



# Hunting in LATVIA



## SURFACE AREA

|                    |                        |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| Total surface area | 64.500 km <sup>2</sup> |
| Woodland           | 50.4%                  |
| Farmland           | 38%                    |

## HUNTER/POPULATION

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| Population                                     | 2.3 Mio |
| Number of Hunters                              | 25.000  |
| % Hunters                                      | 1,1%    |
| Hunters /Inhabitants                           | 1/92    |
| Population density inhabitants/km <sup>2</sup> | 37      |



## HUNTING SYSTEM

### Hunters' association



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## LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The system of hunting and game management substantially changed after Latvia regained sovereignty in 1991. The 2003 Hunting Law and the related regulatory acts, approximated to the respective EU norms, make up the legal framework for hunting and game management. The State Forest Service (SFS) is the major hunting authority in Latvia. The Hunting Department of the SFS Central Office coordinates the activities of the SFS territorial units regarding the supervision and control on hunting. The Ministry of Environment and the State Police, too, have statutory powers to control hunting and game management. The Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for hunting legislation.

## HUNTING RIGHTS

In Latvia, the hunting rights belong to the landowner (tenant). Landowners may lease or lend their hunting rights to any third party. About a half of the country's forests are state-owned. Normally, the state grants the hunting rights to hunters' collectives (clubs) or individuals. The use of private, municipal, or other ownership lands for hunting may vary: a part of hunting grounds are let out for payment or gratis free, some are not used for hunting at all. Most of the farmlands are privately owned and may also be put to hunting uses, if circumstances allow. At present, the total number of active hunters is about 25 000, the number of hunters' clubs - over 1000.

### Exercising the right to hunt

In Latvia, to exercise the right to hunt, the citizen or resident must possess the hunter's certificate, the firearms permit (in case of using firearms), or the hunter's seasonal card, authorizing the use of hunting gear (in case traps or snares are used). The seasonal card, to be renewed annually, serves also as a permit for hunting on a variety of small game. For a number of major game species a separate permit (licence) must be obtained for taking each animal. Any person from at least of 18 years of age can receive the hunter's certificate after passing two exams - a theoretical test and shooting test. Starting with 2005, taking a course of training is mandatory for each applicant for the hunter's certificate. The applicant must also present documentary evidence on his/her state of health and eligibility for getting the firearms permit.

### Procedure of hunting

Any hunting event must first be announced to the SFS. No special announcing or coordination is required for hunting waterfowl, American mink and raccoon dog on the public waters or next to them in the so-called towpath.

Hunting is allowed on one's own land/licensed hunting grounds and also on other lands, provided the landowner's permission in writing is obtained. To take the limited game, a permit authorizing the hunting of the respective game on the given hunting grounds is required. To optimize game management and exclude parceling out the hunting grounds a minimum size of the management area for limited game is set as follows: For roe deer - no less than 200 ha of woodlands and farmlands unfenced; for wild boar and the red deer hinds and calves - no less than 1000 ha of woodlands; for red stags - no less than 2000 ha; for moose - no less than 2500 ha.

The open season is chosen so that hunting in the least possible way interferes with the ways and habits of wildlife. The close season normally coincides with the breeding season of animals. During this period there are also restrictions for filming and taking photos of wildlife.

## **Taking hunting trophies out of the country**

The hunting trophies are the antlers of game together with the skull (upper jaw or forehead bone), the tusks of wild boar as well as wildlife pelts and skulls. Taking hunting trophies out of the country is legal under a permit issued in each individual case by the SFS regional forest district office in whose territory the respective trophy was taken. A hunting trophy may be taken out of the country for a fee paid to the state budget. For minor or average value trophies the fee is moderate, soaring considerably for exclusive trophies. A veterinary certificate may be required depending on the type of trophy, the way it is prepared, and the country of destination.

