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‘People Go Hunting Like They Go Shopping’: Russia Sees Poaching Spike During Virus Lockdown

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Dmitry Gorshkov, the head of WWF Russia’s biodiversity program, linked the increase in poaching with people’s desire to “rely on themselves” during the health crisis. **Yury Smityuk / TASS**

Russia is seeing a surge in illegal hunting as the country has entered coronavirus lockdown, the global conservation group World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in Russia said Tuesday.

WWF Russia experts said they saw the increase while comparing recent data on poaching activity with the same period last year, particularly in the Far East, the Murmansk region and the Altai region.

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“People are now going hunting like they go shopping, and they shoot almost every animal that they encounter on their way,” a spokesperson for WWF Russia told The Moscow Times.

In the Primorye region alone, Russian authorities registered 144 cases of illegal hunting from March 31-April 6, a more than threefold increase from March 16-30, WWF Russia said.

Dmitry Gorshkov, the head of WWF Russia's biodiversity program, linked the increase in poaching with people's desire to "rely on themselves" during the health crisis.

"In times of shock, people prefer to rely on themselves and feel independent, stockpiling salt and matches but also stockpiling meat, fish and wood for emergencies," Gorshkov said in Tuesday's statement.

Gorshkov added that it's challenging for those living in Russia's hinterland to follow the imposed self-isolation rules due to the warming weather as well as the start of the hunting season.

"It is extremely difficult to stay within four walls in the spring," he said. "Many people, especially in remote areas where the self-isolation order is not as strict as it is in large cities, go to rivers, to the mountains or to the forest. In addition, many were already preparing for the start of spring hunting, and the restrictions did not stop them."

The group said that environmental protection authorities have ramped up their activities and increased the number of anti-poaching raids in certain regions.

"Nature does not sit in quarantine, and the people who guard it are working at full capacity to restrain the onslaught," Gorshkov said.

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