

Minimizing
Conflict

Finding
Solutions

People & large carnivores | Europe

Dealing with differences Can wolves and people coexist?

Role Play



Introduction and purpose

The return of large carnivores to Europe is a conservation success story but one that also brings major challenges. Large carnivores sometimes depredate livestock; damage property, and approach settlements leading to fears about human safety. A peaceful coexistence of people with bears, wolves, lynx and wolverines is still far from reality in many countries, and their conservation and management is often politicized and highly controversial. However, solutions exist and many initiatives and projects successfully work towards facilitating – and living – coexistence.

Since 2014, the **EU Platform on Coexistence Between People and Large Carnivores** brings together a range of stakeholders representing different interest groups on the EU level who have agreed to a joint mission: **To promote ways and means to minimize, and wherever possible find solutions to, conflicts between human interests and the presence of large carnivore species, by exchanging knowledge and working together in an open-ended, constructive and mutually respectful way.** In addition to the Platform on the European level, there are a number of regional and local platforms in different European countries aimed at facilitating dialogue around large carnivores under the motto “finding solutions, mitigating conflicts”.

The purpose of this role play is to generate greater awareness and understanding of large carnivores, the complexity involved in their conservation and management, and encourage greater acceptance of their presence. It aims to encourage participation and provide an opportunity for people “to step in someone else’s shoes”, thereby promoting empathy and tolerance while getting to know various different perspectives on the topic.

The role play is modeled on the dialogue platforms that have been implemented in different countries. It is designed as a simulation of the discussion process involving key stakeholders in large carnivore management with the aim – as in real-life platforms – to find joint solutions and a common way forward, enabling coexistence. However, stakeholder platforms always involve a longer process and the role play can only reflect a one-off discussion between key stakeholders.

Yet, it does offer unique insights into how those processes work, what the challenges are and what is important to have a structured and constructive discussion where everyone can express their opinion. The role play is intended to help students become aware of and define the arguments that support attitudes towards large carnivores and what shapes them (e.g. personal experience or that of others, friends, family, media, and/ or networks).

The role play can be played by adults, potentially even as an exercise for stakeholders during platform discussions. However, its primary target group is teenagers (15-18 years of age) and it is designed for use both in formal (secondary school programmes for instance as part of the courses in biology, geography, social studies or history) as well as in informal education settings (e.g. natural history museums).

Educational objectives

- Greater knowledge and understanding of wolves, their behaviour and ecology;
- Identification and recognition of the different interests and perspectives towards large carnivores;
- Better understanding of the different social, economic, cultural and personal factors that influence those perspectives;
- Insights into discussion formats and principles that enable constructive exchange and compromise for a joint way forward
- Greater knowledge about human wildlife conflicts and coexistence, including on solutions for coexistence with large carnivores.

Instructions & preparations

The **aim** of the role play is for participants to:

- learn more about the problems and management options that exist in relation to wolves;
- understand the different perspectives, opinions and positions towards wolves and the factors that influence them;
- agree on three priority actions that could be implemented to solve conflicts between people and the wolves in the area;

Duration

A minimum of two hours should be scheduled for the role play:

- preparation (30 minutes),
- play / discussion (60 minutes),
- evaluation (30 minutes).

Instructions for the teacher/ initiator

- Carefully read the introduction, the context description and the role cards.
- Print the context description, the guidance for facilitation and the role cards.
- Explain to your students the aim of the role play, and summarize the context description.
- Read out which role cards / stakeholders are available and let students pick one.
- Provide each student with a context description and a copy of their role and position card.
- Give the students about 10 minutes to understand their role. If there are several students for one role, they can discuss it together and agree on one person to represent the role.
- Explain the facilitation task and choose a facilitator or facilitation team (maximum two people, could also be the teacher). The facilitator receives the facilitation guidance to clarify the task.

Material

- Context description.
- **Role cards:** Brief description of the respective stakeholder and their attitude towards wolves.
- **Position cards:** Each stakeholder has a certain position, which reflects the interest that person has towards wolves.
- **Wolf card:** information about the behaviour and ecology of wolves.
- **Action cards:** List with different types of measures that could be taken to manage the situation.
- **Facilitation card:** Guideline with key aspects important for facilitation.
- **Rules of engagement:** Rules and principles guiding the discussion.
- Evaluation guidance.

