



PROJECT CARING FOR DOGS SAVES THE BEARS (FUNDED BY PATAGONIA&TIDES)

IN PROGRESS

Presentation

The conservation of the remaining population of Marsican brown bear is indissolubly linked to a correct sanitary management of the ecosystems in which this species survives. The small population of the Marsican bear has a scarce ability to adapt to quick environmental changes. One of these changes might be just the introduction of a new pathogen or the major aggressiveness of the already-present pathogens. The high vulnerability of the population of Marsican brown bear, due to the low genetic variability and the few individuals remaining, compel us not to underestimate any signal from the environment. In the last years (2008 and 2012), because of pathogen agents probably related to interactions with cattle, two individuals, which lived in the massifs of Duchessa and Velino-Sirente, out of the brown bear core area, died. It has been ascertained that at least 80% of pathologies considered important to bears come from cattle or dogs. Some diseases potentially dangerous for bears, such as distemper, parvovirus, leptospirosis, infective canine hepatitis, may be transmitted by dogs. The occurrence of a transmission can be dramatically reduced thanks to vaccinations and a correct management of dogs.

Location

The Project will be carried out in the current home range of the Marsican brown bear. This area is about 1,500 – 2,500 km² large, and it involves three Regions (Abruzzo, Molise and Lazio). Under a sanitary point of view it involves:

- 3 Regional Veterinary Services,
- 2 Istituti Zooprofilattici Sperimentali (veterinary public health institutes),
- 5 ASL (NHS primary care trust).

Priority area of intervention will be the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise and its Buffer Zone, officially considered as the core area of the Marsican bear.

Main purpose

Conservation of genetic variability of species and ecosystems.

Significance

The Marsican brown bear is a “umbrella species”. It needs large and interconnected habitats to survive. So the actions of sanitary management related to this species will have a positive effect on the conservation of other wildlife species (especially the wolf) and domestic animals sharing the same environmental context, and it could give also important sanitary information on the management of traditional human activities such as sheep farming.

The Project will be carried out in cooperation with the Department for Conservation of Nature of the Abruzzo Region, already committed to the implementation of the C2 Action of LIFE Arctos “*Conservation of the brown bear: coordinated actions for Alpine and Apennine territories*”.

Goals

The Project aims at:

1. Implementing an operating and management strategy leading to encourage registration in the Canine Registry and vaccinations of dogs in the home range of the Marsican brown bear;
2. Promoting the knowledge and conservation of the Marsican brown bear;
3. Involving and orienting the Institutions to finance and implement actions to control the stray dogs in the home range of the Marsican brown bear.

The above-mentioned goals will be achieved through the following actions:

1. *An extraordinary campaign of vaccination and registration in the Canine Registry of the dogs in the Marsican brown bear's home range.*

For this action, "Salviamo l'Orso", in agreement with Mayors and territorial Veterinary Services, will make public vaccination days in the area in question through posters in the streets, the association's website and facebook page and articles on the main local newspapers.

Vaccines will be provided by the Department for the Conservation of Nature of Abruzzo Region, according to the C2 Action of Life ARCTOS Project "*Conservation of the brown bear: coordinated actions for Alpine and Apennine territories*", while Patagonia's funding will be used to buy microchips.

In each area will be a veterinary doctor, determined every single time by the Provincial Association of Veterinary Doctors, in charge of vaccinating dogs and registering them in the Canine Registry. The presence of a Veterinary on the spot will be the best chance to give important advice to dog owners.

2. *An awareness campaign for dog owners in the Marsican brown bear home range.*

The Association Salviamo l'Orso will launch an awareness campaign to drive dog owners in the Marsican brown bear's home range to vaccinate their dogs and not let them roam without strict control. Articles in the main local newspapers will be published and the members of Salviamo l'Orso describe the interventions in a school in each municipality where vaccinations are held. That will be also an opportunity to talk about the conservation of the Marsican brown bear in order to make the new generations more and more aware of the importance of wildlife for the balance of all ecosystems.

3. *"Lobbying action" in order to involve and orient Institutions to finance and implement actions to control the stray dogs in the home range of the Marsican brown bear.*

Salviamo l'Orso will organize several meetings with the Mayors of the municipalities in the home range of the Marsican bear in order to reach a shared solution to the problem of stray dogs, since the awareness and vaccination campaigns are a "blunt weapon" if not combined with management interventions leading to reduce the number of stray dogs which roam without control in the home range of the Marsican brown bear.

Target species

Marsican brown bear, Apennine wolf.

Duration

20 days

Overall cost

8,000 USD