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3 April 2013

Dear Mr. Dezza and Di Simine,

Thank you for your letter concerning the bear M13, which was shot in Switzerland on 19 February 2013 after a decision of the Federal Office of Environment and the Wildlife Management Authority of the canton of Grisons.

IUCN has consulted with its Bear Specialist Group in the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) and, though it was not involved in the decisions relating to M13, the Chair of the Group has been able to comment on what took place. The following is an outline of the situation sent to us by the Bear Specialist Group:

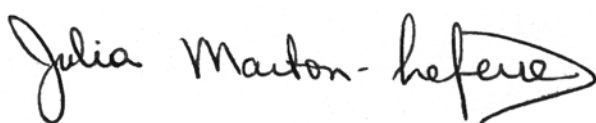
1. Legal situation: The Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) is a protected species in Switzerland and requires a management plan according to Swiss law. The management plan, the so called "Swiss Bear Concept" defines the preventive measures to be taken to protect livestock, beehives, plantations, etc., and defines potential responses to "abnormal" bears. The Concept distinguishes three types of bears: "unobtrusive", "problematic" and "high-risk". A "problematic" bear is one that is not shy towards people and may attack livestock. Such a bear should be radio-tagged to enable its surveillance and the application of targeted aversive conditioning measures. A bear is classified as "high-risk" if it repeatedly approaches people and/ or searches for food within human settlements. In such a case, the authorities in charge of the confederation and the respective canton(s) together decide whether to remove it.
2. Situation and fate of M13: M13 was an offspring of a bear translocated to Italy from Slovenia as part of a restocking program in the Italian Alps. As is common for young male brown bears, M13 began to wander widely. He crossed the border into Switzerland, where he was first observed on 6 April 2012 approaching people and venturing into villages. He had already adopted the habit of seeking out anthropogenic food while he was in Italy (where he was tagged with a transmitter that failed). On 11 April, the bear was tagged with a GPS-GSM collar to allow for tracking and negative conditioning. On 30 April, the bear was hit by a train. He survived, but in the following weeks, there were some problems with his collar. On 30 June, the bear was caught again in Grisons and fitted with a new collar. M13 concentrated his activities in the "Poschiavo" valley, where he frequently searched for food in the villages, and became increasingly bold (e.g. robbed a beehive in a schoolyard). He was classified as a "high-risk" bear; he approached people, although he had not shown aggression towards people. Aversive conditioning measures (noise, rubber bullets, etc.) became less and less effective. He broke into the annex of a house to get potatoes, which prompted some local people to demand his removal. M13 went into his winter den on 19 November 2012, and came out in early February 2013, whereupon he immediately went back into the villages and approached people. The situation with this bear was frequently

discussed at various levels of Swiss government. Ultimately, on 19 February 2013, he was shot after a decision from the Federal Office of Environment and the Wildlife Management Authority of Grisons. Italian authorities were informed about all movements of the bear and the final decision. Translocations are difficult in the densely populated Alps, and putting wild bears into captivity is an option that has been ruled out in the “Swiss Bear Concept”.

3. Authority and suggestions: From the information above, it is clear that the situation with bear M13 is a national issue – IUCN does not have the authority to provide prescriptive guidelines at a national level on wildlife management. However, IUCN does, through its Specialist Groups in the SSC, provide assistance and advice on species-related issues. In this regard, members of the IUCN SSC Bear Specialist Group and of the LCIE (Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe, also an SSC Specialist Group) have considered this case and have determined that there were two points in the history of M13 where there could be room for improvement, should a similar case occur in the future. (1) The measures and procedures to re-educate a problem bear might be improved – the IUCN SSC Bear Specialist Group can look into what was done in this case and the possibility for better documentation (i.e., an ethological assessment) and more rigorous field protocols in future situations of this sort. (2) Prevention measures by local communities could be improved (e.g. protecting beehives or protecting or removing all anthropogenic food sources in or near villages). The challenge here is that there were three levels of responsibility involved in the decision-making: The Confederation, the canton, and the communities. While the Federal Office did what was possible and the canton (responsible for wildlife management including the aversive measures) responded quickly and correctly, more work needs to be done to inform communities as to what they can do in a similar situation. The IUCN SSC Bear Specialist Group and the LCIE should be able to assist in this regard.

In addition to this response, we have also forwarded your letter to the Federal Office of Environment in Berne for their further comment.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julia Marton-Lefèvre". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Julia Marton-Lefèvre  
Director General