Format

The discussion includes the following elements of interaction:

- **Introduction** and agreement of the rules for the discussion (facilitator).
- **Rounds:** Each stakeholder has three minutes to answer the question of the facilitator.
- **New input** by the facilitator to bring in facts about a topic (wolf and action cards).
- **Open discussion:** Participants discuss and exchange views and opinions openly.
- **Closing:** Participants shed their roles and take a break before coming back for the evaluation.
- **Evaluation:** Participants reflect on the experience using the evaluation guidance.

Context description

In a rural area somewhere in Europe, large carnivores had been absent for more than 100 years. But a few years ago, a wolf returned to the region. Since then, sightings of wolves have increased, a reproducing pack was confirmed and today there are five packs living in the area. The region is characterized by relatively high farming intensity, local villages and tourism in the associated protected landscape area.

The wolves have killed livestock, in particular sheep, which caused much attention on social media. In response to the livestock killings, two wolves were poached and local media reported extensively about wolves as a threat to livelihoods and personal safety.

In addition, adequate data on wolf population distribution, size and trend is still lacking. The official wolf monitoring system relies on voluntary inputs which can lead to inaccuracies. The lack of systematic monitoring creates mistrust in the official population numbers and associated management decisions and exacerbates conflicts.

The main challenges in the region are how to increase the use of damage prevention measures and effective protection of livestock, to prevent the illegal killing of wolves, to ensure regular and reliable monitoring of the wolf population, and promote awareness regarding wolf presence near settlements.

In order to address those challenges and facilitate co-existence, a dialogue platform was initiated by the local municipality. The aim of the platform is to bring together the different stakeholders that are affected by, or have an interest in, the presence of wolves in the area. The municipality has received funding from the national government / European Union to mitigate conflicts with wolves and has set up a “coexistence fund” which offers a budget for measures related to wolf management.

The objective of the platform is to provide a forum where different perspectives can be expressed in order to find a way to improve the situation and agree on solutions and concrete measures that could be funded through the “coexistence fund”. The main stakeholders include the municipality and the nature conservation agency, as well as livestock owners, hunters and environmental organisations, and local inhabitants. Their perspectives are described in detail in the role cards.

The role play simulates the first meeting of the stakeholder group on invitation of the municipality, which has hired a neutral facilitator / mediator to moderate the discussion.

Facilitation guidance

You are an expert on mediation and dialogue processes around conflicting environmental issues. The municipality hired you to facilitate the stakeholder discussion.

The following **principles** guide your work. As facilitator, you:

- are “multi-partial”, which means to adapt an attitude of non-judgement (allowing space for all perspectives) combined with that of empathetic presence;
- offer a safe space for expressing all relevant thoughts;
- give everybody the chance to contribute;
- respect and consider all viewpoints;
- make sure discussions stay focused;
- ask questions to heighten sharing and clarify meaning;
- do not steer discussions in a certain direction (promoting own agenda).

Your **task** is to:

- introduce the rules of engagement, get the agreement of all participants with these rules and ensure that they are respected during the discussion;
- explain the objective of the discussion: Agree on three priority actions that could be implemented to solve conflicts between people and wolves in the area.

Rules of engagement

- We all respect each other and listen to each other.
- We don't interrupt each other, and don't take too much time.
- We have a personal commitment and express our own interests (what is really important to me about the topic).
- We look for solutions together with others that include these interests.

Guidance for structuring the discussion

- Introduce yourself and your role as facilitator.
- Explain the **reasons** for the meeting and the **objective** of the discussion.
- Read out and explain the “**rules of engagement**”, answer any questions and ask everyone to visibly agree with these rules (e.g. by raising their hands).
- Ask everyone to introduce themselves (**first round**): their name, background and interest in the topic (e.g. “Please introduce yourself and let us know how you feel about the fact that wolves have returned to this area”).
- After everyone has spoken, try to give a brief summary of the main points.
- Invite people to add their perspective or respond/react to what was said by raising their hand.
- Stimulate further **open discussion** by asking e.g. “How would you describe the problem and what is causing it?”
- Bring in some facts and scientific evidence by reading out the **wolf card**.
- Introduce a **second round** providing each stakeholder with the opportunity to respond (e.g. “Has anything changed for you after hearing this information?”).
- Stimulate further **open discussion** about the solutions by asking “Which options do you see to solve the problem?” “What do you need in order to be able to coexist with wolves?”
- Highlight available solutions by introducing the **action cards** and ask participants to select, prioritize and agree on the three most important measures for funding (**open discussion**)
- When the agreed time is up, **wrap up** the discussion and summarize the results to close the session.

