



Guide to Hunting in Germany

03 – History of German hunting

Developments in Europe around A.D. 800 are considered to be the most significant influences on German hunting customs of today. During this period, the sovereigns of Europe proclaimed the right to hunt as the prerogative solely of the royalty. After this proclamation hunting became a major recreation of the court. With the court hunts came all the elegance of court protocol and ceremony. Many present German hunting customs may be traced to these old customs.

An excellent example of this link with the past is the categorization of game into two principle divisions, high game (*Hochwild*) and low game (*Niederwild*). High game was reserved for the sovereign, or for the few who were selected to hunt with the sovereign's permission.

Although there is no longer the class distinction among hunters, the terms *Hochwild* and *Niederwild* persist. *Hochwild* includes all cloven hoofed game, except Roe Deer, it includes Capercaillie and Eagles.

The use of hunting horns is another aspect of hunting that has persisted through centuries following its origin as part of the court ceremony. In modern Germany, a social hunt is not complete unless buglers are present with their hunting horns to add flavor to the hunt and to signal instructions to the hunters and beaters. The most common signals are:

- *Aufbruch zur Jagd* (departure to hunt)
- *Anblasen des Treibens* (start of the drive hunt)
- *Hahn in Ruh* (unload firearm/end of drive hunt)
- *Hirsch tot, Sau tot, Reh tot, Fuchs tot.....* (to honor the harvested game)
- *Jagd vorbei* (end of the hunt)
- *Halali* (at the end of a social hunt, hunters take their hats off).

Also in use today is the language peculiar to the art of hunting (*Jägersprache*). This is a language of several thousand words developed over the centuries; and many of the old words are traceable to the old courts.



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Strecke legen und verblasen des Wildes nach einer Gesellschaftsjagd
Display and honoring the harvested game after a social hunt

By A.D. 1500 hunting generally was regarded as a royal sport for gentlemen and was accompanied by a complete court ceremony. Drive hunts, with game being driven into confined areas for shooting by the nobility, became popular during the next three centuries. Elaborate hunting castles were erected in areas where game was plentiful. Many of these castles along with their trophies and artifacts are still present.

At the same time the common people (*Volk*) were suffering from the damage that the game (Wild Boar, Red Deer) did to their fields, these people had to serve as beaters during the drive hunts for no pay. Common people were not allowed to kill any game, for poachers severe punishment was the rule, including death by hanging.



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Sweeping land, social, and religious reforms followed the French revolution. These reforms resulted in the virtual elimination of the royal prerogative. With the land, formerly owned by the feudal lords, now in the hands of the common people, the right to hunt on their property also went into the hands of the common people.

Extensive hunting, and the lack of any Germany wide hunting laws and regulations during the 1800's made experienced and responsible hunters and foresters work for a change.

The German Reich after 1870 had no federal hunting laws, all laws and regulations were on state level, sometimes just for specific areas, these laws covered police regulations about poaching etc., but nothing like game management, animal or nature protection. Ulrich Scherping, born 1889 in Krackow/Pomerania, is the most famous "father" of a modern German hunting law. Plans for such a modern law already existed prior to WWI, but the war, the chaotic days of the Weimar Republic and the narrow-minded, selfish politics of the old German states made the law making process impossible.



German foresters with their *Schweisshund* (1930s)

When the Nazis won German elections in 1933, they quickly took over all important government functions. Hermann Göring, a WWI fighter pilot, became President of the Prussian state. Göring was also hunter since childhood, which made it easy for Scherping and other foresters to get his attention for the hunting law. Göring was one of the most important members of the Nazi party and from his position it was no problem to push the new law through the Reichstag. The Hunting law was followed by several other new laws, like Animal Protection law, Forestry law and others. Göring also reorganized hunting organizations by forming one nationwide organization called "*Deutsche Jägerschaft*". Göring himself became the *Reichsjägermeister* and was head of all hunting in Germany.



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German hunters in the WWII era

After WWII German citizens were banned from hunting until 1949. The actual hunting law, the *Bundesjagdgesetz*, dates back to 1952, when it replaced the old *Reichsjagdgesetz*. Most of the German states created their own Hunting laws (*Landesjagdgesetze*) during the years 1949-1952, copying the old *Reichsjagdgesetz*.

Before reunification, the former East Germany (DDR) had a totally different, “socialist” hunting law. Since the reunification of Germany in 1990 the federal hunting law is binding for all German States. Separate state laws still exist, but cannot ease federal or European legal requirements. The state laws establish varying hunting seasons and differing procedures for *Jungjäger* training and testing from state to state.

Today German hunting is still deeply influenced by the old traditions. The basic color for a hunters outfit is still green, in the southern parts of Bavaria the traditional color for Loden pants and jackets is grey or brown. Meanwhile many wear surplus army gear, but still the color is green. Camouflage jackets and pants can be seen in some places and blaze orange vests or parkas are required by law for participants of social hunts in Baden-Württemberg, other states just require fluorescent hatbands. The use of the special “*Jägersprache*” is still common and is encouraged by the hunting organizations.

Most German hunters are members of the *Deutscher Jagdverband (DJV)*, which is the German Hunters Association. The *DJV* is organized in State hunting associations, the *Landesjagdverbände*. Local groups are organized in county groups, called *Kreisgruppen*. American hunters may join German *Landesjagdverbände*. Being a member of a local *Kreisgruppe* may offer contacts and resources with local hunters.