**The Development of Wildlife Populations in Hungary over the Last Hundred Years**

As observed in many parts of Europe, the wildlife species and their population sizes in Hungary during various periods reflected the political conditions and the associated values, especially concerning hunting.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the red deer population in Hungary was rather low until after World War II, around 1950. The total red deer population in Hungary was estimated at about 10,000 animals back then. Mature stags reached antler weights of 7 to 8 kg.

The fundamental political changes at the beginning of the 1950s also brought many changes in agriculture and forestry. Many forests were nationalized, and large forest administrations as well as agricultural collectives were established. This resulted, among other things, in a tremendous increase in fallow land because all secondary areas were taken out of cultivation. This increase in ideal habitat and the low hunting pressure led to an explosive population growth, and in the 1970s, the peak was reached with over 100,000 red deer. The quality of trophies also increased, with antler weights often exceeding 10 kg.

Fallow deer were practically insignificant until the late 1970s, with the population estimated at around 2,500 animals at that time, many of them living in enclosures. To date, the population has roughly tenfold increased, causing significant wildlife damage in some state forests.

Mouflon were introduced to Hungary only in 1901, and the population was still below 100 animals around 1950. By 2008, the population was estimated at 10,000 animals. Since large parts of the mouflon populations are in areas with some very rare plants, there is a demand for a strong reduction of the mouflon population.

The roe deer population peaked around 1985. At that time, counts showed well over 300,000 animals. Agricultural changes around 1950, with the emergence of vast agricultural areas offering food and tranquility, boosted the population in eastern Hungary. During winter months, one could observe herds of field roe deer with 250 or more animals. The return to somewhat smaller structures in the eastern parts of the country over the last two decades has slowed and partially reversed population growth.

Wild boar populations in Hungary developed similarly to those in the rest of Europe.

From about 10,000 animals in the early 1960s, the number skyrocketed to 90,000 by 1995. This upward trend continues, with new regions still being colonized by wild boars.

The development of small game shows a somewhat different picture compared to ungulates. Hungary's world-famous small game hunts still existed after the turmoil of World War II. At that time, the partridge population was estimated at 1.5 million animals. This number dropped to 50,000 by 2008! The European hare population also experienced a low in the 1990s, similar to that observed in Central Europe, and has been recovering since then. The peak in the pheasant population around 1980 was due to intensive breeding and release. Nowadays, there are very few hunting grounds with a pure wild pheasant population.

The development of hunting tourism in Hungary is also interesting. Although the first foreign hunter hunted in Hungary as early as 1957, the big boom began in the 1970s. At that time, an average of 35,000 Hungarian hunting licenses were issued to foreign hunters annually. It was also a period when world record trophies for red deer and roe deer were taken in Hungary. A few years later, a fallow deer taken in Hungary was also rated as the world's strongest trophy. The increasing foreign exchange earnings on the one hand and the fact that no wildlife damage compensation was paid to landowners on the other hand, allowed wildlife populations to continue to grow.

The collapse of the communist system and the return of expropriated land led to a change in mindset in Hungarian society. "Land and soil" were now no longer anonymous state property but had owners who now demanded compensation for wildlife damage. In all hunting grounds, efforts began to reduce the overpopulated wildlife stocks. With the increasing number of hunting grounds – around 1980, the entire Hungarian area was divided into slightly over 800 hunting grounds; by 2009, there were about 1,200 hunting grounds – hunting pressure also increased. Nevertheless, Hungary still has hunting grounds in almost all parts of the country that offer fantastic hunts for all wild species occurring in Hungary in the wild.