

Project

MEDWOLF:

A NEW PROJECT TO DECREASE MAN-WOLF CONFLICTS IN MEDITERRANEAN-TYPE AREAS

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MedWolf - Best practice actions for wolf conservation in Mediterranean-type areas - www.medwolf.eu

A new LIFE+ project to tackle the wolf damages to livestock and its related conflicts with humans has been co-funded by the EC. The MedWolf project “Best practice actions for wolf conservation in Mediterranean-type areas” had its start in October 2012 and it is now in the phase of completion of the main preparatory activities to set the background for the implementation of the concrete conservation actions, mainly focused on damage prevention, but also on improvement of wolf presence detection, and control of illegal activities, such as poisoning and the use of snares.

LIFE MedWolf is implemented in Italy and Portugal, in two areas characterised by rural environments and where the presence of the wolf is slowly expanding. Such expansion process is associated to high levels of conflicts, mainly due to the fact that the local communities are not prepared to live with the predator and find it difficult to change their livestock raising practices.

In Portugal, the areas targeted by the project are south of the Douro river, where there is an isolated wolf nucleus consisting of less than 50 individuals. The project’s intervention area is localized in the eastern part of this nucleus, the bordering region with Spain, in the Districts of Guarda and Castelo Branco.

In this region livestock is still a very important economic resource, mainly represented by sheep and free-ranging cows. Although the number of wolf packs present in the project’s area is estimated to be low, the level of conflict is increasing and in order to facilitate the highly endangered portion of the Iberian population to establish and expand – southwards and westward, establishing contact with the Spanish population –, interventions to prevent the interruption of the slow, but steady, expansion of the wolf are crucial.

In Italy the project is being implemented in the Province of Grosseto, where very few protected areas exist and the local economy is strongly based on rural activities, mainly related to production of typical food items, and tourism. The expansion of wolf in the area has been recorded in the last decades and attacks to free-ranging livestock are becoming so frequent that they cannot be considered a risk of the entrepreneurs activities. The local economy is based mainly on sheep farming and its associated products. Due to the virtual absence of wolf, local traditions have evolved in the last 70 years into free ranging flocks poorly guarded, left grazing on large pastures at night during summer months, when it is too hot to confine them and leaving them out in the sun during the day time.

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Measures to be implemented in the two project areas include fences of various type and nature and livestock guarding dogs. Such interventions will be associated to a series of activities in support to the livestock producers and the local managers, in order to set the basis for a long term process of active management in full consideration of the local realities. The overall aim is to provide guidance to the Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas (ICNF, the environmental agency responsible for wolf management and conservation and for damage compensation) and to the livestock owners for adopting measures that will be tested during the project and proven to be effective. Preliminary results from a survey in the Portuguese project study area, to evaluate the real impact of wolf damage and the interest of livestock owners to collaborate in the Project, reveal a general willingness to adopt the prevention measures proposed, despite some conflict hotspots, implying the need for a well-founded collaboration. The survey also allowed to characterize the holdings and identify the main prevention problems and needs, in a region where livestock management and husbandry are not adapted to the wolf presence. The information gathered will be used to better define the implementation of the concrete conservation actions.

In Portugal the project will enjoy the partnership with the EU-funded, LCIE-coordinated pilot action on traditional practices for livestock raising and coexistence with wolves (see also this issue), which also sees the active participation of the responsible institution for the management of wolf-caused damages, the ICNF.

In Italy the participation of the three agricultural association as well as the provincial administration

will set the bases for a shared approach to damage prevention and conflict reduction. A preliminary analysis of the current regional legislation has revealed a high percentage of undeclared damage that is to be interpreted as both an indication of the discontent of the rules to be applied and a minimal estimate of the level of conflict, including the willingness of the local livestock producers to accept rules and conditions set by the authorities and not shared preliminarily with them. The current law foresees the reimbursement for lost heads to predator attacks only through an insurance system, and the Regional Government covers up to 80% of the premium. Nevertheless, only less than 10% of the livestock breeders subscribe an insurance system, and up to 24% of them abandon the scheme after a couple of years. One long term objective of the project is to investigate further such system and explore the possibility to lobby for the modification of the Regional Law in order to include further assistance to livestock owners and at the same time stimulate them to comply with the current law. An in depth analysis of the efficacy of measures or combination of them in different environmental and social context will be done, so as to identify the most effective ones to be implemented ad hoc in selected farms.

Within the frame of the project we plan to implement a Carnivore Damage Prevention Working Group (CDPWG) that will exchange experience and information through a forum platform that will be activated on the project website. The working group will also share information through the production of articles to be published in the Carnivore Damage Prevention Newsletter, taking over from the work coordinated by Kora until 2005.

The project, with an overall budget of over 3 million Euros, 75% of which are funded by the European Commission, will last until March 2017, when we aim to reach the goals of decreasing the damage suffered by 20% and involve at least 30% of the livestock owners in the adoption of best practices for preventing damages.

For more information please visit the project website: www.medwolf.eu