## **HUNTING PERMITS AND LICENCES**

Foreign visitors can hunt in Latvia after they have drawn the hunter's documents from the *State Forest Service of Latvia* following an order as provided by the hunting regulations. Foreign visitors who want to hunt in Latvia produce:

- an identity document
- a legally valid hunter's certificate of his/her home country
- the European Firearms Certificate or a permit issued by the Latvian State Police for taking firearms into the country and keeping them
- the SFS permit for hunting in Latvia
- the hunter's seasonal card

The visiting hunters pay also a fee to the state budget. The sum to be paid depends on the duration of hunting permit - the longer the term of permit, the higher the charge. Normally, the permits are issued for one day, two to ten days, or the whole season.

For an alien to obtain the hunting permit the hunter's collective, corporate body, or individual, inviting the respective person(s) from abroad, forwards a written application to the SFS, indicating the identity of the person(s) invited, the time and venue of the hunting event, and the identity data of the local hunter who will keep the firearms taken along. A receipt confirming the payment of fee is attached.

After considering the application, the SFS issues the permit and a reference for the respective State Police department for getting the firearms permit or putting a stamp to the European Firearms Certificate produced. The aliens, accepting invitations for hunting in Latvia, should know that the government fee for hunting is generally low. However, the persons hosting the visiting hunters (owners/holders of hunting grounds or hunting tourism firms) normally surcharge on the services offered and the value of hunting trophies anticipated.

## **FIREARMS, CALIBRES & AMMUNITION**

### **Taking firearms into the country**

In Latvia, the firearms on hire are available on a limited basis. It is more convenient for a visiting hunter to take along his/her own shotgun and ammunition into the country:

- The hunter of any of the EU member states must have the European Firearms Certificate and an invitation for hunting in Latvia. In this case putting a stamp to the European Firearms Certificate is the only formality required.
- The hunter of any non-EU member state may take the firearms and ammunition into the country against a permit issued by the Latvian State Police. The firearms permit of the hunter's home country is the basis for obtaining the said permit from the Latvian authorities. Normally, these formalities are settled by the person/body concerned with inviting foreigners for hunting tours to Latvia.

### **Using firearms and ammunition**

The safety regulations in handling firearms are the same as in the majority of EU member states. Unlike a number of European countries, the Latvian regulations set no restrictions or additional demands regarding the use of a definite type of weapon for a particular game. Using a hunting weapon, specified as such under the Latvian law, is the only demand.

In Latvia, there are two provisions regarding the use of ammunition: firstly, bullet must be used when shooting at the moose or red deer; secondly, no lead shots are allowed when hunting on waterfowl in nature reserves.

## DOGS

### Using hunting dogs

Only the dogs of hunting breeds are allowed in hunting. Traditionally, the dogs are used for the following:

- in battue or drive hunting - for disturbing, finding and chasing the animals and driving them onto hunters; also for finding or tracing the game killed or wounded
- in carnivore hunting - for crawling into animal burrows and hiding places
- in wildfowl hunting

Note: in individual hunting on moose, red deer, wild boar and roe deer, the hounds can be used only for tracking down the game wounded or killed.

### Taking hunting dogs into the country

The procedure for taking a hunting dog into Latvia is the same as for the majority of EU member states. The provisions for taking into Latvia a dog from a EU member state:

- the dog has a valid EU passport for an animal, accordingly filled in
- the dog has an identification microchip implanted or a legible tattoo; in case the microchip is other than specified by the ISO Standard 11784 or 11785, the person in charge of the dog must have a device for reading the respective microchip
- the dog looks healthy and is vaccinated against rabies at least 30 days before taking it into Latvia (except when it comes from Ireland, Malta, the UK and Sweden).

The procedure for taking into Latvia a dog from any third country, considered safe regarding the rabies control, is the same, except for a demand to produce a valid animal's passport and/or veterinary certificate of the country of origin in English (Latvian or Russian).

The procedure for taking into Latvia a dog from any third country, considered unsafe as to the rabies control, is the same except for a record in the documents or a separate document (in Latvian, English or Russian) for an anti-matter titration test done by a EU-certified laboratory at least 30 days after vaccination and at least three months before taking the dog into the EU.

Taking back from any third country a dog of the EU member state origin requires the EU passport for an animal and not the veterinary certificate.

Taking puppies up to three months into Latvia from any country is possible only together with the female dog, supported by documentary evidence that the puppies had not been weaned away from their mother.

