



## Connecting the Iberian wolf in Portugal - Project Lobo na Raia



Iberian wolf caught by camera trap during monitoring

Photo: Grupo Lobo/Zoo Logical

The Iberian wolf (*Canis lupus signatus*), once a common species along the Portuguese border in the region south of the River Douro, has been gradually disappearing since the 1970s. Direct persecution, habitat loss and loss of wild prey caused a drastic reduction in numbers, approaching the threshold of local extinction. Recent population monitoring studies have confirmed the current precarious status of the wolf, with continued persecution, disturbance and dwindling prey remaining significant threats.

Genetic data has confirmed the barrier effect of the River Douro, which isolates two distinct wolf nuclei: a stable population in the north, and a vulnerable and isolated population in the south. Connectivity between different population groups is therefore essential to recover fragmented wolf populations and to ensure their long term viability. Given its location, the Portuguese border region

south of the River Douro can act as a bridge between these population clusters.

The goals of the Lobo na Raia project are: to identify wolf presence in the study area; assess the applicability of different non-invasive methods of population monitoring; identify the main threats to wolves in the region, and apply direct and secondary conservation measures to promote population recovery.

The border region south of the River Douro is typically Mediterranean, including an abundance of flora species such as holm Oak (*Quercus ilex*), and gum rockrose (*Cistus ladanifer*), and emblematic endangered fauna including the Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) and the black stork (*Ciconia nigra*). This semi-wild region consists mainly of patches of agricultural land mixed with forested areas and small villages. It



The importance of wolf population connectivity in the region south of the Douro river Grupo Lobo/Zoo Logical

covers two main protected areas - Malcata Natural Reserve and the International Douro River Natural Park; one Natura 2000 site; and one private natural reserve - Faia Brava. It is a low human density region where farming and livestock husbandry remain the primary economic activity. It is included in the “Western Iberia” region covered by the Rewilding Europe programme.

Wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) density is high all over the

area, prevailing over the other ungulate present - the shy roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) that hides among the oak tree (*Quercus pyrenaica*) clusters spread throughout the region. The red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and the alpine ibex (*Capra ibex*), are now unfortunately locally extinct.

A recent increase in wolf numbers in the region led to an inevitable rise in the number of attacks on livestock, exacerbated by the lack of preventive