Evaluation guideline

After the discussion, everyone sheds their roles and the group comes together to reflect on the experience. Here are some suggestions to facilitate the evaluation.

Each participant should get the opportunity to speak. If the group is too large, students can also come together in small buzz groups and share their experience with each other. Afterwards they can share their main findings with the whole group.

Suggestions for evaluation questions:

- Did you change your position during the discussion? If yes, what made you change? If not, what prevented you from changing your opinion?
- Did you find the arguments of your role plausible? Did the role change your own attitude towards that stakeholder and why / why not?
- What did you learn during the discussion? What was surprising / unexpected?
- Can you identify which aspects made the opinions so different?
- How easy / difficult was it to find a joint solution that everyone could agree to? How did it become possible (enabling factors)? What made it difficult?
- What is your feedback on these kind of stakeholder discussions? Do you see any potential to apply what you have learned from this experience to other contexts? If yes, which and how?

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Dealing with differences Can wolves and people coexist?

Cards





Dealing with differences
Can wolves and people coexist?

Hunter B



Dealing with differences
Can wolves and people coexist?

Hunter A



Dealing with differences
Can wolves and people coexist?

Animal rights activist



Dealing with differences
Can wolves and people coexist?

Tourist guide





Hunter A

- Wolves have changed the behaviour of other wildlife, including deer and wild boar who don't come to our traditional hunting grounds anymore.
- We cannot fulfil our mandate and maintain healthy game populations, if all the animals are eaten or scared away by wolves.
- The wolf population is too big, they take away our purpose as hunters.
- But getting permission for shooting wolves is difficult.
- We are unhappy about the situation: we care about nature and wildlife but are framed as the "bad guys" by the nature protection groups.
- We simply treat the wolf like all the other species that we are managing.

Position

- We have to manage wolves and that includes shooting them.
- The current management approach for large carnivores is not effective.
- The data are not accurate and reliable, we are the ones with real field knowledge, the conservationists have an idealised vision and are not to be trusted.

Hunter B

- Our hunting club has already participated in the monitoring of large carnivores.
- We were involved in collecting non-invasive samples, setting up camera traps and prey inspections.
- We worked together with the nature conservation agency and the protected landscape management authority.
- We know the forest best and want to be involved in managing it.
- Cooperation with the state agencies is not always easy, but we also learned new methods for monitoring wolves and their prey.
- The wolf needs to be respected and we can learn a lot from it as hunters.

Position

- Wolves are needed to maintain the ecological balance in the forest.
- They are hunters just like we are, that's why we respect them.
- We are interested in working together and want to be involved in the decision-making.

Tourist guide

- Wildlife watching programmes are attractive for tourists.
- Having wolves in the area means we can offer special "wolf tours" which is good for our business.
- It helps with advertising and attracts urban people to visit the region – and book a tour with us.
- What is good for business is also good for the community.
- I also like guiding tourists through natural places, I'm not afraid of wolves.
- I took a course with the nature conservation agency to learn how to detect wolf tracks and scats etc.
- I can use this information for my tours.

Position:

- I see wolves not as a threat but as an opportunity.
- It would be interesting to explore other business options such as "bear-friendly honey" - couldn't we do something similar with wolves?

Animal rights activist

- Every living being has the right to live a dignified life.
- We humans have no right to take the life of a living being.
- It is not acceptable that humans raise animals for food, so the outrage of livestock breeders over large carnivores is pointless.
- If people were to eat more sustainably, ie. plant-based food, these kind of problems would become irrelevant.
- People who raise domestic animals for slaughter are immoral.