## GAME & HUNTING SEASON

### Game animals and hunting methods

#### Artiodactyls

Artiodactyls are the major game animals in Latvia. It is allowed to take moose, red deer, roe deer and wild boar. The hunter may act alone (individual hunting: wait hunting, sneaking up to the quarry, decoying) or in a hunting party (beating of game, or battue or drive hunting).

In wait hunting, the hunter is usually on a watchtower (high seat). Such towers are erected next to the sites frequented by wildlife for feeding or mating. Sneaking up to the quarry or decoying (imitating the bellowing) is practiced when taking roebucks or stags of red deer and moose during rutting.

In individual hunting, the hunter may make a shot provided the quarry is visible distinctly in natural lighting. No artificial lights are permitted. The hunter acting alone prefers to hunt early in the morning or at nightfall. However, night shooting and using artificial lights is allowed in places where the wildlife (wild boar, red hinds and calves) damages the farm crops. When hunting in the nighttime, the hunter must be on a seat at least 2,5 m high.

Note: night shooting from a watchtower by using artificial lights is allowed in hunting such unlimited game as European fox and racoon dog.

Battue hunting is practiced in a group. The hunter(s) are waiting in a pre-determined place while the beaters comb a definite forest area, disturbing the game and driving it towards the hunters. Beating of game is allowed in full daylight between October 1 and March 31 of the following year.

#### Hunting of Wildfowl

In Latvia there are 28 species of game birds. Waterfowl hunting in autumn (on ducks and geese) is the most popular sport among the hunters. Initially, the ducks of local breed are taken and then the migratory ones. Shooting takes place mainly in the morning and also towards evening when the birds transmigrate. Quite often the ducks are lured within hitting range by imitating their quacking or using decoys. In waterfowl hunting, there is no special bag limit per day. However, a bird dog trained for finding the quarry or taking it onto the shore is a special advantage for any hunter.

In autumn it is possible to hunt on woodcock and black grouse, using specially trained dogs. In spring, there are some possibilities, though limited, for taking the rooster of capercaillie during its mating season. By tradition, the shooting is at dawn with the hunter sneaking up on the prey at the moments the bird is clucking.

The capercaillie has a habit of rutting on one and the same sites - normally old-growth forests of pine. No logging operations are allowed on similar sites to ensure conservation of capercaillie mating sites, thus maintaining also a habitat for a variety of species, which go with old-growth pines.

## **Hunting of carnivores**

In Latvia, the diversity of natural environment and continually low intensity of nature management provide for sustainable harvesting a number of carnivorous species, which are rare elsewhere in Europe. Most of the hunters consider wolf hunting a difficult yet tempting pursuit. Wolves are most commonly taken by battue hunting. A wolf may be hunted down in both hunting artiodactyls and during special wolf hunting events. On detecting the traces of wolf the respective forest area is encircled with flags on the string. In late summer and early autumn, when wolf cannot be traced, its lair may sometimes be detected by imitating the wolf's howl - the cubs usually respond to it. In wait hunting, baiting or imitating howl may make a wolf occasionally come within the hitting range.

Lynx, red fox, racoon dog, badger, marten, and sometimes also polecat and stone marten may be taken in both individual hunting by using a shotgun or hunting gear, baiting, sound imitation by a special whistle, or odorous substances are the tricks used to attract the fox and racoon dog. The hunting dogs are involved for both tracking down the prey and finding it in burrows or other hiding places. Unfortunately, there are almost no hounds in the country trained in tracing larynx and arresting it.

## **Beaver hunting**

In Latvia, unlike many west European countries, beaver is common and also one of the game animals. It yields a variety of products - meat for roasting, the famous secretion of castoreum, and warm and resistant fur. The trophy is the beaver's peculiar scull with powerful front teeth. This animal may be taken in a number of ways:

Shooting in wait hunting on beaver feeding sites in late summer or early autumn. It must be reminded that a beaver, even wounded, is still capable of swiftly diving into water. It means the shot must be made when the animal is at a considerable distance from deep water.

Catching beaver in Conibear traps; it is a pursuit less strenuous for the hunter. However, trapping requires keenness of observation to look into the ways and habits of the animal.