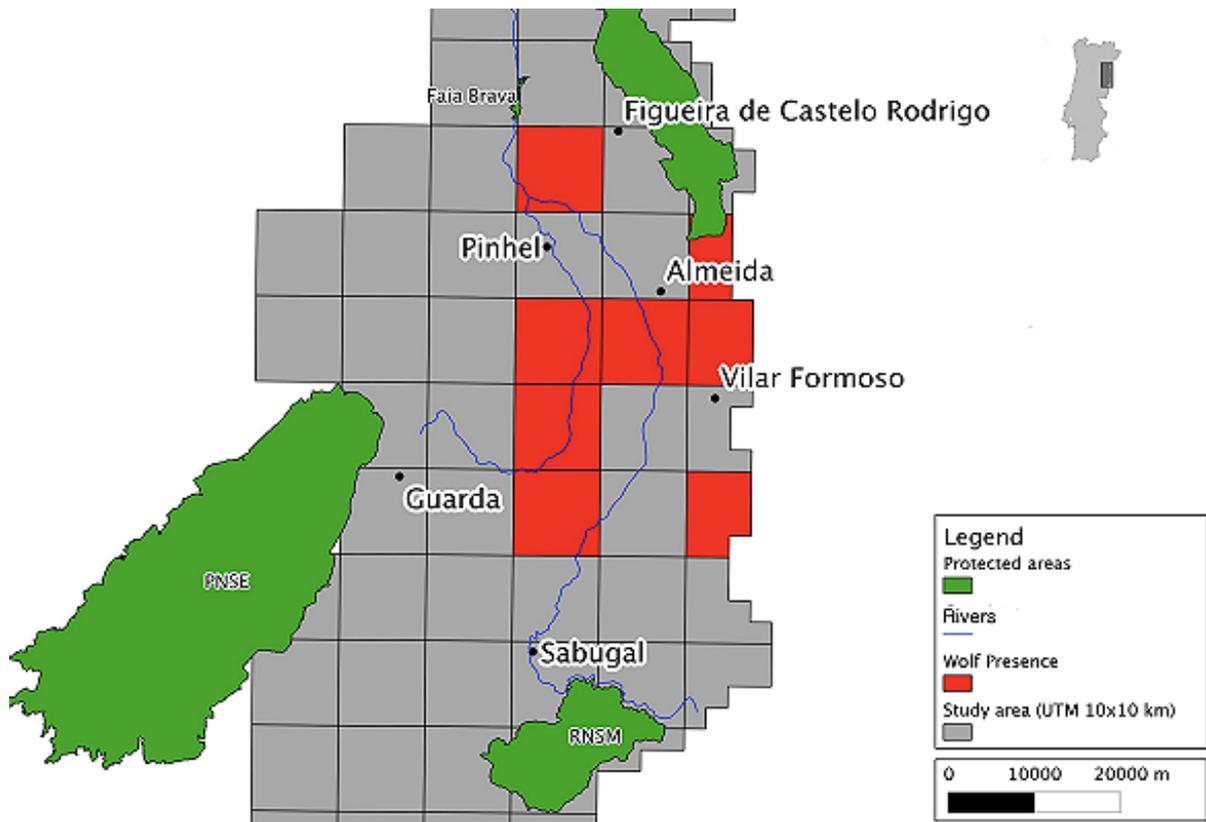


Bushnell Camera Name 35°F1°C

02-28-2013 19:41:00

Wild boar in the study area

Photo: Grupo Lobo/Zoo Logical



Wolf presence in the region south of the river Douro in Portugal

Grupo Lobo/ Zoological

measures such as guardian dogs or fenced husbandry, no longer used due to the disappearance of local “wolf culture” since the decline of wolf numbers in the region. Since 2011 the project has worked in close collaboration with the National Conservation Institute in order to assess the effects of wolf presence on reported damages.

numbers, including very low wolf density, large areas of private property areas where access was not granted and therefore impossible to survey, presence of stray dogs, and high vulture abundance (which reduces detection of wolf kills, as the vultures quickly clean up the evidence).

The methods used during research and monitoring focused on non-invasive techniques such as photo trapping, genetic analysis of scats and biological samples from wolf kills (scats, hair and saliva). Since 2011, the project has confirmed wolf presence on 17 occasions, and identified four males, three females and one pack .



Genetic sampling from wolf kill **Photo:** Grupo Lobo/Zoo Logical

Results of monitoring show an increased wolf presence through the region that is most likely indicative of a natural recolonisation process (but may be down to the success of new methods of monitoring such as genetic analysis and photo trapping in more accurately estimating wolf presence).

The project has faced challenges in monitoring wolf



Iberian wolf in the study area

**Photo:** Grupo Lobo/Zoo Logical

In November 2012, Grupo Lobo helped set up the Med Wolf project under the EU LIFE initiative, (<http://www.medwolf.eu>), which aims to continue the monitoring started by Project Lobo Na Raia, and identify and promote ecological corridors to allow movement of wolves between fragmented populations in the whole Mediterranean region.

The project also aims to mitigate the impact of predation on livestock and address wolf conflict through the donation of livestock guarding dogs and electric fences. A public awareness campaign will be initiated and strategies and a study of public attitudes towards the wolf carried out.

The Lobo Na Raia and Life Med Wolf projects have identified major conservation challenges and future needs to ensure long-term survival of this important wolf population, including monitoring of wild prey and developing a recovery strategy for these species, and determining the true impact of

poaching on wolf numbers and working to prevent illegal killing.

The analysis of data on wolf behavioural ecology obtained through the use of GPS telemetry will be fundamental to understanding the variables that affect and hinder the establishment of a stable wolf population in this region, and help set conservation goals for the future.

During field work, researchers discovered a medieval wolf trap, “Curral de Lobos”, the first of its kind to be found in the region south of the Douro. These stone constructions - “fojos” - are strong reminders of the ancient wolf presence in this region and symbolize centuries of troubled relations between humans and wolves.

*Thanks to Sara Pinto and Duarte Pereira for the article and graphics.*



---

## How you can help

Wolves and Humans has so far contributed €1,000 to fieldwork for Project Lobo na Raia\*. Please help increase our support by making a donation to Project Lobo na Raia.

You can donate by filling in the donation form enclosed with this newsletter and returning it with your payment, or you can go to the Wolves and

Humans website and click on the Make a Donation button. Watch out in future issues of the WOLVES AND HUMANS newsletter for more news about this vital project for Iberian wolves.

\*Main funder: Fundação Vox Populi

# Is wolf hunting in Slovakia affecting neighbouring countries?

There have been protests in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, and campaigns on social media websites, over a quota of 130 wolves set by the Slovak Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, for the 2012/13 hunting season, which started on 1<sup>st</sup> November and ended on 15<sup>th</sup> January. The season was shorter than in previous years, when quotas of 120-150 wolves were set with a season between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 31<sup>st</sup> January. In recent years quotas have been met, and the 2011/12 quota of 120 was exceeded by 15%, which hunters claim is evidence that there are abundant wolves in Slovak forests.

