

OPPORTUNITIES AND STRATEGIES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE ROMANIAN WILDLIFE

ION MICU

National Forest Administration - ROMSILVA, Harghita Forestry Directorate, Harghita, Romania

ABSTRACT

The notions of “game” and “hunting” cannot substitute either the concept of wild life or that of durable management of wild fauna. It is necessary that the attitude towards the concept of wildlife (which is the second big component of the forest ecosystem) be reconsidered. In order to ensure a durable management of wild fauna it is essential to provide an appropriate material basis and to know all species, as far as their eco-ethology are concerned. The attraction of the population and especially of the youth to such actions constitutes a sine qua non condition of success. Hunting should not be and end in itself but it must constitute a means of ensuring the ecological equilibrium and a durable and integrated management of wild fauna.

Keywords: wild life, wild fauna, hunting, durable management

According to the formula $Phenotype = Genotype + Environmental\ conditions$, any modification in the environment causes phenotypical modifications which, even if not visible as far as their anatomo-morphology is concerned, are noticeable in the respect of behaviour and for those who are knowledgeable in the matter are even more obvious. Of the two determining components which define the phenotype, the more constant is the genotype, this latter being able to modify only as a result of an essential and durable change of the environment. The environmental conditions are defined, in essence, by two types of ecosystems: a forest and an agricultural one. Both ecosystems have undergone major changes lately due to the applications of the law on retroceding the land. Under such circumstances, new opportunities appear and it becomes necessary that the strategies be reconsidered as far as the fauna of hunting interest as well as wild life are concerned.

First of all, I would like to talk about the concept of wild life, which is an up-to-date matter both for ecologists and ecologists but which is hardly known about here (in Romania). In our country, wild fauna is associated with the idea of "game" and the activity related to it is the well-known hunting. On the forest, land allotted to different associations there is no problem whatsoever with this approach of the problem, on the contrary, I believe it is the correct one. On the forest land administered by the state however, I consider that this approach is incorrect if we treat wild life as a major component of the forest ecosystem, a system administered by us, foresters. For a better understanding, let us consider an example by comparing the two basic activities which we deal with at present, that is forestry (meaning cutting off wooden mass) and hunting. In the case of forestry growing forests is the basic aim both as far as the training of specialists (in schools and universities) and production is concerned. On the other hand, in the case of hunting, the basic aim is the hunting and selling of the game (and not its growing). This statement is confirmed if we compare the stock of game in Romania to any of the neighbouring countries, even Hungary (not to mention any of the more advanced Western European countries). To our shame and disappointment, we are perceived by the population as butchers who slaughter wild animals with sporting guns. At least, this is the image we get if we read the press who have pointed out these aspects several times and will continue to do so whenever they have the chance. We, the foresters will have to become from hunters, administrators of the whole forest ecosystem. This has to happen soon because otherwise there will be others who may take our place.

Second we have to take into account the fact that the most important component of wildlife is the fauna of hunting interest which is the main preoccupation of kinegetics and is, at the same time, part of the forest ecosystem, being its second biggest component after wooden vegetation. In this respect, the fauna of hunting interest is important and it has to be known not only from an economic point of view, as a source bringing material interests but also as far as its interdependence with the other elements of the forest ecosystem is concerned since it influences and is influenced by vegetation, which represents a major component of the biotop. From this several aspects result which could constitute the theme of researches in kinegetics and which could be summed up in the following way: the study of interdependence between the fauna of hunting interest and wooden vegetation in the forest ecosystem; possibilities of optimization and harmonization of their ecological integration so that the economic and biological advantages will be the highest both for the animals and plants.

Another domain which should be studied by kinegetics is that of the ethology of the fauna of hunting interest, taking into account the fact that the adaptation to the environment is, first of all, a matter of behaviour. At present, when the conditions of the environment change day by day, only the individuals with the greatest variability of behaviour manage to adapt and survive. The more knowledge is gained in the domain of the ethology of wild fauna, the more obvious it becomes that a species cannot be studied in isolation in the respect of its behaviour, but only taking into account the ecological relations in which it cohabits with other species in its biotop. Unfortunately, so far,

only some species of game have been studied (insofar as these observations can be considered studies) together with the respective birds of prey, mainly in the context of the relationship between prey and bird of prey. The studies do not take into account the larger ecosystem. In order to be better understood I will make a parallel between the diversity and the way of structuring of the vegetation from the forest ecosystem and forest fauna. In flora there are herbaceous plants, bushes and trees of different sizes which make up vegetal associations; similarly in the animal world there are different species of different sizes which form associations but which we know only under the aspect of the food chain, although the relations of interdependence are just as diverse as in the case of the vegetal formations which have been studied and are very well-known. We should not believe that if we do not have knowledge about these aspects, they do not exist, but we should realize a program of research in the domain of wild life from the forest ecosystem so that we can gain knowledge about it and understand it at least as well as we know about and understand vegetation. In order to understand better the relationship between two species which do not seem having anything in common at first sight, let us examine a few examples. Although we may believe that there is nothing in common between the bear (*Ursus arctos L.*) and the jay bird (*Garrulus glandarius L.*), it has been proven that as far as behaviour is concerned, there are important connections between them. It is well-known that the jay bird makes a lot of noise when it is disturbed during feeding, or whenever it notices an intruder in its surrounding. This behaviour attracts the attention of the bear which perceives the noises made by the jay bird as a threat. The bear, which is a heavy and slow animal, is thus helped to protect itself from danger. By making such associations in the respect of behaviour, we can explain why the bear is so mysterious and why it can be seen so rarely in its biotop, although indirect signs (traces, droppings) confirm its presence in a certain area.

Another example is offered by the behaviour of another bird, the raven (*Corvus corax L.*) which signals by its lean and concentric flight as well as by its croak the presence of a dead body, a very important thing for wild carnivores. Besides these examples there are many others which we cannot discuss due to lack of space and time. Other such relationships will hopefully be researched from now on. This is another domain about which several kinegetic studies could be written, the following is a suggestion: ethological observations of wild life in the forest ecosystem and the possibilities of interspecific communication between individuals as a way of surviving and raising the coefficient of their safety.

As a conclusion I will point out the questions related to the opportunities and strategies in the management of wildlife:

1. It is necessary to adopt a different approach to the fauna of hunting interest in the form of a new concept, that of ecosystemic wildlife, which is more current and modern. The old, simplistic and unscientific concept of "game" has to be abandoned.

2. Hunting in natural environment will have to become a means of regulating and maintaining the ecological equilibrium in the ecosystem. Hunting should not represent an end in itself.

3. Certain areas should be designated for sport and industrial hunting. On these areas, managed and administered by different organizations or interest groups, the preservation of the natural and ecological equilibrium is not a major objective.

4. The ecology and ethology of all species of the wild fauna will have to be revised periodically so that we can have a global image of their lives in all the complexity of the relationships of reciprocal interdependence in which they cohabit.

5. It is necessary to create specialised structures in the study and management of wildlife. These structures will have to create appropriate management based on the knowledge of the eco-ethology of the species, and will have to ensure their durable development.

6. By national and regional programs, the population, the youth and especially the children should be educated, so that they gain knowledge of the concept of wildlife and understand the role and place of all species in the ecosystem.