



ours en Pyrénées centrales -
Conservation of large carnivores
in Europe : Brown bear in central
Pyrenees

LIFE96 NAT/F/004794



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Contact details:

Project Manager : LAFITTE

Project description:

Background

The brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) can be found in seven EU Member States but in five of them (Greece, Italy, Austria, Spain and France) the bear populations are under such a grave threat that the species is considered a priority by the Habitats Directive. In France only 4 to 5 native bears remain between the Aspe and Ossau valleys in the western Pyrenees. Poaching and fragmentation of its habitat by the construction of forestry and livestock tracks have brought this species on the brink of extinction in the Pyrenees.

During the 1993 LIFE project "Conservation programme for threatened vertebrates in the Pyrenees" the first phase of a programme aiming at reintroducing bears brought in from Slovenia was carried out in the central Pyrenees (Haute-Garonne), in an area where this animal had disappeared at the end of the 1980s. Tree bears were re-introduced in 1996 and 1997: Pyros, Ziva, who gave birth to 2 cubs, and Melba, who had 3 cubs before being killed in the

autumn 1997.

Objectives

From the general objective of ensuring the long-term re-establishment of brown bear populations in the Pyrénées, the specific objectives of the project, i.e. carrying on the actions launched during the 1993 LIFE project, notably releasing three more bears, derived logically. The project also foresaw the mapping of the habitat and the potential distribution of the species by using a geographic information system (GIS) to allow future expansion of the bear populations and management of human activities (forestry, stockbreeding, hunting...) to be planned in the areas occupied by the brown bear. To improve the availability of food resources, the project intended to plant fruit trees and berry bushes in the areas most often visited by the bears which had been released into the wild. In sensitive zones, it was also planned to close tracks and, if necessary, to suspend temporarily traffic and timber cutting. Actions to support stockbreeding in the bear zones were also foreseen: assistance to herdsman, procurement of guard dogs, erection of enclosures for the livestock and ferrying up material and radio telephones for the summer grazing infrastructure by helicopter. Moreover, it was foreseen to indemnify damages caused by the reintroduced bears.

Results

Even if the reintroduction of 3 more bears has been abandoned following a survey among local representatives and stakeholders who rejected it, the project achieved most of its objectives: First, it has permitted to improve the knowledge on the species and to implement efficient monitoring tools:

- A Geographic Information System has been set up. This tool integrates many data on the natural and socio-economic environment and on bears themselves. It provides for the drawing up of maps showing the location or the potential location of the bears, scientific treatments and can help decision-making processes, particularly concerning forestry and pastoral policies.
- A monitoring team composed of 6 full-time employees (1 biologist and 5 technicians) had been implemented. Their tasks included radio monitoring but also dissemination of information among hunters, stockbreeders and other concerned stakeholders. The role of the team was essential for the success of the project. To complete their radio monitoring action, a “bear-network” of

more than 90 members that used to be active at the end of the 80s, before the extinction of the species, has been reactivated. It has proved to be very useful once the bear had lost their radio transmitter.

The project has also tried to improve the food availability in the habitat:

- Orchards have been planted in 2 areas visited by bears and experimental in-situ grafting of 40 wild rootstocks has been carried out. These actions followed an inventory of the orchards in the area, that identified areas of high density of fruit trees close to deserted dwellings that can be easily be used by bears.
- Inventories and maps of the other nutritious plants (hazel, apple and service trees, raspberries, bilberries...) have also been drawn up. They showed that the distribution of the species was quite good but that their productivity could be too low. This study has been completed by in-situ tests of forestry techniques favouring the productivity of these plants and particularly the bilberry.

As planned, many actions to support stockbreeding in the bear zones have been carried out, leading to a better acceptance of the species in the area:

- Erection of 10 enclosures for the livestock.
- Procurement of 37 guard dogs. The race of dogs able to protect flocks against bears' attacks had disappeared for long in this area and the whole breeding had to be re-organised. Some boards warning walkers have also been installed.
- Assistance to and training of herdsmen. The extra herdsmen were particularly efficient during emergency situation, when the presence of bears was detected. However it was not sufficient for preventing all the damages.
- Installation of material and radio telephones for 20 summer grazing infrastructures.
- A damages compensation process has also been implemented.

A protocol that provided compensations for stopping cuttings in emergency situations (presence of cubs, hibernation, search for a lair) has also been defined. It did not have to be implemented during the project but, however, is now operational for the future. This project, the second phase of the 1993 LIFE project "Conservation programme for threatened vertebrates in the Pyrenees" that reintroduced 3 Slovene bears in the Pyrénées, has shown that their reintroduction was a success on a technical and biological point of view. Bears have adjusted themselves very well to this new environment and central Pyrénées constitute a favourable and large enough habitat to maintain the species. On the other hand, the social acceptance of these new bears is less successful, but measures to support stockbreeding and awareness and communication campaigns have led to a better acceptance of the species in the area. However, even if the population reintroduced is still expanding, the sex ratio of the population (2 females for 4 males) and inbreeding risks are worrying and some new females should be reintroduced in the area in order to guarantee the long-term viability of the population.

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Environmental issues addressed:

Keywords

mountainous area, preventive measure, endangered species, monitoring, protected area, animal damage, introduction of animal species, cartography, geographic information system, conflict of interests

Target EU Legislation

- Nature protection and Biodiversity
- Directive 92/43/EEC - "Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora" (21.05.92)

Target species

Ursus arctos

Natura 2000 sites

Not applicable

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Beneficiaries:

Coordinator	Ministère de l'environnement D.N.P.
Type of organisation	National authority

Description	The beneficiary is the French Ministry of Environment and specifically the Department in charge of the Nature and Landscape Policies. This Department is in charge of the development and implementation of Natura 2000.
Partners	Direction régionale de l'Environnement Midi-Pyrénées (DIREN) Association de Développement Economique et Touristique (ADET) ARTUS Fédération départementale des chasseurs de l'Ariege Fédération départementale des chasseurs de la Haute-Garonne Office National de la Chasse Office National des Forêts (ONF)

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Administrative data:

Project reference	LIFE96 NAT/F/004794
Duration	01-JAN-1997 to 30-APR -2000
Total budget	1,775,516.84 €
EU contribution	887,758.42 €
Project location	Midi-Pyrénées

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Read more:

Brochure-Leaflet	Title: Guide méthodologique sur le chien de protection Author: P. Wick Year: 1998 Editor: ARTUS
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