



MINISTERO DELL'AMBIENTE
E DELLA TUTELA DEL TERRITORIO E DEL MARE



Platform

“Large carnivores, wild ungulates and society”

Program guidelines, mandate, main tasks and working methodology

Claudio Groff, Chair

LARGE CARNIVORES OF THE ALPS: OUR HERITAGE, OUR FUTURE, OUR CHOICE

A famous slogan of the Parks Canada agency claims: “Bears: our heritage, our future, our choice”. Let’s move it in “Large carnivores of the Alps: our heritage, our future, our choice”. The comeback of large carnivores (l.c.) in the Alps in the last 40 years shows that both, habitat and laws, improved and made it possible, up to now. The wolf is coming back by natural spread, whereas the bear and the lynx have been “helped” by translocation carried out in different alpine countries. The bears never totally disappeared from the Alps, while the lynx and the wolf did.

One of the first and stronger argument against the project to save bears in the Italian central Alps has been that “the habitat isn’t suitable anymore”. But the results collected during the first eleven years after the first translocation carried out in Trentino, show the opposite: the habitat is healthy and able to support the small population of bears, which grew up faster than any prediction of the feasibility study (increase fourfold). Bears (but probably this is also applicable for to the lynx and the wolf) are very tolerant to disturbances and able to adapt to the changing environment.

As a result, all alpine countries are today sharing parts of at least one wide population of the alpine large carnivore (some two, others all three).

By a strictly ecological approach, it seems that a bright future is facing the l.c. on the Alps, but threats are tangible: several socio-economic factors may influence their presence.

Habitat management for both large predators and their preys is important, and it has already been subjects of different studies and activities.



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But the future of the l.c. in the Alps depend on the human attitude, may be as in no other part of the world. It is important to consider that, on one hand, the Alps are the mountains with one of the highest human density in the world, especially in the turistic seasons; on the other hand, in the last decades, all the alpine countries carried out a huge amount of political, financial, economical, and social actions to keep people living in the mountains, mainly on rural areas or for touristy activities.

The impact of the l.c. on such rural activities is inevitable. It is possible to prevent and mitigate these impacts by applying the many best practices evolved in the last decades, but it is not possible to totally eliminate their impact. For this reason, it is evident that l.c. conservation (and wildlife conservation in general) is not just a matter of biological knowledge, but it is rather an subject that includes different interests, which have to be balance among all the different stakeholders that play a role. This is also clearly given out by the name of our platform, which includes the word “society” in it as well.

In the frame of international and nationals laws, wildlife (and l.c. especially, as particularly protected species) has to be preserved as a natural heritage that also produce social, cultural, and economic benefits to people. But to make it possible a lot of actions and work are needed: monitoring, damages and emergencies management, personnel training, communication, networking. In the Alps this is strongly necessary compared to other realities, such as Alaska or Kamchatka, where human density, infrastructure and economic activities are much lower. Another challange is brought by the fact that in the Alpine arch there is a high human density which includes many different people, cultures, languages, lifestyles and attitudes. This “human alpine biodiversity” should be used as a point of strength, by learning from each other and being always ready to adapt our models with those that both nature and society constantly provide.

Lot of work has already been done in many alpine countries on such issues, but much more has to be done to improve the common ground behind the management of l.c. in the Alps, aiming for future management policies at the population level.

L.c. will roam in the Alps if, and how, they will be able to live beside us. The level of tolerance shown by people living in the alps (locals: farmers, hunters and beekeepers first) will play an important role on the future of such species, even more than the habitat modifications that will occur in the same time. The pursuit of such coexistence must be therefore the project main goal, keeping in mind in a pragmatic way that the weakest (the l.c.) have to adapt to the strongest (the men), more than vice versa.



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MANDATE

The mandate of the platform “Large carnivores, wild ungulates and society” for 2013-2014 is the following:

- development of concrete goals and management options to restore and preserve wild population of wolves, lynxes and (according to financial resources) bears in the Alps; presentation of conclusions to the Alpine Convention
- to promote a genetic monitoring program, at an alpine level, for large carnivores
- elaboration of a map reporting distribution of ibex populations on the Alps, in cooperation with the Alpine Ibex Group.

MAIN TASKS

- • International cooperation, exchange of knowledge and information,
- harmonisation of methods and management plans.
- • Establishment of a forum to discuss issues of conservation, management and exploitation of large carnivores and ungulates.
- • Conservation of wildlife and habitats on a transnational and population level.
- • Investigation of the biological and ecological requirements of particular species.
- • Consideration of the needs of local stakeholders.
- • Development of common long-term goals for the conservation of wildlife species.
- • Development of a common management and communication strategies, e.g., on upcoming “crisis” situations.

Much has been done in the past years, but there is still a long way to go to meet all these targets. Therefore, the very first element to consider should be a realistic work plan, based on a common understanding of which of these targets and aims can be achieved in the next months.



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It is therefore proposed - as a general point for discussion today – to identify and list the specific outcomes can be produced in approximately 18 months of work, to be able to concentrate our efforts on realistic goals and objectives in the first instance. The goals and working methodology follow this general philosophy of work.

GOALS AND WORKING METHODS

- The platform already did a good work during both previous mandates; such work has to be taken into account and a continuity must be pursued;
- first steps of this new mandate should be addressed to realistic, relatively simple objectives such as defining common long term goals and general strategies to ensure information exchange between relevant partners;

As a general principle, the platform will:

- promote group-work and the involvement of all parties in the discussion;
- takes its decisions with the agreement of all parties;
- promote the presentation of the different positions as nationally harmonised ones (if possible);
- cooperates with experts and relevant institutions;
- elaborates appropriate documents and reports to the Alpine Convention within the 2013-2014 period, on the base of the outputs of the scheduled meetings: Cogne 22 April 2013, Cevo 28-29 October 2013 and Venzone 3-4 July 2014;
- focus its work on the production of proposals for decisions that have to be taken by the ministers of the countries of the Alpine Convention (please keep in mind that this is a very important step).



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PERSONAL REMARKS

- The work plan for 2013-2014 is just a part of a bigger picture, let's work together keeping in mind the long term mission of the Platform and of all activities related with the Alpine convention.
- During the last mandates the Platform did a good job on both wolves and lynxes, but less has been done, for different reasons, on bears. Out of my personal job, I strongly believe we have to improve our work on such specie too, even evaluating the formalization of a Bear alpine group, considering how the bear alpine population is by now regularly interesting different alpine countries.
- Involvement of the governmental organisations in charge of wildlife management is strategic to reach common management goals. Let's promote a more direct involvement of GOs in the Platform activities as much as possible, taking into account the different internal organisation of the Alpine countries, as well as the procedures allowed by the Alpine Convention regulations.
- Last, let's try to keep mutual openness, mutual respect and mutual trust during all activities.



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