

THE MEDIALOUP PROJECT GOES TO SWEDEN

Following the first Italian workshop, the second workshop of the project hosted representatives from the French departmental (FDC) and national (FNC) hunting federations', the Louvèterie, Ministry of Ecology and FACE on 20 June at the Swedish Hunters' Association. Specialists from different networks (the national research center "Grimsö", the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the National Center for Wildlife Damage Monitoring, WWF, the Swedish Association for Hunting and Wildlife, the Federation of Swedish Farmers, Värmland County) shared their experiences in knowledge, management, and monitoring of this large carnivore.

After having disappeared for nearly twenty years, the wolf arrived from Russia, 800km away in the early 80s. The population grew steadily to more than 70 wolves in the late 90s. Sweden now has 31 breeding territories and an estimated population of 277 wolves. This population has also increased due to the return of big game that had almost completely disappeared in the early 19th century: deer, roe deer, fallow deer, wild boar (58,000 hunted today) and especially elk (100,000 hunted today).

It should be noted that the wolf is not the only large carnivore present in Sweden: bear, lynx and wolverine have been well represented for many years. Through derogations from the system of strict protection for the Swedish wolf population required by the Habitats Directive, Sweden benefits today from respective off-takes of 230 bear (out of an estimated population of 3,300 individuals in 2008), 30-50 lynx per year (out of an estimated population of 1,500 individuals in 2007) and of 19 wolves in 2011.

The Swedish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) conducts national management plans for large carnivores. For this, three management areas for large carnivores have been identified:

- North, an area devoted to reindeer herding by the Sami people. Bear, lynx and wolverine are managed but the wolf is not tolerated;
- Centre, three large carnivores: bear, lynx and wolf, are subject to management measures;
- South, an agricultural and urbanised area where lynx are permanently resident and wolf populations would be forced to increase.

Within this framework, since 2010 the management of large carnivores and the wolf is decentralised to the level of administrative regions in which a committee of



various stakeholders establishes the monitoring, management and off-take quotas by species.

Regarding the wolf, SEPA's main objectives are to maintain a genetically viable population of wolves, in balance with traditional and socio-economic activities practiced on the land.

The indigenous Sami people pay a sizeable tribute for large carnivores, as almost 30,000 reindeer are taken each year by bear and lynx. Additionally, wolves coming from Russia or attempting to establish themselves in the reindeer management area are now the subject of a systematic destruction policy, or sometimes translocation into the Central area of the country.

It is on these occasions that the great dispersion ability of the species was confirmed. A female wolf captured in the reindeer area by the researchers of the Scandinavian project Skanduv was equipped with a GPS transmitter and moved to the South. She then traveled 600 km to return to her place of capture. The operation was repeated three times, and the return of the animal to the north of the country has consistently been witnessed by the scientific team.

From a national perspective, the welcome for the wolf by the hunting community is mixed. The wolf is relatively well accepted in areas where elk populations - the main prey species of wolves - are large enough. In others, hunters and farmers would like the wolf population to be kept at a maximum at its current level of density. It should be noted that 30-50 hunting dogs are killed by wolves each year causing quite a stir in the hunting community.

To solve the problem of inbreeding in this population which is based principally on a few individuals from Russia, the Swedish government introduced in 2009 a policy of active reintroduction of 20 wolves by 2015, accompanied by selective off-take of dozens of wolves annually to maintain the population at about 200 wolves.

The current debate in Sweden, is no longer whether or not the wolf must be present ... The presence of wolves is now generally accepted by the Swedish population – whether urban or rural. A social agreement is emerging between the various stakeholders for a national management plan, decentralised to regional level, a policy of prevention and effective compensation but also for a so-called “protective” and “licensed” hunt under derogation of the strict protection regime of the Habitats Directive (Directive FFH Article 16b and e). The WWF Sweden representative confirmed that a licensed hunt for management purposes conducted by way of derogation was generally accepted by the environmentalist network as



long as the wolf population is large enough (what should be the size of a viable population in Sweden?).

It is this notion of a sufficiently large population level, and not on the principle of a regulated hunt that opinions differ today between the stakeholders, and the consensus held until now begins to crumble. The intervention of the European Commission has clearly undermined the wolf regulation and population stabilisation policy, notably by stating that a set ceiling number of 210 wolves was an insufficient objective. The whole debate is now focusing on the number of individuals needed to achieve a viable population with good conservation status in Sweden: 100-200 individuals for some, 400-500 or more individuals for others!

ABOUT MEDIALOUP

The French National Hunters' Association FNC (Fédération Nationale des Chasseurs, FACE Member) received support from the Ministry of Ecology and the Foundation of the House of Hunting and Nature (Maison de la Chasse et de la Nature) to coordinate a mediation and communication project: Medialoup, to address the return of the wolf in France and Europe. FACE is part of the Steering Committee and coordinating the organisation of 3 workshops / fact finding missions by FACE Members, notably from Italy, Sweden and Spain.

For more information on the Medialoup project and these reporting workshops, visit the project website on <http://docs.chasseurdefrance.com/Intraloup/index.htm>.