The Slovak Wildlife Society's Wolf Census Project, supported by Wolves and Humans, has found that 40% of the 50 or so wolf packs in Slovakia have territories crossing the borders with neighbouring countries, particularly Poland, where wolves are fully protected all year round. There is evidence that some wolves, which den and raise pups in Poland, have been shot when they cross into Slovakia. Around 27 Polish wolves are believed to have been killed in Slovakia in the 2010/2011 season. Hunting could also be affecting the small wolf population in the eastern Czech Republic, which may be decreasing in numbers, and wolves in Hungary, where the species has returned to highland areas close to the border with Slovakia since the 1980s.

Following an official request from the Polish government to the Slovak Environment Ministry for a ban on hunting within 23 kilometres of the border to protect Polish wolves, a working group was set up, and preliminary agreement has been reached on an exclusion zone, as well as a 46 kilometre zone of close co-operation and exchange of data on both sides of the border.

In 2011 and 2012 questions were raised in the European Parliament about Slovakia's management of wolves, and the Czech branch of Friends of the

Earth wrote a formal letter of complaint, but according to the authorities, the wolf in Slovakia has favourable conservation status and therefore the hunting season complies with the provisions of Annex V of the EU Habitats Directive, under which the wolf is listed in Slovakia, which allows "taking in the wild while maintaining the population at a favourable conservation status".

Robin Rigg of the Slovak Wildlife Society has emphasised the need for improved knowledge about wolf numbers in Slovakia; estimates vary widely from less than 150 after the winter hunting season, to over 2,000 according to statistics compiled from hunting statistics, as well as research into the effects of hunting on wolf populations.



Slovak hunters with dead wolves

Photo: Unknown

---

## Make a donation

To support the Slovak Wolf Census project, which aims to accurately estimate wolf numbers using objective, scientific methods, use the donation form in this newsletter, or visit [www.wolvesandhumans.org](http://www.wolvesandhumans.org) and click on the Donate link

# Who is more the problem in Switzerland? Wolves, bears or humans?

by James Langridge

*James Langridge is originally from the UK but has lived in Switzerland for 8 years, where he enjoys the outdoors through long distance running and cycling. He has a passion for wolves and other large predators; this is his personal perspective on their return to his adopted country.*

The number of wolves in Switzerland is rather uncertain and not well publicised, but according to certain internet sites, it is under ten. Northern Italy has around 500 wolves, which of course sometimes cross the border. Once sighted, they immediately hit the headlines of the tabloid newspapers. Generally the reports tend to scare-mongering and are written in a negative light, even though there are a huge amount of Swiss internet forums with support for the wolf and the bear. Bear sightings attract even more attention, and once the stories start in the papers, there is a sense of inevitability that at there will not be a happy ending.

Naturally, the politics of large predators in Switzerland (which also includes the lynx) are dominated by animal husbandry unions, most notably the sheep herding community. The intention is generally positive; to find some way to coexist, but lobbying from those who have vested financial interests generally lean in the other direction, to the detriment of wildlife.

In May 2012 a new initiative was established for large predators in Switzerland. Here are some examples of the statements gathered during this process (translated from German):

*“This collective document will help us in the future to deal with conflicts constructively. Breeders and keepers are ready to take into consideration any reasonable measures in protecting their herds in order to allow the coexistence of livestock and large predators”.*



Photo: Angelo Gandolfi

*“The policy allows for a lot compromise: but discussing solutions either in the field or at the table would bring the wolf more benefit than just the judicial proceedings alone”.*

*“Lynx and wolves are again today just as native to our fauna as deer and other game. A sustainable cull with the presence of large predators is possible”.*

In basic terms, the wolf is ‘permitted’ to kill up to 30 sheep or so before the authorities allow it to be hunted. However, the government does not appear to have any real commitment to prevention of damage by large predators, stating that employing shepherds or livestock guarding dogs is too expensive. Nevertheless, the wolf is allegedly growing in numbers and the first small pack is being closely monitored for litters. I cross my fingers; if only wolves could be vegetarian or sheep were less appetising.

