

The use of LGDs under different husbandry systems in Portugal: results from areas of continuous wolf presence and from newly recolonized areas

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Abstract

From an age old tradition into the 21st century the use of Livestock Guarding Dogs (LGDs) in Europe faces new challenges as large predators return to areas from where they had been extirpated, to find husbandry systems that no longer take their presence into account and facilitate predation. As livestock production changes due to socio-economic reasons, resulting in more extensive systems and less investment in damage prevention, the return of large predators, namely wolves, is bound to create high levels of conflicts with human activities, particularly in areas where wild prey is still scarce, and create technical and economic challenges to the use of LGDs.

In the scope of the LIFE MedWolf project (LIFE11NAT/IT/069) since 2014 nearly 30 LGDs were donated to livestock breeders which had experienced wolf damage in the project's Portuguese study area, including the eastern range of the Iberian wolf population south of the Douro river, along the border with Spain. Although results are still preliminary they reveal that the use of LGD may be a viable tool to decrease wolf damage on extensively grazed cattle. Results from the LGD Program implemented by Grupo Lobo since 1996, including almost 500 dogs from autochthonous breeds, placed in herds and flocks throughout the wolf range will be presented. Advantages of using LGDs as well as technical problems and solutions will be highlighted among the distinct husbandry systems, with a look on the main social constraints identified in the MedWolf area. The use of LGDs can be adapted to different situations and combined with other methods to increase efficiency, but ultimately its success in areas recently recolonized by predators will depend on the willingness of the farmers, on the existence of financial incentives that can reduce initial costs, and on technical support to help devise solutions adequate to specific farm management conditions. The development of concrete actions, namely within the LIFE Program, is a good opportunity to start the process towards a better coexistence with endangered predators.

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