

Wolf and Man: Partners in Survivorship

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Abstract

Damage caused to livestock is one reason why persecution of large carnivores has persisted for centuries, extirpating them from big parts of their distribution areas or reducing them to small, remnant populations. Traditional damage prevention methods have disappeared and wolf predation on unprotected agricultural facilities brings a high incidence of damage for farmers. Reducing these carnivore-livestock conflicts is a prerequisite for successfully conserving a carnivore species like the wolf.

The use of LGD is one of the most ancient and effective methods for protecting livestock against the attacks of predators. The habit to use this kind of dogs has been lost. High quality LGD of a proper breed and adequately trained to protect the livestock without being aggressive towards people can be a very effective and relatively cheap protection method. The donation of good LGD to livestock breeders who are exposed to carnivore depredation can be a tool to encourage the use and dissemination of such a prevention method.

The project area coincides with the wolf distribution area south of Douro River and the central area of the northern wolf range. The area still supports a rich wildlife community. Low human density and a high percentage of old people characterize this area. The main activities are linked to agriculture, forestry and livestock breeding mainly sheep and goats.

Pups of livestock guarding dog will be donated to interested shepherds selected considering the amount of damage suffered and who live in the project area. The applications of farmers who are interested in receiving the dogs will be evaluated and a contract signed between the Grupo Lobo and the dog beneficiary. Whenever possible a pair of dogs will be provided to each shepherd, with the obligation that in return he will provide the new generation of puppies to other eligible shepherds free of charge. In the future the selling of pups from the given dogs can be a new source of income to shepherds. Through this process, a network of shepherds-breeders will be created in the region, facilitating the spread of suitable guard dogs. The project personnel will accurately brief the farmers on how to train the dogs, and on the necessary administrative and veterinary procedures. Donated dogs will be monitored concerning their effectiveness. The data from holdings with donated livestock guarding dogs will be compared against data from holdings with no dogs, and holdings with dogs from other areas.

Revenge killing by shepherds who have suffered livestock damages is one of the main reasons of wolf human-caused mortality. This is the result of the increase of human – large carnivore conflict due to inadequate use of damage prevention measures. Past experience has shown that such preventive measure can smooth such conflict, resulting in decreased killing rates of wolves. This action will assist both in the conservation of the method, as well as that of ancient and effective breeds of guard dogs.