



EX-TRA Project

Improving the conditions for large carnivore conservation - Transfer of best practices



Habitat Directive

water habitats

improving biodiversity

renaturalisation

management tools

preservation techniques

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The EX-TRA project was carried out in 4 EU countries: Italy, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. The general objective of the project activity was the sharing of experiences for enhancing knowledge about the best forms of conservation of the wolf (*Canis lupus*) and bear (*Ursus arctos*) species. It was ideated as follow-up of the previous project LIFE COEX (www.life-coex.net) *Improving Coexistence of Large Carnivores and Agriculture in Europe* (LIFE04 NAT/IT/000144), implemented between 2004 and 2008.

The LIFE EX-TRA project was aimed at improving the know-how of the involved operators about crucial aspects of carnivore conservation and actively involving different stakeholders, creating a set of instruments which can be replicated in other geographical areas, thus transferring best practices.

The international character of the project represented an important added value since it allowed to fruitfully exchange experience in order to find appropriate solutions for a better coexistence with large carnivores.



OBJECTIVES

The specific project objectives were to:

- **transfer the best practices** and the lessons learnt to new countries;
- strengthen the cooperation with **stakeholders** in the field of large carnivore conservation;
- foster the use of **prevention tools** to counteract damages caused by large carnivores;
- provide the relevant authorities with necessary knowledge for **conflict management**;
- acquire the **necessary capacity for the management of conflicts** caused by habituated bears (defined also as problematic);
- provide the necessary know-how for the **control of stray dogs**;
- **improve the management of wild ungulates** representing the main prey of the wolf populations;
- **improve the attitudes of interest groups** towards the conservation of wolves and bears.

PROJECT PHASES

The main phases of the project activities were:

- **Preliminary analysis:** analysis of the opinions and expectations of the local interest groups aimed at involving them in a participatory management process;



- **Observation:** monitoring, during all project phases, of the damages caused by large carnivores to the local economic activities, and development of a **standard procedure** for the determination of damages allowing to identify and monitor at different complexity levels all conditions which can lead to conflicts;
- **Implementation:** farmers and breeders were provided with **prevention tools** to deal with the problems being created by large carnivores. In this phase a networking was created between dog breeders and cattle breeders to favor and foster the use of attack dogs;
- **Monitoring:** during the whole project duration large carnivore populations were monitored on the basis of a **protocol shared by all project partners**, in order to evaluate the extension of groups and their distribution on the territory. The wild ungulate populations (wild boar, deer, roe deer) were also monitored making specific actions of repopulation to increase the number and availability of wild prey in order to reduce pressure on domestic cattle;

Outreach and diffusion: actions were taken to raise public awareness about the importance of wolf and bear species' conservation, while parallel information campaigns were addressed to farmers and breeders to favor pacific coexistence with large carnivores. In view of this particular attention was given to the **experience exchange** among all participants, as one of the key components of the project.

PROJECT RESULTS

The LIFE EX-TRA project had a very **positive impact** on the wolf and bear species' conservation in the project areas producing, due to the introduced prevention measures and a solid involvement of the different interest groups in the decision-making processes, a **significant reduction** of damages to human activities. The improvement of relations between the interest groups and the local authorities was crucial for the implementation of an effective **conservation strategy** of the large carnivores, a procedure which can be applied also to other environmental problems.

The most important achievements were:

- **Dialogue and participation:** the LIFE EX-TRA project put particular attention to find a **compromise between the needs of the wildlife populations and human activities**. Thanks to an accurate dialogue between the competent authorities and local communities, the most urgent problems and the main interest groups concerned by wildlife presence were identified for each partner country. A total of **95 meetings** were kept, which formed integral part of the territorial and environmental governance process representing a **new methodology for sharing management choices**, which was then appreciated in all the involved countries. This has resulted in an **overall improvement of the relationships between interest groups and local authorities with positive effects on wolf and bear conservation**, which is expected to pass the boundaries of the project.
- **Monitoring of the species:** in the first year of the project a survey was carried out in Italy and Romania on the population density of wild ungulates, data which then served as basis for the successive management actions. In Italy, in the National Parks of "Gran Sasso" and "Monti Sibillini" **54 deers** were released, 20 of which were equipped with GPS radio-collars to allow the monitoring of their movements. In the same area, along 58 km of roads, several **optical devices were installed for preventing collisions between wild animals and vehicles**. In Romania **24 feeding points and 2 observing sites** were constructed. In addition, teams were organized to combat poaching, one of the major causes of wolf and bear mortality in this country and beyond. The information gained during the monitoring was stored in a database where damage data was linked to information on the presence and distribution of large carnivores, and a **GIS model** was developed to georeference the most conflictual areas where **to focus damage-prevention measures**. The database was implemented jointly by all the project beneficiaries and delivered to the relevant national authorities as an effective tool for future conflict prevention.
- **Training:** 10 training courses, addressed to veterinarians and local technicians, were organized to provide specific knowledge and expertise on practices **to ascertain the real causes of domestic cattle mortality and to recognize false predations**. These meetings were very useful for both the field staff involved in wildlife management and the staff of the public bodies involved in the compensation process, moreover it allowed to indirectly diminish possible conflict situations.
- **Dog exchange networks:** **local networks** for the exchange of **domestic cattle protection dogs** have been set up. Italy coordinated the exchange of **61 puppies among the breeders**; a breeding center for attack dogs was launched in Greece, information activities were carried out for cattle breeders and the exchange of 30 dogs between local farmers was promoted. In Romania, in collaboration with local dog breeders associations, an information campaign was held for shepherds on the use of protection dogs.
- **Bear Emergency Teams:** in all four countries **Bear Emergency Teams (BETs)** have been set up with the aim of effectively intervening and managing conflict situations between these mammals and human activities. The teams are still operational and have successfully dealt with **116 conflicts** in Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. In Italy teams have been activated only for precautionary reasons given that in the national parks where the project was implemented there is no



stable bear population.

- **Damage prevention:** in the National Park "Monti Sibillini" **15 electric fences** have been installed for the protection of domestic cattle. This intervention led to a **67% reduction of damages** to the concerned companies.

As consequence of this latter positive result and of the great appreciation of the action by the local breeders, the Park Authority decided to co-finance with proper funds the purchase of further 16 electric fences. In Romania local breeders have been assigned **6 pairs of puppies of domestic cattle protection dogs**. In Bulgaria **90 electric fences have been installed to protect cattle and hives**.

Finally, the "[Carcasse Analysis Manual](#)" has been developed as part of the project, an operational tool used to detect damage to cattle by predators.



Acronym
EX-TRA

Number of reference
LIFE 07 NAT/IT/000502

Reference Programme
[LIFE](#)

Beneficiary Coordinator
Ente Parco Nazionale del Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga (PNGSML)

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1.767.850,00

Call Year
2007

Start Year
2009

End Year
2013

Beneficiary headquarters

Via del convento
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Italy

Region
Abruzzo

Description

Italy. Ente Parco Nazionale del Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga e nel Parco Nazionale Monti Sibillini, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece.