

Improving the coexistence of wolves and Man in Portugal

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Abstract

The Portuguese wolf population, originally widely distributed over the country, suffered a significant regression along time, occupying today only 20% of the former area. The wolf population consists of 300 individuals, divided by the river Douro in two subpopulations: the northern one connected with the Spanish population and comprising 90% of the total Portuguese population, and the southern one, isolated from the first one, with just 10% of the wolves. The first sub-population may be considered stable, but that from the south is critically endangered. The wolf in Portugal is fully protected since 1988, although most of the threats that have caused the decline of the species still are operating: road-kills, poisoning, snaring, habitat destruction and wild prey reduction. Besides the human negative attitude towards wolves, this predator still is illegally persecuted due to damage caused on domestic animals. Portugal has a highly humanized landscape, inadequate agro-forestry practices, and over-hunting, which have caused the regression of the wolves' wild prey (red and roe-deer) with a consequent consumption and damage of domestic prey (horses, cattle, sheep and goats). This has resulted in a long-lasting conflict that is not solved yet. In the frame of LIFE COEX, a project funded by the European Union, different lines of action are being developed and can be briefly summarized as: (i) monitoring the number of wolves and stray / feral dogs; (ii) assessing damage caused by wolves and dogs; (iii) assessing and implementing preventive measures (livestock guarding dogs and electric fences); (iii) analyzing public attitudes towards wolves, and (iv) raising the awareness of the general public and of farmers to the role of the wolf in our rural landscape. With this presentation we intend to contextualize the actions developed in Portugal in the frame of the overall project, to make an overview of the state-of-art of the man-wolf conflict in Portugal and to describe the results gathered so far and their constraints and possible solutions.

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