



## INTERGROUP ON THE WELFARE & CONSERVATION OF ANIMALS

### Bureau Members

#### President:

Dan Jørgensen MEP

#### Vice-Presidents:

Kriton Arsenis MEP

Jacqueline Foster MEP

Nadja Hirsch MEP

Elisabeth Jeggle MEP

Jörg Leichtfried MEP

Kartika Liotard MEP

David Martin MEP

Cristiana Muscardini MEP

Sirpa Pietikäinen MEP

Raül Romeva i Rueda MEP

Daciana Sârbu MEP

Michèle Striffler MEP

Janusz Wojciechowski MEP

Andrea Zannoni MEP

#### Honorary President:

Carl Schlyter MEP

#### Honorary Secretary:

Marit Paulsen MEP

#### Secretariat:

Eurogroup for Animals

6, rue des Patriotes  
B- 1000 Brussels

T: +32-2 740 08 20

F: +32- 2 740 08 29

[www.animalwelfareintergroup.eu](http://www.animalwelfareintergroup.eu)

[info@eurogroupforanimals.org](mailto:info@eurogroupforanimals.org)

Established in 1983

# Report of the 295<sup>th</sup> Session

Thursday 13 June 2013, 10.00 - 11.00 hrs, Room LOW R3.1, EP Strasbourg

## I. LIVING WELL WITH WOLVES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

### The state of play, the problems and solutions

**Prof Luigi Boitani**, from the Department of Biology and Biotechnologies at the University of Rome, "la Sapienza", Italy, gave a presentation about the state of play of wolf populations in the European Union.

All the data he presented come from a IUCN specialist group called "[the Large Carnivores Initiative for Europe](#)". This group which is headed by Prof Boitani has as vision "to maintain and restore, in coexistence with people, viable populations of large carnivores as an integral part of ecosystems and landscapes across Europe".

The history of wolf extermination in Europe is an old one. The British Islands lost as first all their wolves in 1773. At the end of the 1960s and 70s very few wolves were left across Europe. In 2006 LCIE specialist group has carried out a first survey which showed a significant increase of wolves across many parts of Europe. The latest survey was completed at the end of last year and was presented early this year.

The main range areas of wolves in the European Union.

- North West Spain and Northern Portugal (about 2500 wolves) and a very small area in the Sierra Morena.
- The Apennines (about 800 wolves) in Italy and the Western Alps (about 200 wolves)
- The Dinaric Mountains from Slovenia down to Greece with about 5000 animals
- The big area of the Carpathian mountains in Romania and northern Bulgaria and upper North in Slovakia
- Poland and the Baltic countries about 1000 animals
- In Finland there are few wolves and they are decreasing unfortunately
- Sweden and Norway. There were no populations in the 1960 s and then a few animals came in through Finland. There are a lot of issues for the conservation of this small population. The Scandinavian population is though increasing substantially.

In terms of numbers the situation is encouraging. Basically all European populations are either stable or increasing. There are only two areas where the wolf populations are decreasing: In the Sierra Morena the populations have dropped to one pack and the species will probably disappear soon.

Finland has decreasing wolf populations due to poaching which is a major problem.

All this information can be retrieved on the website [www.lcie.org](http://www.lcie.org) but also on the Commission website because this project has been carried out for the European Commission.

The quality of data across Europe varies a lot. Very good data about demographic trends and geographic range extents exist for the Western Alps in France in Piedmont thanks to the fantastic monitoring programme that the region of Piedmont has been running for ten years.

This has allowed publishing in a scientific journal a model for the best habitat for wolves in the Alps. There is still a lot of room for improving the wolf populations in the Alps.

Data of wolf very small wolf populations exist also for Germany, the Netherlands and in Denmark. The Dutch have already worked out a wolf action plan.

### Dispersal

Dispersal is the behaviour of individual young animals to leave the pack and to find a new mate and new territories. This is typical for all mammals. It is extremely important to understand these dynamics. Expansions of Iberian wolves are directed northwards, in Slovakia they are directed southwards, in Poland westwards.

### The legal protection of wolves in Europe

The wolf is protected by the Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, CITES, and by national laws. Lack of legal protection is therefore not a concern.

### Why are the wolves expanding in Europe?

There are concurrent reasons for the renewed expansion of the species. First of all, **wolves move over very long distances**. When talking to local people they refuse to understand this. The most common comment when wolves appear in a new area is, that somebody released them which is obviously a wrong assumption. As an example, a wolf from the Apennines which was collared for monitoring was spotted in Southern France. Wolves can cross the continent without major difficulties. Good data exist about this dispersal thanks to radio tracking or genetic identification. Furthermore, **wolves can eat everything**. They are extremely flexible. There is no need for a specific prey to sustain them.

