



THE *Golden Jackal* CONQUERS WESTERN EUROPE

Text: Rolf D. Baldus | Photo: Getty Images

According to the German Hunting Association (Deutscher Jagdverband), there are more than one thousand wolves in Germany. With the population increasing by about one third per year, it is easy enough to imagine what will happen in the forests and the fields if the wolves aren't soon appropriately managed by regulated hunting. The removal of individual problem wolves isn't an effective or a practical solution. In the long run wolves will have to be controlled by hunting, which is the practice in some European Union countries.

What most hunters in Western Europe are unaware of, however, is that another predator, the golden jackal, is knocking at the door. Unfortunately, the situation will most likely only be addressed when it begins to have a noticeable negative effect on the populations of small game, ground-nesting birds, small deer, and other game species.

So far no efforts are being made to control the spread of the golden jackal, although



it is a true alien in Western Europe. Since it migrated from the Balkans on its own, and wasn't introduced by humans (like the raccoon), it does not fall under the narrow definition of an invasive species. However, that does not change the fact that the jackal was never endemic to the region, and that it poses a threat to the native species. Unfortunately, the EU does not yet have it on its list of foreign animals to be eradicated. On the contrary, the golden jackal is found on Annex V of the Fauna, Flora and Habitat list, and thus is a species for which a "favorable state of preservation" must be created. In Germany this means that the golden jackal isn't considered a game species, and it is therefore strictly protected.

There is little scientific data available regarding its range across Germany, even though it was initially confirmed there in 1997. There are areas where the golden jackal is present along the North and Baltic Seas, and there are signs of its presence in several other German states. The first

proven predation on sheep occurred in the state of Schleswig-Holstein in 2017. Almost everywhere in Europe it is spreading in a similar fashion. More than a hundred thousand animals are estimated to exist currently, as compared to about seventeen thousand wolves.

To date there has been no effort to address the situation in Germany. The hunting associations have enough on their plates with the issues around wolf hunting. Scientists and so-called environmentalists want to study the situation before any action can be taken, and this will take years. By that time, the first permanent populations of *Canis aureus* will have been established. Practitioners know from many examples that by the time an invasive species is considered established and harmful, it is too late to reverse the situation. At that point hunting can only limit population growth, but not eradicate the species.

In Hungary it is easy to see what happens when the golden jackal becomes an

established predator. Hunting in packs, it is able to significantly reduce game species. In one hunting area I visited, it was reported that the fallow deer harvest had decreased by three-quarters since the arrival of the golden jackal. In the last thirty years it has gone from being barely present, to a current harvest of tens of thousands per year. But even with such a number being hunted, the population is increasing. It is too late.

With foxes, lynx, wolves, domestic cats, stray dogs, and maybe soon even bears, our game animals have more than enough predators to deal with. We don't need another one. We need to advocate for legislative changes, and to do everything we can to prevent the permanent colonization of Western Europe by the golden jackal. Perhaps it is still possible to be proactive and to achieve something. Our game species certainly deserve the effort. ■