

Short note: First breeding record of the golden jackal (*Canis aureus* L., 1758, Canidae) in Austria

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Abstract

In Austria some single records of golden jackals were recorded between 1987 and 1998 and between 2003 and 2006. 2007 however, the first breeding record for Austria was proved by the regular observations of three cubs in the Austrian part of the National Park Neusiedler See-Seewinkel/Fertö-Hanság in the Burgenland.

Key Words: *Canis aureus*, range extension, Austria

Zusammenfassung

In den Jahren 1987 bis 1998 und 2003 bis 2006 gab es wiederholt Einzelnachweise von Goldschakalen in Österreich. Der erste Fortpflanzungsnachweis für Österreich erfolgte jedoch erst 2007 durch die regelmäßige Beobachtung und Dokumentation von einem Wurf mit drei Jungtieren im österreichischen Teil des National Parks Neusiedler See-Seewinkel/Fertö-Hanság im Burgenland.

Golden jackals inhabit suitable habitats in northern and eastern Africa, southern Asia and southeastern Europe. The occurrence of *Canis aureus* in Austria was summarized by BAUER (2002) and PLASS (2007). According to BAUER (2002) there is no evidence for the existence of golden jackals in Austria in prehistoric or historic times. Examination of museum material revealed that the so called "Rohrwölfe" reported to have lived within the *Phragmites* stands of Neusiedler See in the 19th century were small wolves (BAUER 1960, HOI-LEITNER & KRAUS 1989).

Between 1987 and 1998, however, single golden jackals dispersed to Austria from the increasing jackal population on the Balkan. Altogether twelve animals were documented – 75% of these during winter months. Of these twelve animals eight males and one female were identified. The sex of the remaining specimens is unknown. This first invasion had its peak between 1987 and 1992 when ten observations were recorded, followed by but two more until 1998. The named localities were distributed over Lower and Upper Austria, Carinthia, Styria, and Burgenland. A second wave of invasion was recorded between 2003 and 2006 when four specimens became known from Lower and Upper Austria and Styria (PLASS 2007).

For Burgenland until now only one female golden jackal was documented which was shot in Schandorf, municipality of Schachendorf in 1996 (PETRAKOVICS 1996 a & b). The present record in northeastern Burgenland is the first to prove breeding in Austria.

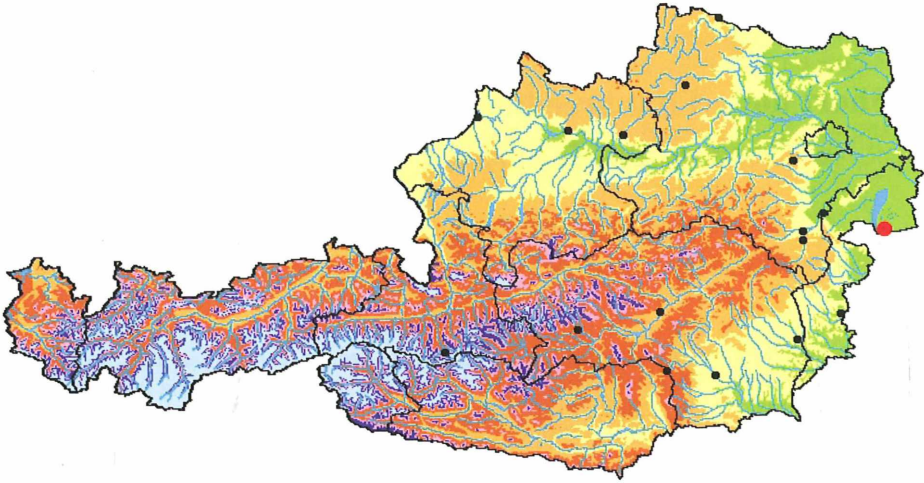


Fig. 1: Records of golden jackals in Austria until now (after PLASS 2007) and the breeding site (red).



Fig. 2: Aerial photograph of the Neudegg, showing the small wood and thickets with adjacent meadows, the reed belt and fields. (Photo E. Nemeth ©)



Fig. 3: The three young golden jackals from the National Park Neusiedler See-Seewinkel/Fertö-Hanság in the middle of August. (Photo V. Waba ©)

The locality is situated in the National Park Neusiedler See-Seewinkel/Fertö-Hanság near the Hungarian border (Fig. 1).

Although there were some unproved sightings of golden jackals reported in the National Park Neusiedler See-Seewinkel/Fertö-Hanság in Burgenland in earlier times, it took until August 2007 that regular sightings reported by members of the staff of the national park were confirmed by photographs by Vinzenz Waba. Since the first half of August three young jackals were regularly observed moving during day time in the Neudegg area ($47^{\circ} 41' N / 16^{\circ} 48' -49' E$) 5 km SE of the village of Apetlon (Fig. 2). The young looked well fed and it was clear that young of this age (estimated about five months, following DEMETER & SPASSOV 1993) were still living with their parents. In the early morning of 25th September one adult with the three young was observed in the same region.

In this area of the park no visitors are allowed and the undisturbed surrounding obviously permitted activity during day time. The area the animals live in is typical for golden jackals as summarized by DEMETER & SPASSOV (1993; see there for further references) and BAUER (2002). It is characterized by ecotones, including thickets of bushes and trees as well as *Phragmites* stands, and by fields and pastures (Fig. 2). The den of the golden jackals is obviously in or near a small forest (about 3 ha) with lots of fallen trees which supply good cover. It is bordered by meadows, a less densely covered area of bushes and trees and the extensive reed belt of Neusiedler See in the south and west and by meadows and fields in the north and east where the animals were observed (Fig. 3). The distance to the next farm is about 3 km and to the next village (in Hungary) is about 2.3 km.

While the jackals formerly observed in Austria were thought to have dispersed from Croatia, it seems quite obvious that the present ones came from Hungary. Regular distri-

bution of golden jackals is reported in Hungary from the east, the south and also from the border to Burgenland in the Hanság (HELTAI et al. 2000). Golden jackals are regularly hunted in Hungary.

It will be interesting to see if this first breeding record of golden jackals in Austria will be the onset of a permanent settlement.

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