

As seen in chapter 1, in Europe exist measures of support to rural development that aim at stimulating activities different from agriculture and breeding, as for example the so-called agri-tourism. In some agricultural areas particularly interesting from an environmental point of view and where large carnivores are present, in particular in those areas in which the priority objective is the conservation of these species, this kind of support should be linked to programs elaborated on the basis of environmental impact studies. Such studies are generally neglected, while a deep analysis of the consequences that the development of such activities could have on the population of these predators should be necessary.

The promotion of recreational activities or others, can bring on the one hand socio-economical benefits in disadvantaged areas where there is a high risk of abandoning by local communities, but on the other hand, if these activities are not based on a serious long term planification they could bring negative consequences for the viability of large carnivores populations.

As cited in the previous paragraph, the return to wilderness in some areas (due, among other things, to a decrease in the anthropic pressure) has allowed the recolonisation of various species of big mammals. The return of human activity in these areas, even if different from agriculture or breeding, could bring to such a situation as to compromise the optimal conditions for the survival of these species (predators as well as prey species).

2.6 Large carnivore depredation of livestock

The conflict between large carnivores and livestock is a normal predator-prey relation. Livestock losses are recorded in all those European countries where there are large predators (bear, wolf, lynx and wolverine, see the distribution chart in annex n° 7). To give an idea of these losses, in Italy wolves caused the death of approximately 1,500 sheep per year between 1974 and 1978 (Boitani 1982); in 1989 in the French Jura Mountains, lynxes killed 389 sheep and goats (Vandel and Sthal cited in Kaczensky 1996); in Spain wolves killed 5,179 sheep and goats, 1,196 horses and 444 cows in 1987 (Garcia-Gaona 1995 cited in Kaczensky 1996).

The size of the losses depends on the number and type of predator, the number and type of prey, the husbandry methods used, the availability or absence of alternative prey and the geography of the area where the conflicts take place.

The complexity of the phenomenon makes seeking specific correlation extremely difficult. As regards Europe, the losses caused by lynxes and wolverines are less than those caused by bears and above all by wolves (Kaczensky 1996).

It is therefore wrong to exclude a priori co-existence between large carnivores and livestock, many forms of breeding are in fact deemed compatible with the conservation of large carnivores. It is mainly free and uncontrolled grazing which is subject to high rates of depredation and hence incompatible with the presence of predators.

In Europe, this type of breeding is currently common principally in those areas where there are no predators and have been none for a long time (Kaczensky 1996). In this respect,