### Is the management of wolves a success in Europe?

Prof Boitani's answer was no. The renewed expansion of wolves in Europe during the last decades has happened for reasons beyond a specific planning. So we just have to manage a process that is going on without us planning for it.

There are still a number of open issues:

1. **The fragmentation of management policies**. Despite the Habitats Directive, the Bern- and the Bonn Convention the wolf is still managed at local level. What is needed is to have a **population approach**. Spain is a good example. Galicia, Asturias and Leon do not collaborate on a common management plan and have different policies. The same happens between Spain and Portugal. This is a major issue.
2. **Enforcement is still very weak**. Poaching is wide spread all over Europe and there is a general laissez-faire concerning the management of the species. The wolf is often just protected on paper.
3. **Conflicts with livestock** is the key issue. Wolves are very happy to kill whatever they find, they are predators. We tried to quantify this conflict which is increasing.  
All damage done by wolves in Europe is estimated at 8 million euros. For the European Union, single Member States or Regions 8 million Euros is not very much but when it comes to local economies then it can be a lot. Even one sheep can become a big loss. There are a number of ways to handle the conflict.

### Livestock protection

Livestock protection is based on four types of actions that must be applied in concert:

1. **Prevent the damage**: Big shepherd dogs are not afraid of standing in front of a wolf attack. Electric fences are another way of protecting the herds.
2. **Mitigation**: some kind of compensation for people who have losses in their herd. Most European countries foresee compensations.
3. **Some species control**. In areas where wolf populations are high we should not be afraid at killing some of the wolves if conservation is ensured.
4. **Research and monitoring**

There is no single recipe to manage the wolf-man interface. Each case is a different one. A specific solution must be found for each area that is adapted to the given parameters.

The **set-aside programme of the CAP** which has been introduced in 1992 has been beneficial for carnivores allowing the general progression of wild prey that created new sources of subsistence.

### Hybridisation between wolves and dogs

Cross breeding between wolves and dogs has been observed in several parts of Europe like in Italy, Finland, Estonia, Germany, Serbia or Croatia. This is mainly due to feral dogs that live in the wild and get in close contact with wolves. Offspring are hybrids that are neither a wolf nor a dog. This is an issue which needs to be solved to protect the wolf as a species. Feral dogs should be removed in range areas of the wolf.

## CONCLUSIONS

The comprehensive legislative framework of the Habitats Directive, the Bern and Bonn Conventions is a good umbrella for the protection of wild species in Europe. Management plans have remained though at national or regional level. **There is a need to move to a cross boarder population approach.** The European Commission supports this approach and has approved guidelines for population management plans for large carnivores in Europe. They have been produced by the IUCN specialist group in 2007 and have become a formal document of the European Commission in 2008. The guidelines call for trans-boundary management and for a trans-boundary action plan.

The European Commission has also approved three pilot projects in three areas for implementing actions in the field.

### What future for wolves?

The real issue is not about the number of wolves in Europe but about the level of wolf–human conflict that can be tolerated and where. How much money are Europeans ready to pay and how much conflict are they ready to tolerate? On top of the ecological carrying capacity, the economic and the social carrying capacity defined by the cost of conflict needs to be considered. This has an implication that is not easily accepted by all wolf lovers. It implies that in some cases wolves must be removed. Coexistence means compromise.

## II. THE SITUATION IN POLAND

**Małgorzata Czyżewska** from the General Directorate of the Polish State Forests Poland reported that still in the 1950s wolves were considered as a pest. Hunters were highly remunerated for killing them. Then the trend reversed and in 1998 the wolf was protected under law on the whole area of Poland. Nowadays EU legislation is implemented in national law. The supervising organ for nature conservation issues is the **Polish General Directorate for Environmental Protection**. This is the authority which is also vested with the task of managing the wolves on the Polish territory. It is also liable for any losses incurred by the presence of wolves. In 2011 the State treasury had to pay 123.00 Euros for mitigations.

The overall number of wolves in Poland is estimated at about 850 individuals. There is a migration trend to the west of Poland. The East and South East remain though the areas with the highest population density of wolves.

20-24% of the Polish Territory can be considered as a good habitat for wolves. In Western Poland it has been evaluated that the habitats could carry much more wolves than are currently living there.

Concerning the monitoring photo traps are used allowing to get acquainted with the customary behaviour of wolves and their range areas. There is also monitoring of the major routes they take and inventories are carried out about scent marking and defecation. This allows having more information about the gene pool. Sometimes, a few wolves are also collared to better observe their movements.

**A major benefit** of the presence of wolves is that they contribute to reduce the populations of deer. This allows a better renewal of forest trees. They also contribute to the reinvigoration of other species as generally only weak individuals become prey of wolves.

**The main disadvantage** of the wolf presence is the conflict with livestock farmers. To avoid this, shepherds are used to protect the herds from wolves.

A problem is still the generally negative image the wolf in the public.