Switzerland has no permanent brown bear population. Occasional bears crossing from neighbouring countries into Switzerland are assigned sterile numbers once they are identified; the most recent being M13 and M14, who were brothers. The reaction in the press is excitement; ‘how wonderful, the bear is back in Switzerland’. But over time, the more the bear behaves like a bear the less favourably they are portrayed. M14 was killed by a car in 2012, leaving his two year old sibling in the limelight. In 2012 M13 killed around 33 livestock and plundered beehives, causing damage costing around 20,000 Swiss francs. During this time he also miraculously survived being hit by a train.

M13 began his hibernation in late November, waking again in February this year. Once again the stories and scare-mongering began, even including one claim by a teenage girl that she had been stalked by him. This story probably contributed to his downfall and he was shot on the 19<sup>th</sup> February after entering a village in Val Poschiavo, apparently in search of food. Food is scarce at that time of year, and there are no real provisions for protecting garbage, small livestock etc; what did the authorities expect to happen? But I doubt he

had an appetite for humans. The killing has been widely criticised in the media, with claims that the government has not done enough to deter the three year old bear from approaching settlements. M13 had only spent around a year in Switzerland.

The press use the description ‘problem bear’ (problembär) when reporting these incidents. Surely it is ‘problem-humans’, who leave rubbish and foodstuffs in places where bears can easily get to them, that we should be more concerned about? Other famous (or should I say infamous) bears in Switzerland in the last ten years include JJ1, who also wandered across the border from Italy, but spent most of his time in the German/Austrian border regions. He made the headlines for being a ‘problembär’, even though he was the first bear to have entered Germany for many years. As with M13, a ‘Wanted’ poster was published for JJ1 after he caused damage to beehives and entered villages, and he was eventually shot. You can still see him if you wish; he is stuffed and on display in a museum in Germany, but no longer such a ‘problem’.

I love Switzerland, the quality of life is incredible and the nature is well managed and in theory there is sufficient funding to improve large predator management. There are even free wildlife parks where you can view bears and wolves... in captivity of course. The capital Bern is famous for its historical bear pit, which thankfully has been recently renovated - it was like something out of the Victorian age, with the bears showing exaggerated repetitive head-swaying behaviour of severe boredom. They were moderately entertained in November 2005 when a mentally unstable man jumped into the enclosure and was attacked. Who was the ‘problem’ in this case?

Hopefully the wolf population in Switzerland will grow, and more bears will cross the borders and perhaps establish a permanent presence here. We can only hope that investment in proactive conservation of wolves and bears will improve and we can find a workable way to live with these predators without problems.

White Dog Update:

## Electric fencing proving an effective solution

The first electric fences installed using money from the White Dog Fund, raised by you, are now entering their fifth year of use protecting beehives and livestock in Slovakia, and so far have a 100% record of preventing damage.

A remote camera provided by Wolves and Humans recently photographed a bear close to beehives in

the Liptov region of Slovakia which are protected by electric fencing generously donated by Hotline Electric Fencing of Devon, England. The bear passed close to the hives, but did not get past the fence and caused no damage. This fence has been in place since May 2012 and has been effective in repelling bears, which regularly raid apiaries in search of honey and bee larvae.



Photo: SWS

---

## Artist Jane Lee McCracken donates profits from limited edition print to Wolves and Humans

Jane Lee McCracken produces incredibly detailed biro drawings inspired by childhood memories, fairytales, eastern Europe and forests, as well themes of loss due to conflict, disasters and environmental destruction.

Jane has kindly agreed to donate 65% of the profits from sales of her Limited Edition Giclee Print 'Lily' (opposite) to the Wolves and Humans Foundation. The print, which measures 42cm x 30cm, costs £50, and can be purchased from her website [www.janeleemccracken.co.uk](http://www.janeleemccracken.co.uk), or contact her on: 07931 586805.



Update:

## Sweden wolf cull halted

A new wolf cull in Sweden has been halted after environmental groups appealed to the Administrative Court, but not before three wolves were killed.

Following speculation that the controversial wolf cull in Sweden would be resumed, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced at the end of January that a limited hunt of 16 wolves would be allowed between 31<sup>st</sup> January and 20<sup>th</sup> February.

The hunt was described by the EPA as a “*selective and targeted hunt of inbred wolves to reduce inbreeding and achieve a long-term viable wolf population*”, with a quota of 16 wolves in eight territories in the counties of Värmland, Dalarna, Örebro and Västmanland. Two wolves were permitted to be killed each of the territories, described as “the most inbred areas”. The cull aimed to remove one alpha wolf from each pack in

the hope that it would be replaced by a wolf with “less inbreeding”. The EPA plans further genetic enhancement of the wolf population by releasing unrelated wolves, possibly pups born in zoos.