Position

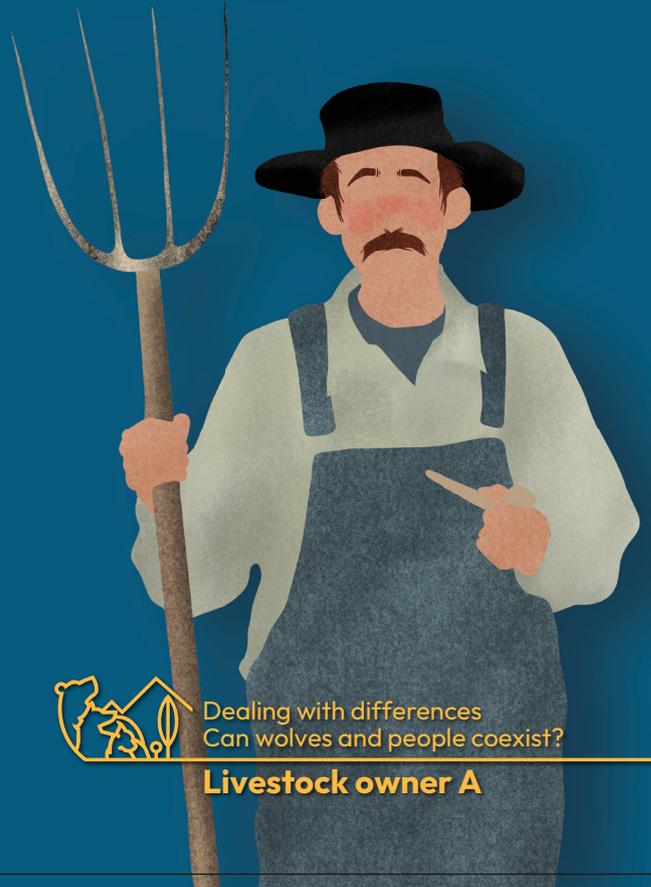
- We humans are morally irresponsible if we raise animals for food.
- Livestock breeders are more bloodthirsty than large carnivores.
- People should stop having so much unnecessary livestock and have more respect for both wild and domestic animals.





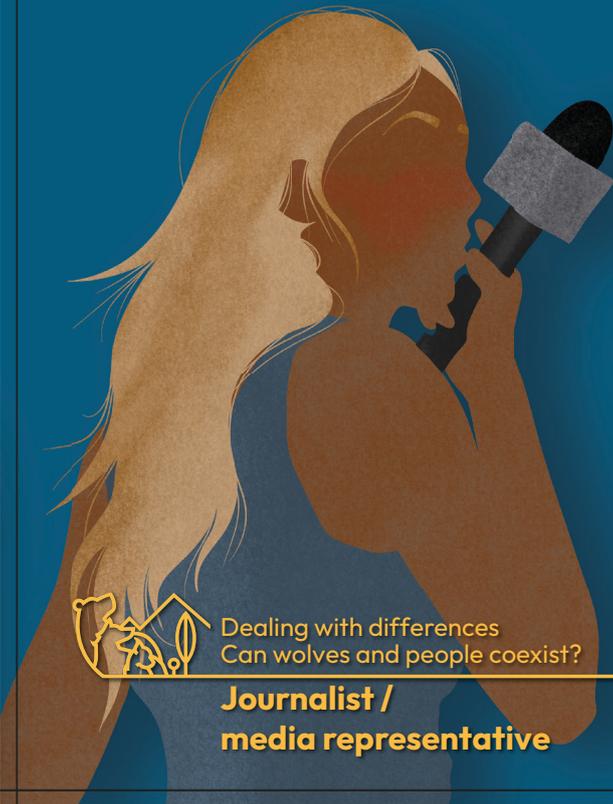
Dealing with differences
Can wolves and people coexist?