There is still a lack of clarity concerning the genetic identification of the Polish wolf populations. Further research has still to be carried out.

The protection of wolves is co-financed by the European Union through LIFE +. The Polish authorities collaborate as well with research institutions like the Polish Academy of Sciences. NGOs like WOLF and the WWF are as well included in the conservation projects.

## III. QUESTIONS AND DEBATE

**Bill Newton Dunn (ALDE, UK)** asked if wolves carry rabies.

**Prof Boitani** confirmed that they can be vectors of rabies. However, the species which is the most responsible for the spreading of rabies are foxes. Their population densities are also much higher.

**Andrea Zanoni (ALDE, IT)** reported to have recently written a letter to the Italian Ministry for Environment regarding the poaching of wolves in the national Park of the Abruzzi. He follows this issue with the help of some Italian NGOs.

He inquired whether it would be worth releasing wolves from the Tosco-Emilian Apennines in the Cansiglio Forest in Veneto where deer populations are too high. This could possibly contribute to recreate an ecological balance. Has he also wanted to know if there have been any precedents of reintroduction and if such a project could this be founded by the LIFE programme.

**Prof Boitani** replied that there have never been wolf reintroductions in Europe. In North America the wolf has been successfully reintroduced in the Yellowstone park and attempts have been made as well in Mexico. He warned though against the reintroduction of wolves in new areas as it is a highly political issue and it is difficult to estimate the consequences.

**Sirpa Pietikäinen (EPP, FI)** was ashamed about the decreasing figures of wolf populations in Finland. Traditional scare stories have contributed a lot to the negative image of the wolf in Finland and also elsewhere.

She inquired what the European Parliament could do to support the Commission's guidelines for the protection of wolves. She was very interested in the population based approach taken the Commission and suggested that the Intergroup should send a letter to the relevant Finnish authorities informing about the outcomes of the Intergroup meeting. The letter should also urge them to improve their management plan for the wolf according to the guidelines adopted by the European Commission.

**Prof Boitani** replied that the European Parliament could insist on a better collaboration with Russia concerning the protection of wolves. This would be very helpful for the protection of wolves in Finland. A population approach in the management of wolves would require the collaboration with the Karelian authorities.

**Malgorzata Czezcawska** replied that we should stop telling horror stories about wolves. We should rather tell our children that it is a species worth knowing.

**Isabella Lövin (Greens/EFA, SE):** was amazed about the numbers of wolves that can live in the Apennines and in Northern Spain. In 2009, the Swedish Parliament took the decision to allow a top number of 210 wolves in the entire country. She wondered if it was a wise decision considering the large extensions of woodlands in Sweden that could be a good habitat for a larger number of wolves. She wanted to have more information about the yearly license hunt of wolves on grounds of genetic cleaning. These hunters are claiming that they are only shooting wolves which inbreed. Furthermore, she inquired about the situation of wolves in Russia.

**Prof Boitani** ignored whether a maximum of 210 wolves is the right number for Sweden. He said to have the highest respect for the Swedish authorities and scientists because they have done outstanding work in rescuing Sweden's bear populations. Not so long ago, the country's bears had dropped to less than 100 and now the number is at 3500 animals. Rescuing the wolf is different. It is a political issue. He respected the Swedish Parliament's decision of having not more than 210 wolves in Sweden and was quite sure that it was just a preliminary step. Soon, a higher number of wolves will be allowed in Sweden. The big issue in Sweden is the lack of collaboration with the Norwegians. Norway has just 21 wolves and whenever wolves come in from Sweden they are killed. They rely on the Swedes to maintain a viable wolf population in Scandinavia.

Concerning the inbreeding the researchers from the Grimsö Wildlife Research Station have done a fantastic report that explains clearly what should be done. There should be an enrichment of the genetic pool. This could be done with wolves from Karelia but so far it has not been done for political reasons.

**Anna Rosbach (ECR, DK)** agreed that the use of shepherd dogs is a very efficient way of keeping wolves away from livestock. She had a question concerning the hybridisation of wolves and dogs and wondered whether a sterilisation programme of feral and stray dogs could contribute to avoid cross breeding. She inquired if this was an issue where the EU could intervene. It must not always be wolves who kill livestock, sometimes it also feral dogs are responsible.

**Prof Boitani** replied that last year, they captured a so-called wolf in the Tosco-Emilian Apennines which was then identified as a Czechoslovakian wolfdog, a breed which is sold all over Europe. It looks like a wolf but is not one. They create damage but the wolf takes the blame. The sterilisation of feral or stray dogs would solve half of the problem but it will not solve the impact on livestock as neutered dogs still kill. The dog has been bred by humans to be with humans and it should be under the control of humans. So, feral pets should not be tolerated in the wild. He did not mean to kill them but they should be removed from the wild where they cause damage and reproduce.