According to genetic research, the current population of around 270 wolves in Sweden is descended from just five individuals, after declining to near extinction in the early 1980s.

The first wolf was shot on 2nd February near Hedby preserve, in Örebro, central Sweden, and two more wolves were killed before the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, WWF, and the Swedish Predator Association successfully obtained an injunction at the Administrative Court of Appeal in Stockholm to stop the hunt, claiming that it breached both EU law and Swedish hunting regulations. This was upheld by the Supreme Administrative Court on 12<sup>th</sup> February, effectively ending the cull for this season.

### Editorial



Wolves and Humans is returning to its roots in 2013 with support for an important project in Portugal, aiming to improve connectivity between fragmented populations of wolves on both sides of the border with Spain. Wolves and Humans' predecessor, the Wolf Society of Great Britain, raised funds for the Iberian Wolf Recovery Centre near Lisbon, and current Wolves and Humans director Richard Morley spent time as site manager there, so the Iberian wolf is close to our heart. We hope to bring you news later in the Spring of an exciting new collaboration to help Iberian wolves - watch this space.

Looking to the present and future, recent protests against wolf hunting in Slovakia and Sweden have taken place largely online, through websites such

as Facebook and Twitter. The development of social networking sites, together with photo-sharing applications such as Instagram and online petition sites, means information can be can now be widely circulated almost as it happens, and a wide sector of society has the opportunity to comment. We get to hear about each wolf that is shot, and in some cases graphic photographs are uploaded within hours - something which can bring home the reality of the situation in a much more powerful way than a magazine article months after the event.

Whilst care needs to be taken to ensure that information available on the internet is accurate and is not misrepresented, it may prove to be an important tool for future public participation in management of wolves and other large carnivores.



## SLOVENIA HOSTS WOLF CONFERENCE

An international wolf conference; “Wolf Conservation in Human Dominated Landscapes”, hosted by the LIFE+ Slowolf project, will be held in Postojna, Slovenia, between 25-27 September 2013. Aimed at wolf researchers, experts and managers, as well as students with interests in wildlife management and conservation, the conference will cover wolf socio-biology and ecology, population monitoring, genetics and molecular ecology, conflict mitigation and resolution and human attitudes, and will include workshops on using data collected by members of the public in wolf population monitoring, encouraging and rewarding use of damage prevention measures, and the pros and cons of hunting as a conservation tool. There will also be as a fieldtrip to wolf habitat.

The aim of the conference is to share knowledge and improve co-operation at European and international level to promote the transition from management of wolves within individual countries to population level management, increasing effectiveness of conservation. The conference will be in English and registration is free. For more information visit <http://www.volkovi.si>

## FARMERS WANT RIGHT TO SHOOT WOLVES IN GERMANY

As wolves continue their successful recolonisation of Germany, farmers and livestock owners are calling for the right to shoot them if they stray outside protected parks and reserves or military land and threaten livestock.

The state government in Brandenburg, where the majority of Germany’s 160 or so wolves live, currently pays compensation for confirmed losses to wolves, and provides fund for training livestock

guarding dogs. Some farmers have complained that it has taken a year to receive any money. Wolves are fully protected under German law, but there is evidence that they are being illegally shot and run down on fenced forest roads.

## GOOD NEWS FOR WASHINGTON'S WOLVES

According to figures from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, a survey of wolf numbers shows the population in the US state has doubled in the last year, from 27 wolves in five packs and three breeding pairs in 2011, to 51 wolves in nine packs at the end of 2012. The actual number may be even higher, as the survey focused on evidence of reproduction, and it is likely there are lone wolves, or wolves that do not den in the state but whose territory crosses the state line.

Wolves in Washington are fully protected under the Endangered Species Act, but will be eligible for delisting once 15 breeding pairs are recorded for three consecutive years in three designated wolf recovery areas of the state. The wolf was not reintroduced in Washington, but arrived naturally from Canada and neighbouring states.



**Wolves and Humans** is the newsletter of the Wolves and Humans Foundation. *However, the views expressed in articles do not necessarily reflect those of the Foundation.* Any queries, letters or articles for publication should be sent to:

**Wolves and Humans, 2 Blackrod Cottages,  
Compton Durville, South Petherton,  
Somerset, TA13 5EX,  
United Kingdom.**

t: +44 (0)1460 242593

e: [info@wolvesandhumans.org](mailto:info@wolvesandhumans.org)

w: [www.wolvesandhumans.org](http://www.wolvesandhumans.org)

Registered charity no: 1111289

Printed on 100% recycled paper

