



## ANTIDOTO Project

A new strategy against the poisoning of large carnivores and necrophagous raptors



Habitat Directive

improving biodiversity

preservation  
techniques

management tools

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The ANTIDOTO project (meaning antidote), carried out in three European areas, the National Park of Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga (Italy), Andalusia and Aragon (Spain), had the aim of **promoting the conservation of large carnivores and necrophagous raptors** through the dissemination of innovative measures to prevent and combat the **illegal use of poison** applied to protect the domestic livestock. This is an illegal and unfair practice, widespread in Europe, which each year causes the death of a significant number of wild animals. **Animal carcasses and poisoned food** are left on the ground to defend the domestic livestock and the animals hunted by predators. Some of the affected species, both direct victims (such as large carnivores) or collateral victims (such as necrophagous raptors) of the poisoning, are very rare or endangered. These include the wolf, bear and many predatory birds such as the **red kite**, the **bearded vulture** and the **Egyptian vulture**. The practice of poisoning further aggravates their survival.

In this context, one of the key actions of the project was the training and employment of **Antivenin Dog Units (ADU)** consisting of forest operators or agents and trained dogs able to patrol the area and to identify any poisoned food or animal, suspected to be died due to poisoning.



### PROJECT PHASES

The project had three main lines of activity:

- **Employment of Antivenin Dog Units (ADU).** 3 ADUs have been created, two in the National Park of Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga and one in Aragon. The units carried out periodic inspections as a preventive measure and urgent inspections in case of discovery of pieces and carcasses suspected of being poisoned. Both in Italy and in Spain the actions of the units were accompanied by diagnosis made on the found food and carcasses, including analysis of the samples, necropsy of the dead animals suspected of poison ingestion and, when needed, laboratory tests.
- **Training of police personnel and veterinary staff.** It was an important activity since the recourse to appropriate protocols by the police and veterinary personnel when finding poisoned carcasses or food is essential to the success of subsequent decontamination and investigations.
- **Raising awareness of stakeholders and population in general** in order to prevent the use of poison and to make known the activity of protection of the territory carried out by the Antivenin Dog Units and the surveillance staff. In Italy a



specific campaign was carried out to promote the "**Strategy against the use of poison in Italy**", developed to provide a picture of the phenomenon and to propose appropriate preventive measures.

## PROJECT RESULTS

**To identify on sight poisoned carcasses and food in a natural environment is almost impossible, but with the activation of the Antivenin Dog Units of the Project ANTIDOTO** it was managed to put in place a very effective tool for deterrence from using poison as well as for land decontamination and prevention of deaths. **The trained dogs**, under the guidance of an expert operator, are able to **inspect by smelling large surfaces in a quick and efficient manner**, to recover the poisoned material and indicate elements come in contact with harmful substances. Therefore, the ADU may play a decisive role not only in preventing the death of many animals but also contributing to the police investigation.

The main results achieved can be reassumed as follows:

- **Activation of 2 Antivenin Dog Units (ADU) in the Park of Gran Sasso-Laga**, one composed of an operator of the park and 3 dogs and another formed by one unit of personnel of the State Forestry Corps and 2 dogs. Between August 2010 and March 2014 the ADUs performed **133 periodic and 76 urgent inspections**. 31 urgent inspections were carried out in other protected areas of the Abruzzo region or in areas adjacent to the park, where the use of poison is quite widespread. In 14 urgent cases, outside the project area, the ADUs identified some food, carcasses and other elements possibly relating to the investigations. Overall the ADUs found 35 poisoned food elements and 12 poisoned carcasses.

Thanks to the introduction of the ADUs **no more cases of poisoning have been registered in this area** in the last five years.

- **Activation of one Antivenin Dog Unit in Aragon**, composed of 1 operator and 5 dogs. Between October 2011 and December 2013 the Unit carried out **94 periodic and 62 urgent inspections**. In 59 cases possible circumstantial evidences were found, while in two inspections the poisoning was confirmed by laboratory analysis.
- Signing of a **memorandum of understanding with the State Forestry Corps** for the joined management of an Antivenin Dog Unit and for the cooperation in other activities of the ANTIDOTO Project.
- Development of an [Operational manual for the veterinary management of cases of suspected poisoning of the wild and domestic fauna](#) (versions in [Italian](#) and [Spanish languages](#)).
- Issue of the [Strategy against the use of poisons in Italy](#).
- In the Park of Gran Sasso-Laga several activities were implemented to disseminate the project results to different target groups, in particular a series of meetings with 8 livestock enterprises, 37 meetings with tour operators, and training activities involving 330 students were organized. In Andalusia a long and extensive outreach activity was carried out among the involved groups (hunters, breeders, hunting companies staff, etc...) with 805 meetings in the areas mostly interested by the use of poison and frequented by rare species of necrophagous raptors. In Aragon 37 meetings were organized in 31 different rural areas involving 622 persons, among which agents of the Nature Protection Service (SEPRONA) and game wardens.
- In Italy a wide **disclosure campaign** was organized on the issues of the ANTIDOTO Project obtaining a significant response. **560 persons**, mainly police corps staff and surveillance personnel of the regional and national parks as well as veterinarians etc ..., participated to the **5 events** (seminars and trainings), organized by the park, on the poisoning of the fauna. Other initiatives and occasions of outreach and training activities were used to encourage bodies and institutions to take care about the illegal use of poison, providing tools and strategies.
- The issues related to the illegal use of poison and its consequences on the wild fauna were discussed by the project staff in the frame of **9 seminars and 17 training courses** organized at Italian and European levels.



**Acronym**  
ANTIDOTO

**Number of reference**  
LIFE07 NAT/IT/000436

**Reference Programme**  
[LIFE](#)

**Beneficiary Coordinator**  
Ente Parco Nazionale del Gran Sasso e  
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**EU contribution**  
705.572,00

**Call Year**  
2007

**Start Year**  
2009

**End Year**  
2014

#### Beneficiary headquarters

Via del convento  
67010 Assergi AQ  
Italy

**Region**  
Abruzzo

#### Description

National Park of Gran Sasso and Monti  
della Laga