

Nobody knows the trouble they cause? The behaviour of forest users and their knowledge about wildlife disturbance

Christiane Brandenburg, Wolfgang Lexer, Felix Heckl, Andreas Muhar,
Friedrich Reimoser, Richard Zink, Andreas Bartel

Abstract — The Biosphere Reserve Wienerwald frames the west and south side of Vienna, the capital city of Austria. High biodiversity and conservation values are given by a large contiguous forest area and interlocked grass lands. The Wienerwald is a major large-scale wildlife habitat and part of a supra-regional ecological corridor. Due to the close proximity of the city, the area is characterised by high use intensities and pressures caused by intense recreational uses, a strong demand for hunting opportunities: high hunting pressure as well as urban sprawl, land take, habitat loss and fragmentation. In order to reduce negative impacts towards wildlife caused by recreational activities, forestering and farming, landowners and tourism management organisations developed various regulations and management regimes for the use of the Wienerwald. The aim of the presented research project funded by the Austrian Academy of Science was to investigate the familiarity with those rules as well as the level of acceptance and compliance with the site regulations. On-site interviews and mailing surveys using standardised questionnaires were taken to address the project objectives. Altogether 1334 land users like foresters and farmers as well as recreationists, like hikers, horse riders, mountain bikers and joggers were asked if they were aware of the problems and conflicts caused to wildlife and wildlife management by certain behaviour such as off-trail use, off leash dog walking, if they knew the further-reaching implications of disturbing wildlife, and in the end if they observed the rules.

Index Terms — Awareness of wildlife disturbance, sustainable recreational use, visitor management

Christiane Brandenburg is with the Institute of Landscape Development, Recreation and Conservation Planning, BOKU - University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences in Vienna, Austria

Wolfgang Lexer is with the Umweltbundesamt GmbH Vienna, Austria

Felix Heckl is with the Umweltbundesamt GmbH Vienna, Austria

Andreas Muhar is with the Institute of Landscape Development, Recreation and Conservation Planning, BOKU - University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences in Vienna, Austria

Friedrich Reimoser is with the Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology, University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, Austria

Richard Zink is with the Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology, University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, Austria

Andreas Bartel is with the Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology, University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, Austria