

Short communication

FROM CONFLICT TO COLLABORATION IMPROVING COEXISTENCE OF PEOPLE AND LARGE CARNIVORES

Bárbara Pais¹, Tõnu Talvi², Luisa Vielmi³, Valeria Salvatori⁴

¹ Europarc Federation, Regensburg, Germany

Contact: b.pais@europarc.org

² Environmental Board, Estonia

³ DifesaAttiva, Italy

⁴ Istituto di Ecologia Applicata, Italy

www.europarc.org

1. Introduction

For centuries, large carnivores were hunted and persecuted to such an extent that they were eradicated from much of their original habitats in Europe. Changes in land use, habitat improvement and increasing prey populations, supported by legal protection in many countries, are allowing large carnivores to return to parts of their former range.

While the ongoing recovery of large carnivores in Europe is seen by many as a great conservation success (Chapron et al., 2014), considerable challenges have also arisen. Large carnivores can have a variety of impacts on human activities and livelihoods, resulting in conflicts among different stakeholders including farmers, hunters, local authorities, protected area staff and environmentalists. To mitigate these effects, national governments in many countries have implemented damage prevention measures and/or compensation schemes (Linnell and Cretois, 2018).

Working side-by-side with farmers and providing direct support might not always be achievable by governmental organisations and this is where other organisations such as protected area administrations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can play important roles. Two events organised by the Europarc Federation in 2018 offered opportunities to

share experience and improve understanding of the issues and provided inspiring examples of how people can work together to achieve better coexistence with large carnivores.

2. Strategies for better coexistence

On 27th March 2018 the Europarc Federation in cooperation with the EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores¹ hosted a webinar entitled *Large Carnivores: strategies for a better coexistence*. Over 150 participants took part from across the globe. Valeria Salvatori, who is a member of the



Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (www.lcie.org) as well as serving on the CDPnews editorial team, set the scene by summarising the current situation of large carnivores in Europe and introducing the work of the EU Platform. There then followed two case studies of governmental and non-governmental initiatives to support farmers and improve coexistence.

The first case study described state support for farmers and beekeepers in Estonia, where the wolf (*Canis lupus*), brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) and lynx (*Lynx lynx*) are relatively common. Damage to domestic animals (mainly sheep but occasionally also dogs, goats, cattle and horses) as well as apiaries is the main cause of human-carnivore conflicts. To reduce conflict and build tolerance, since 2009 the Environmental Board has run a programme of damage prevention measures alongside a compensation scheme. The main priorities are to improve husbandry practices, to (re) introduce different preventive measures, to improve farmers' responsibility and training, and to inform and educate the general community. A manual describing various prevention measures has been published and widely distributed among farmers (Talvi, 2014). The state subsidises 50% of the costs of effective preventive measures such as electric fences, night enclosures and livestock guarding dogs (LGDs).

The second case study illustrated how a non-governmental organisation has worked successfully with livestock producers in the province of Grosseto, Italy, to reduce the impact of wolf depredation. DifesAttiva, whose members are local farmers, was created within the EU-funded LIFE MedWolf project with the goals of establishing a network for exchanging and managing LGDs, promoting the use of preventive measures



and promoting local agricultural products and activities. More details can be found in a pdf which is available on the Europarc website² along with the other presentations, links to participating organisations and a full recording of the webinar.

3. Effective communication

As predator populations continue to recover in many parts of Europe, fear and misunderstanding among communities are growing. Addressing negative perceptions is a great challenge to all national governments and other organisations working with large carnivores. One of the main difficulties is to overcome communication barriers between different stakeholders. Antagonism is frequently a result of the fact that each group simply wants to push forward its own agenda, without listening to others. The media also play a role, influencing feelings towards large carnivores, and should be taken into account as an important stakeholder. There is a clear need to provide guidelines and expertise on how to establish constructive dialogue and improve the communication skills of professionals.

The Europarc Conference held in the Cairngorms National Park, Scotland, from 18th to 21st September 2018 included a workshop³ on *Fear versus facts: effective communication*, a means to improve coexistence with large carnivores in protected areas. Organised in collaboration with the EU Platform for Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores, the workshop brought together large carnivore experts and protected area professionals to share experience and find solutions to ensure constructive dialogue and build acceptance of large carnivores amongst local communities. Several case studies were presented⁴, including the work of the Campo Grande Group in Spain (see the article on page 15 of this issue of CDPnews).

Problems related to coexistence with large carnivores are complex and therefore inevitably require complex responses: simplified messages are often counterproductive. For this reason, the first step is to ensure that all parties acknowledge the existence of a problem, which has to be clearly identified and defined. Bringing stakeholders together and giving them a chance to speak and share their views is essential, although a moderator is usually needed to keep the group focused and functioning.

Workshop participants identified several strategies to mediate discussions and manage conflicts:

1. Analyse and plan

It is crucial to develop good communication processes and plans in advance. What will be the key outputs of working sessions? Who are the most relevant stakeholders? Which tools can be used to engage them? Answering these questions will contribute to make messages more consistent and effective. Communication is a complex process and needs to have a clear purpose in order to contribute to finding solutions.

2. Adapt to the audience

It is important to ‘speak the language’ of stakeholders in order to be able to relate to them, build bridges and find room for agreement.

3. A neutral agent in the room

Achieving acceptable solutions to divisive issues requires negotiation and compromise. For this, it is highly recommended to involve professional mediators and facilitators.

4. Promote knowledge sharing

Provide learning exchanges and site visits to build mutual understanding and trust. Solutions from elsewhere can be explored and discussed to understand how others are doing it.

5. Be open to different perspectives

It is important to consider the issue from different points of view. Develop active listening skills with stakeholders, try to understand their needs and stimulate healthy sharing of ideas and perspectives.

6. Don't forget the human dimension

Put an emphasis on people and show activities that can be undertaken to solve their problems. Take emotions into account, but without forgetting facts and data.

7. Create a friendly environment

Different stakeholders should get to know each other: create opportunities to overcome personal barriers. They need to find pleasure in each other's company: music, food, fire and drinks are important ingredients.

8. Identify key persons

It is very useful to identify people within each stakeholder group who can help to mediate and spread positive messages among their colleagues. On the other hand, it is also crucial to identify and work directly with those who incite negative feelings (e.g. by spreading disruptive news, inflaming people or misrepresenting the views of the group as a whole).

Europarc organises a webinar every year with the EU Platform to share best practice and regularly shares updates, tools and case studies to support protected area managers⁵.

References

- Chapron G, Kaczensky P, Linnell JDC, von Arx M, Huber D et al. (2014) Recovery of large carnivores in Europe's modern human-dominated landscapes. *Science* 346, 1517-1519.
- Linnell JDC, Cretois B (2018) Research for AGRI Committee – The revival of wolves and other large predators and its impact on farmers and their livelihood in rural regions of Europe. European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels, 106 p.
- Talvi T (2014) Looma tekitatud kahju ennetamine (Prevention of wildlife-caused damages). Environmental Board, Tallinn, 20 p (in Estonian).

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/coexistence_platform.htm

² <https://www.europarc.org/webinar-coexistence-large-carnivores/>

³ <https://www.europarc.org/news/2018/10/fear-versus-facts-effective-communication-for-coexistence-with-large-carnivores/>

⁴ <https://www.europarc.org/workshop-presentations-2018/>

⁵ <https://www.europarc.org/knowledge-hub/large-carnivores/>