



MORTALITY

IN THE CONTEXT OF FAWN RESCUE

Project report – Activities in 2025

1. Introduction

Fawn rescue aims to protect young fawns during mowing and increase their survival rate. Despite various efforts, the actual impact on the survival rate of the fawns themselves and, subsequently, on population development has been little researched to date. This project aims to help close these gaps in knowledge and further develop best practice.

2. Focus of activities in 2025

2.1 Pilot project with Forst Eibenstein and WCFE e.V.

In 2025, the focus was on a comprehensive pilot project in the Donhauser family's hunting grounds (Eibenstein Forest). Here, the central processes, methods and protocols for fawn rescue were intensively tested and further developed. The aim was to create the technical and organisational basis for a later expansion of the project. Auswahl und erster Praxistest von Sendern für die Markierung der Kitze,

Testing the procedures from drone deployment to the safe removal of fawns

Preparation and revision of protocols to ensure standardised and traceable documentation

2.2 Fishing operations and drone deployments

During the pilot year, drone flights were carried out on 17 days. The protocol included planning and documenting flight routes as well as marking and securing fawns using PinPoint. A total of 30 fawns were found and attempts were made to capture them. Seventeen of these attempts were unsuccessful, while thirteen fawns were successfully captured. Due to two double captures, the total number of fawns captured was 11, which were marked with ear tags.

Little is known about the whereabouts of the fawns so far, as no transmitters were used.

The documentation already indicates that fawns have a significant mortality rate. Four deaths were recorded in the first few weeks of the test project. The causes included a tear caused by a poaching dog, a subsequent mowing injury and unexplained factors.



Figure 1: Fawn with the number 17 from 16 June 2025



Figure 2: Death found with unknown cause



Figure 3: View of the drone image showing the fawn that was found. The location where it was found is saved using GPS coordinates, in this case Pin#5.



Figure 4: Fawns placed in protective boxes for the duration of mowing. One of two wildlife cameras installed is also visible..



Figure 5: Fawn #17 fleeing after removal of the protective box.

2.3 Optimisation of technology and methods

Another focus was on refining the technology used. The positioning and settings of camera traps and audio recorders were tested and optimised to improve the monitoring and subsequent evaluation of the fawns. In addition, all procedures were documented in such a way that they are understandable and applicable for new participants.

2.4 Documentation and evaluation

For each action, the captured fawns were comprehensively documented (capture or removal, monitoring, sighting and killing records). This created a solid database for later statistical analysis, for example on survival rates or the reacceptance of fawns by their mothers.

3. Outlook and further planning

Building on the experiences of the pilot year 2025, the following next steps will be taken by the start of the 2026 fawn rescue season:

- Telemetry exercises and testing of a transmitter on a deer in January
- Clarification of any necessary approvals
- Ordering additional transmitters and receivers
- Training of new volunteers for expanded areas
- Plan to catch and document at least 10 fawns per hunting ground from 2026 onwards.





Figure 6: VHF receiver and 25g training transmitter. The transmitter for the deer weighs 7 grams.

4. Conclusion

The 2025 project year was primarily devoted to the methodological and technical development of fawn rescue. The findings provide a solid basis for expanding the measures to other areas from 2026 onwards and for further evaluation.

5. Project team and partners

The project is being carried out by a team from FORST EIBENSTEIN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION (WCFE e.V.) and MELES Wildlife Services, as well as professional hunting staff from FORST EIBENSTEIN, mainly represented by:

- Jürgen Donhauser (Forst Eibenstein, Familie Donhauser)
- Julia Gubo (WCFE e.V.)
- Dominik Dachs (Wildtierbiologe) von MELES

The project is sponsored by WCFE e.V. with the kind support of the Forest-Game-Field-in-Europe Foundation and RIFH (Rotary International). The project is being carried out in close cooperation with TU Dresden, Prof. Herzog and Ms Hanna Gellner.

Project description: Mortality in the context of fawn rescue *Impact and measures*

The team:

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Project description WCFE, D. Dachs und J. Donhauser

1. Introduction

Fawn rescue is becoming increasingly important (*legally and ethically*), as it aims to protect young wild animals during mowing. Despite numerous initiatives, there are still gaps in our knowledge about the effects of rescue measures on the survival rate and subsequent population dynamics of roe deer. This study aims to contribute to the collection of reliable data on the mortality and reacceptance of fawns by their mothers, as well as to assess the effects on the population.

2. Research questions

The project will examine three key questions: Firstly, how often are rescued fawns accepted back by their mothers after release? Secondly, how high is the mortality rate of rescued fawns compared to the natural mortality rates reported in the literature? Thirdly, to what extent does fawn rescue influence the population dynamics of roe deer in the study areas?

