

# Promoting the use of livestock guarding dogs in northeastern Portugal

Ana Guerra<sup>1</sup>, Sílvia Ribeiro<sup>1</sup> & Francisco Petrucci-Fonseca<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Grupo Lobo – Associação para a Conservação do Lobo e do seu Ecossistema, Faculdade de Ciências, Universidade de Lisboa, 1749-016 Lisboa, Portugal

<sup>2</sup> cE3c – Centre for Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Changes, Faculdade de Ciências, Universidade de Lisboa, 1749-016 Lisboa, Portugal

## Abstract

Since 1996 Grupo Lobo promotes the use of Livestock Guarding Dogs (LGDs) throughout the Portuguese wolf range as an effective damage prevention measure. But the use of these dogs should also be promoted as a preventive action in advance of wolf recovery. Since 2012, in the scope of the compensatory measures of the impact of the Baixo-Sabor dam on the wolf population south of Bragança, 72 dogs, mostly of the Transmontano Mastiff breed, were donated. Dogs were placed in 46 flocks when 2-3 months old and regularly monitored. An agreement was signed with the owners ensuring the dogs were raised properly to become efficient guardians. Food and veterinary assistance was provided to the dogs, as well as support to the farmers regarding dog education, breeding, registries, and legal aspects. Since the intervention area is located in the limit of the wolf population, with low densities and unstable packs, predation level is uneven across the region, and is not a good criterion to evaluate all dogs. Thus adult dogs were evaluated according to other criteria based on behavioural analysis and owner satisfaction. Results confirm the good performance of the dogs, with >90% exhibiting good/excellent behaviours, and 88% being considered excellent (none bad) by farmers, who are mostly (93%) satisfied/very satisfied with their dogs. The occurrence of endemic diseases greatly limits dog survival and efficiency in the region. The mortality rate was 25% (n=18), mainly caused by road accidents (33%), disease (17%), and poisoning (11%), while some dogs disappeared (22%). Despite reduced wolf damage, farmers traditionally continue to use LGDs, stating they also prevent attacks from dogs and small predators, as well as theft of livestock and farm equipment, while keeping wild ungulates away, thus reducing damages to pastures and agriculture fields, and the risk of disease transmission to the livestock.

Poster

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