and adequately enforced, regulations such as leash prescriptions for dog-walkers, access restrictions, and the prohibition on feeding wolves. To maximize compliance with such regulations, it is important to ensure clear messaging, a sufficient allocation of enforcement personnel, a quick response to potential violations, and imposition of appropriate sanctions.

Second, where undesirable situations do arise, it is essential to act swiftly, decisively, and consistently. The action required will vary from one situation to the next, according to the specific circumstances of each case. What will always be needed is to intensify monitoring in order to gather as much information as possible about the specific situation and the wolf involved. In various situations it will be necessary, in order to comply with best practice guidelines, to proceed without delay to capturing, radio-collaring, hazing, and individually monitoring the animal in question. Failure to do so greatly increases the chances of

continued or worsening bold behaviour, and thus the chances of ultimately having to remove the animal from the population. Valuable experience with various techniques has already been gained in Europe and North America, especially with regard to bears. The LCIE urges the authorities to rely only on the best scientific information and expertise.¹ Wrong, or ill-applied, techniques to haze wolves may actually reinforce the undesired behaviour. For instance, attempting to haze an uncollared animal is less effective when compared with the recommended approach of a targeted hazing that involves prior capture and radio-collaring.

In this regard, the LCIE urges the competent authorities to adopt and implement a standardized and fully operational policy aligning with best practice, and to ensure the consistent application of this policy in practice. Optional guidelines are insufficient. What is needed are standard operational protocols that are swiftly and consistently implemented in each instance. This requires having one or more capable and well equipped intervention teams on permanent stand-by, able to expertly assess each situation as soon as it arises, ready to follow pre-agreed protocols in accordance with the particular and evolving circumstances of the case, and provided with all adequate tools to capture and radio-collar wolves, as well as the necessary permits in advance insofar as possible. It is recommended for such a team or teams to be interdisciplinary, covering ecological, veterinary, legal, and other relevant aspects, and comprising both experts competent to assess situations as well as operational personnel competent to carry out the associated practical measures.

The above approach is also necessary in view of the strict legal protection of wolves under Dutch law in accordance with the EU Habitats Directive. For instance, actually taking all the appropriate non-lethal steps will often be essential in order to keep open the option of eventually removing a bold wolf from the population. Not doing so will increase the chances that the authorization to kill the wolf in question is challenged in court for failure to observe the condition that possible alternatives to killing have been exhausted. The return of large carnivores to our modern, human-dominated landscapes, will always require certain degrees of management, including a preparedness to lethally remove specific wolves where needed.

The LCIE expresses the hope that the Netherlands authorities will expeditiously implement the approach outlined above, to the benefit of people and wolves alike, and it stands ready to provide further advice as necessary.

Yours sincerely,

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Chair of the LCIE

¹ A more elaborate document indicating what the LCIE considers to be best practice is its 2019 'Policy Support Statement' on bold wolves: https://lciepub.nina.no/pdf/636870453845842163_PPS_bold%20wolves.pdf. Another useful report is I. Reinhardt et al., *How to deal with bold wolves – recommendations of the DBBW*, BfN Federal Agency for Nature Conservation 2020: <https://www.bfn.de/publikationen/bfn-schriften/bfn-schriften-577-how-deal-bold-wolves-recommendations-dbbw>.