

## THE MEDIALOUP PROJECT HOSTS AN ITALIAN DELEGATION

On 6 June, the *MediaLoup* project focused itself on the wolf's situation in Italy. Italian experts from different networks (Natural parks, universities, shepherds' associations and hunting associations) gathered to share their expertise in terms of knowledge, management and monitoring of the species.

Notwithstanding the national framework, the wolf is managed at a regional level in Italy, and in terms of the national framework, a number of informative elements were provided.

Today, Italy has a wolf population that is estimated at no less than 1000-1500 individuals. Originating from a relict native population of about one hundred individuals in 1973, this population has progressively reconstituted itself and colonised most of the country. Indeed, the wolves present in France come from this population.

This natural recolonisation of the Italian territory was made possible by the significant development of both wooded areas and the populations of large ungulates. The ecological plasticity of the species as well as its great capacity for dispersion and movement – combined with the implementation and maintenance of strict protection since 1977 (with no derogation for the strict protection status fixed by the Habitats Directive) are equally factors put forwards by the scientists and experts present.

In terms of livestock, the wolf causes recurring problems by attacking cattle and sheep. From a national point of view, this problem seems minimal when compared to the significant numbers of stray dogs, feral dogs and dogs which have hybridised with the wolf. For instance, the region of Lazio estimates about 60,000 stray dogs.

In terms of acceptance in the livestock world, the situation is in contrast depending on the regions. In the Abruzzo region for example, where the wolf has always been present, the shepherds are used to practical protection of their flocks and herds. On the other hand, in Tuscany or the Alps, the recent colonization of the wolf forced the administration to inform and train farmers in techniques to avoid, reduce or compensate damages. Moreover, the socio-economic and agro-pastoral impacts are seemingly much the same as in France (degradation of some pastures, economic losses, incremental human costs, abandonment of alpine meadows).



In terms of compensation, Italy is currently developing a new system founded on private insurance: the farmers insure their herds and the regions subsidise the subscription for up to 80% of its cost, which creates the possibility to maintain a coexistence – however precarious – with the predator. As a guide, the Tuscan region spends 300,000 €/year on contributions to insurance costs, 100,000€ for attacks prevention and 3,5 to 4 million € in compensation for wild boar damages. In most regions, the damages caused by wild boar pose a greater problem than those caused by the wolf.

In contrast, in some regions which have been colonised more recently, such as Piedmont, livestock-keeping is becoming difficult. Acceptance of the species is then challenged. In these regions, numerous illegal acts of destruction are registered each year in the following order: shooting, poisoning and trapping.

According to the different stakeholders who have been consulted, the hunting world seems to be accommodating the return of the wolf and is participating in knowledge-acquisition and species-monitoring projects for the wolf. Even if the situation varies across different regions, this coexistence is generally viewed as satisfactory by the Italian federation of hunters. This is linked to the fact that competition between hunters and the wolf for game resources is perceived more as a ‘virtual’ than real in Italy. Three main explanatory factors have been put forward:

- ✓ In the heart of the peninsula, the major prey for wolf is young wild boar,
- ✓ The populations of ungulates (wild boar, roe deer, deer, mouflon) are such that the impact of the wolf is not really felt in terms of hunting
- ✓ The presence of the wolf helps hunters in a way, to regulate the wild boar populations.

The aim of the Italian State is now three-fold: maintain viable populations of wolves in coexistence with other local actors, stabilise populations in the peninsula and increase that of the Alpine Arc. At this stage, no derogations for the strict protection of the species is issued on the basis of the Habitats Directive. However, the Italian State suggests they have reached a turning point in the policy of the wolf's return. The uncontrolled expansion of the species is difficult to accept both socially and economically and solutions must be found in the relatively near future.

## **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>.