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3. Methodology

3.1 Areas of investigation

The study will be carried out by WCFE on three dates. The planned setting times are May 2025, May 2026 and May 2027 ... Evaluation by 2028 at the latest.

Initially, *it will be carried out in selected hunting grounds in Bavaria (belonging to the FE Bayern/Böhmen hunting company)*. These include the Mitteraschau, Nefling, Stockarn and Schwarzhofen hunting grounds and surrounding areas. In total, the study areas cover around 2,500 hectares, of which around 300-500 hectares of meadowland (and other mown areas, e.g. for biogas) are flown over for fawn rescue. Of particular interest are the proportions of arable, forest and meadow areas, the proportion of early-mown meadows, the altitude and the exact geographical location.

From the second step onwards (i.e. from 26 May), further areas (five planned) with different habitat compositions will be selected. A selection form has already been sent to the first interested parties. Coordination and support will be provided by this project with the same requirements. A comparative measure in Bohemia (Czechia) is also being considered.

3.2 Carrying out fawn rescue

Before mowing, a specific route plan is drawn up for the drone deployment, and the flight routes are documented (e.g. as GPX files). During the drone flight, fawns are identified and marked using PinPoint. Each fawn is photographed and the findings are recorded. The fawns are then secured, and all relevant biological and technical information is recorded using a standardised questionnaire.

3.3 Data collection

The survey comprises various protocols. The recording protocol (rescue of fawns) documents the time of removal, GPS location, photos, sex, estimated age, body measurements and, if applicable, transmitter and ear tag numbers. The monitoring protocol records the status of the fawn (alive, dead, no signal) and, in the event of death, possible causes of death. Sightings of fawns with or without their mothers are recorded in the sighting protocol. Finally, the hunting protocol documents the weight and time of kill for any fawns that may have been killed in the course of the survey.

3.4 Data analysis

The collected data will be statistically evaluated. In particular, the mortality rates of the rescued fawns will be compared with known natural rates. Furthermore, an analysis of influencing factors such as the condition of the *release site* on the probability of survival will be carried out.

4. Collaboration, joint study

The plan is to collect the survey data jointly and in cooperation with the Wildlife Ecology and Management Institute at TU Dresden, Prof. Herzog, and to evaluate it jointly as well. This will be done in close consultation with Ms Gellner.



6.) Data world - Records/logs:

Drone flight

- All thermal images and zoom images in one folder per lug
- GPX file of the markers

Sampling protocol

- Person
- Date and time of collection
- Unsuccessful capture attempt [yes/no]
- Fawn ID = ear tag number
- Ear tag colour
- Ear tag on left/right ear
- Pin number – drone marking
- GPS coordinates of the location where found – [via WhatsApp]
- Photo of the location where found [via WhatsApp]
- Sex of the fawn [m/f]
- Estimated age (in days)
- Hind leg length (optional)
- Transmitter number (if available)
- Transmitter status (on/off)
- Transmitter attachment method
- Sibling fawn numbers (PIN, ear tag numbers)
- Comments (e.g. sibling fawns)
- Photos of the storage location via WhatsApp
- Location of the storage location via WhatsApp
- Comments on the storage location
- Camera mounted 12 steps away and active?
- Audiomoth mounted?

Monitoring log

- Person
- Date and time of observation
- Fawn ID
- Presumed location (GPS)
- Life status (alive/dead/no signal)
- Presumed time of death (if found dead)
- Presumed cause of death (e.g. predation, starvation)
- Photographic documentation if found dead
- Comments



Inspection report

- Observer
- Fawn ID
- Date and time of sighting
- GPS coordinates of sighting
- Does accompanying (yes/no)
- Comments

Hunting record

- Fawn ID
- Date and time of kill
- Weight of fawn
 - Gutted, with head, with legs, without gutted shot channel
- Location of kill (GPS point)
- Comments

7. Expected results

It is expected that the majority of rescued fawns will be successfully accepted back by their mothers. At the same time, verified mortality figures will be collected in order to better understand the effects of fawn rescue. This may provide evidence of changes in population dynamics as a result of the interventions.

8. Significance of the results

The results should contribute to further optimising fawn rescue methods and establishing animal welfare standards. In addition, the findings could provide important impetus for wildlife management and agricultural practice.

9. Time and work schedule

The survey is conducted during the mowing period from late April to mid-June each year.

In the first year, 2025, the recordings will be made without VHF transmitters. In the second year (from 2026 onwards), VHF transmitters will be used. *The initial plan is to collect data in 2026 and 2027.*

The subsequent data analysis will be carried out over several months, so that an interim report can be expected in October 2025.



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