Suppressing the population in the areas where beaver is vermin; it is done by pulling its dams apart and driving the animals out of their burrows or dens with the help of specially trained hounds. As the beaver can inflict mortal wounds, the hounds must be really well trained and experienced in crawling into burrows.

## **Unauthorized hunting methods and gear**

In Latvia, the prohibited hunting methods, firearms and gear are mostly the same as elsewhere in Europe: for instance poisonous substances, sound recordings, explosives, self-starting weapons, non-selective hunting methods and gear etc.

However, Latvia has a number of norms and restrictions of its own:










- A ban on using arbalests and bows
- No hunting of the wildlife, escaping from natural disasters



- Using only a weapon specified by the Latvian law as a hunting weapon other than the hunting weapon under the law, the visiting hunters/their Latvian hosts are advised to apply to the Latvian State police for explanation even in case the person has the European Firearms Certificate and no special permit for taking in the weapon is needed

Note: use of automatic or semi-automatic weapons that can be loaded with more than three cartridges or shooting is possible by ripple fire is prohibited. The same refers to the laser-type back sights and sights with electronic magnification for night use.

The hunting season is from April 1 till March 31 of the following year. The hunter's seasonal cards are usually issued for this period. Periods of high hunting activity are followed by dull seasons. The peak of the season is between October 1 and January 31, when most of the limited game is taken. The same refers to the opening of the waterfowl-hunting season on the second Saturday of August which is considered the hunters' national holiday.

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
|  <p><b>Red Deer</b> (<i>Cervus elaphus</i>)<br/><b>stags</b> – September 1 – January 31,<br/><b>hinds and calves</b> - August 15 –<br/>December 31</p> |  <p><b>Moose</b> (<i>Alces alces</i>) -<br/>September 1 – December 15</p> |  <p><b>Roe Deer</b> (<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>)<br/><b>bucks</b> – June 1 – November 30,<br/><b>does</b> – August 15 – November 30</p> |
|  <p><b>Wild Boar</b> (<i>Sus scrofa</i>) –<br/>All year</p>   |  <p><b>Beaver</b> (<i>Castor fiber</i>) –<br/>August 1 – March 31</p>    |  <p><b>Capercaillie</b> (<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>) – April 10 – May 10</p>  |
|  <p><b>Black Grouse</b> (<i>Tetrao tetrix</i>) –<br/>September 1 – October 31</p>   |  <p><b>Wolf</b> (<i>Canis lupus</i>) –<br/>July 15 – March 31</p>        |  <p><b>Lynx</b> (<i>Lynx lynx</i>) –<br/>December 1 – March 31</p>   |



1. **Woodcock** (*Scolopax rusticola*) – August 1 – November 15 (in 2004);
2. **Wood Pigeon** (*Columba palumbus*) — August 1 – November 15;
3. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon** (*Columba livia*) — August 1 – December 31;
4. **Wild ducks** (*Fulica atra, Anas crecca, Anas strepera, Anas clypeata, Anas platyrhynchos, Anas querquedula, Anas penelope, Anas acuta, Aythya ferina, Aythya fuligula, Aythya marila, Melanitta fusca, Melanitta nigra, Clangula hyemalis, Bucephala clangula*) - second Saturday of August – November 15;
5. **Wild geese** (*Anser fabalis, Anser albifrons, Branta canadensis*) – September 15 – November 15;
6. **Hazel Grouse** (*Bonasia bonasia*) — September 1 – January 31;
7. **Hares** (*Lepus europaeus, Lepus timidus*) — October 1 – January 31;
8. **Martens** (*Martes martes, Martes foina*), **Polecats** (*Mustela putorius*) and **Muskrats** (*Ondatra zibethicus*) — October 1 – March 31;
9. **Badger** (*Meles meles*) – October 1 – December 31;
10. **Hooded Crow** (*Corvus corone*) and **Magpie** (*Pica pica*) — June 15 – April 30;
11. **Fox** (*Vulpes vulpes*), **American Mink** (*Mustela vison*) and **Raccoon Dog** (*Nyctereutes procyonoides*) - all year.

## CULTURE

### Hunting Press

“MMD – Hunting. Angling. Nature.” (Independent magazine for Latvian hunters)

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