

Project

LIFE EURO LARGE CARNIVORES

IMPROVING COEXISTENCE THROUGH CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

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1. Introduction

In many European countries, the grey wolf (*Canis lupus*), brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) and, to a lesser extent, the Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) are recovering after centuries of intense persecution. As their ranges expand, they inevitably come into contact with people and their activities, potentially resulting in conflicts that call for strategies and tools to enable coexistence. Over the past 30 years, more than 135 projects in 19 countries under the LIFE programme of the European Union have dealt with large carnivores (Oliveira and Krofel, in press), for example by focusing on species recovery or developing tools and approaches to prevent or mitigate human-wildlife conflicts.

In 2017, 16 partners across Europe under the coordination of WWF Germany initiated the LIFE EuroLargeCarnivores project which seeks to improve coexistence with large carnivores in Europe through effective stakeholder communication, cross-border cooperation and the exchange of knowledge. The partners share the belief that coexistence is possible and that powerful tools have been developed within past and current projects and initiatives of which many deserve better dissemination. The project, which has a budget of € 6.2 million euros and will run until 2022,

aims to provide a platform to gather and share knowledge on human-large carnivore coexistence among various stakeholders across Europe. Topics such as large carnivore monitoring, human-wildlife conflict mitigation and prevention measures, the discussion of fears and concerns for safety, herding and livestock protection practices, but also poaching, economic opportunities and investment requirements are topics included in the project.

2. Sharing experience and good practice across borders

With most European large carnivore populations being transboundary in nature (Linnell and Cretois, 2018), the need for better transboundary cooperation in their management has long been highlighted (Boitani et al., 2015). The LIFE EuroLargeCarnivores project seeks to improve experience sharing across national borders by making diverse approaches to managing social, economic and ecological challenges available through workshops on the ground, online platforms, transboundary exchange visits and international conferences such as the 2018 Pathways

Europe Conference (www.nna.niedersachsen.de) in Goslar, Germany that was co-hosted by the project and brought together 300 participants from around the world in a transdisciplinary exchange around human-wildlife conflict.

Project activities are implemented in five distinct regions and populations: Scandinavia (focussing on the wolverine, *Gulo gulo*), the Iberian Peninsula (wolf), the Carpathians (wolf, Eurasian lynx and brown bear), as well as north central Europe and the Alps (wolf and Eurasian lynx) (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 LIFE EuroLargeCarnivores project focus areas.

3. Communication as the key to success

Listening to and engaging with people who interact with large carnivores on a daily basis is critical to the LIFE EuroLargeCarnivores project. Thus, to capture the perspectives of different stakeholders and the relationships among them, an extensive stakeholder engagement process was designed using surveys and facilitated workshops across 14 countries to identify concerns, challenges and solutions raised by people living with large carnivores (EuroLargeCarnivores, 2019). Looking at the conflicts from a European perspective and comparing them offers the chance to find similarities and differences among countries, populations and areas and develop recommendations and tools that fit different regional contexts and ex-

plore the potential for transferring good practice approaches to new regions.

One of the major challenges raised by stakeholders across the project regions within surveys and at workshops was a lack of up-to-date, reliable and trustworthy information about large carnivores as well as missing access to scientifically proven facts about their distribution, conflicts and possible prevention methods (Grossman et al., 2019). To improve understanding of the social and economic impacts of large carnivores, a study was initiated by the project that looked on the one hand into management costs and livestock damage of large carnivores and on the other examined tourism income and regional marketing (Rode et al., in press). The project website (www.eurolargecarnivore.eu) facilitates dissemination of these and other findings and of tools to prevent or mitigate conflicts and to share stories of people living with large carnivores. Everyone is invited to add their experiences and stories concerning large carnivores. Stories are collected by project partners across Europe to share first-hand experience and help to identify possibilities for transferring tools and approaches that have worked elsewhere. For example, readers can learn from farmer Swen Keller how he lost some calves to wolves, how he started to test different fencing systems and now uses dogs to protect his livestock from future attacks. Project partners are also running a series of targeted press trips to build relations with journalists, offering fact-based information and sensitising journalists about their role in how large carnivores are perceived among the general public.

The findings from the surveys and workshops are collated in a report, *European Perspectives on Co-existence with Large Carnivores* (EuroLargeCarnivores, 2019), that describes the main challenges and expectations of farmers, foresters, hunters, conservationists, researchers, representatives from public authorities, politicians and citizens in the 16 countries and beyond. Building on the findings of these workshops and identified needs, a unique set of training events was designed to enhance the capacity of conservation actors (NGOs, authorities and independents) to communicate with stakeholders. By the end of 2019, 200 participants throughout the project regions had undergone training with the goal of enabling them to support local stakeholders and help establish and maintain networks to exchange experience in dealing with human-wildlife conflicts. During these training

workshops, participants are trained in mediation and communication techniques but are also asked to map their ideas for activities and projects to foster coexistence in their neighbourhood. The project also strives to support implementation of the proposed activities.

4. Livestock versus large carnivores?

Farmers, especially livestock owners, in all project focus areas raised concerns about the economic impacts of livestock losses and the expense of obtaining and managing the tools needed to prevent such losses (Grossman et al., 2019). During the surveys and workshops, they clearly stated a need for economic support to cover the costs of adopting prevention tools and a compensation system for livestock losses or improved efficiency of systems already in place. Within the LIFE EuroLargeCarnivores project, farmers and wildlife managers from different regions of Europe are brought together to exchange experience of conflict management. The aim of these ‘peer-to-peer’ workshops, carried out in the Alps, Central Europe and the Carpathians, is to initiate and sustain transboundary exchange among practitioners (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 Livestock exchange trip to Graubünden, Switzerland within the LIFE EuroLargeCarnivores project with a delegation from Austria and Germany. (Photo: Moritz Klose)

To enable exchange around livestock protection among a broader audience, the project hosted an international conference on *Livestock Protection in the Alpine Region* on 21–23 January 2020 in Salzburg, Austria, together with the EU Platform on Coexistence Between People and Large Carnivores, the European Landowners Organization, the German Association of Professional Shepherds and AGRIDEA.

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