Livestock owner B



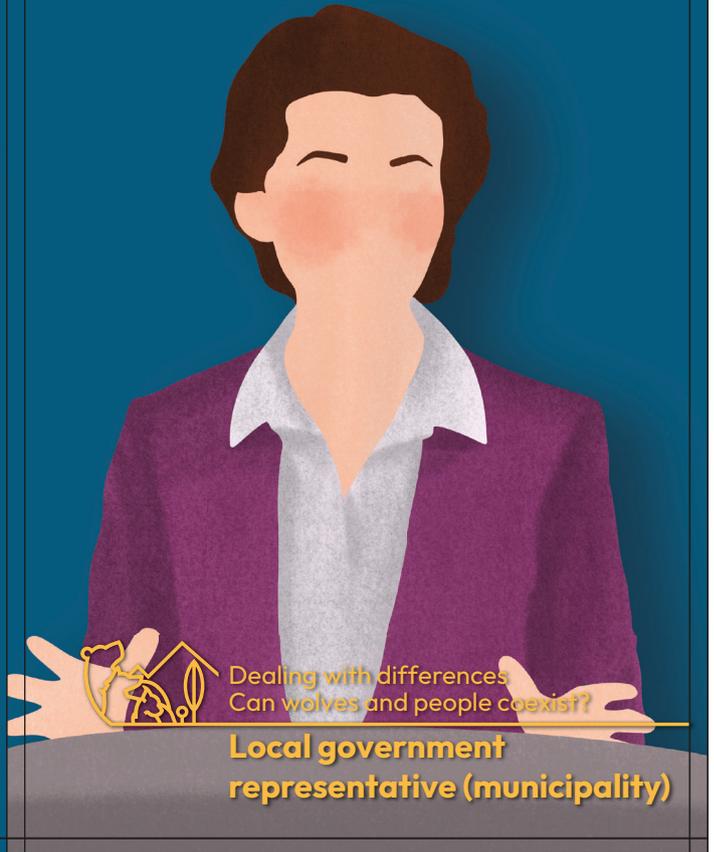
Dealing with differences
Can wolves and people coexist?

Livestock owner A



Dealing with differences
Can wolves and people coexist?

**Journalist /
media representative**



Dealing with differences
Can wolves and people coexist?

**Local government
representative (municipality)**





Livestock owner A

- I live close to where the wolves were seen.
- I never had livestock killed until recently.
- Wolves have killed most of the sheep and some calves.
- It was shocking to see so many of my animals die brutally.
- We have received some compensation payments, but it doesn't cover the real value of my sheep.
- I cannot afford complicated measures to better protect my animals.
- I need to get back in control but support is lacking.
- No one will pay us for the extra investments and efforts that are needed now.

Position

- The only solution is to remove those wolves so that our livestock can be safe again.
- It's fine to have them in wild areas elsewhere but here it's not a practical option.

Livestock owner B

- I live in a mixed pasture area with patches of woodland, with regularly passing wolves.
- Our farm is our livelihood and main source of income (goats for milk, we produce yoghurt and cottage cheese).
- We worry a lot about the safety of our goats and have made efforts to protect them.
- We installed mobile electric fencing, bring the goats into a barn overnight and have a livestock guarding dog .
- We haven't had any losses so far.
- But we made a big financial and time investment .
- State financial support was slow and complicated and didn't pay for everything.

Position

- We are not happy about having wolves around but have accepted it.
- We need to prepare and ensure we don't suffer any damage to our animals and livelihood.

Local government (municipality)

- We have to accept the presence of wolves as they are legally protected
- We have already participated in different projects on large carnivores.
- We need more preventive measures for livestock protection.
- But in the long run we don't have enough money for that and people will not or cannot make the investments themselves.
- We also have little expertise in effective livestock protection measures.
- Breeders and farmers complain about low compensation payments and high bureaucracy, but this is all we offer right now.

Position

- It is crucial to provide funding for preventive measures.
- We want to be able to act proactively and find good solutions.
- We hope that we can achieve that with this dialogue process.

Journalist/media representative

- The wolves are a great opportunity for us local journalists: they produce a lot of news!
- We finally have something substantial to report about.
- Everything that happens around wolves is worth a headline – especially if livestock is killed and people are angry.
- People have a right to know how dangerous these animals are and that they are not alone with their worries.
- So we make sure that attention and interest in is kept high.

Position

- Conflicts are good for our business.
- We will always highlight conflicts, even if other people are trying to find solutions.
- The big bad wolf is more interesting than reporting on some fences.





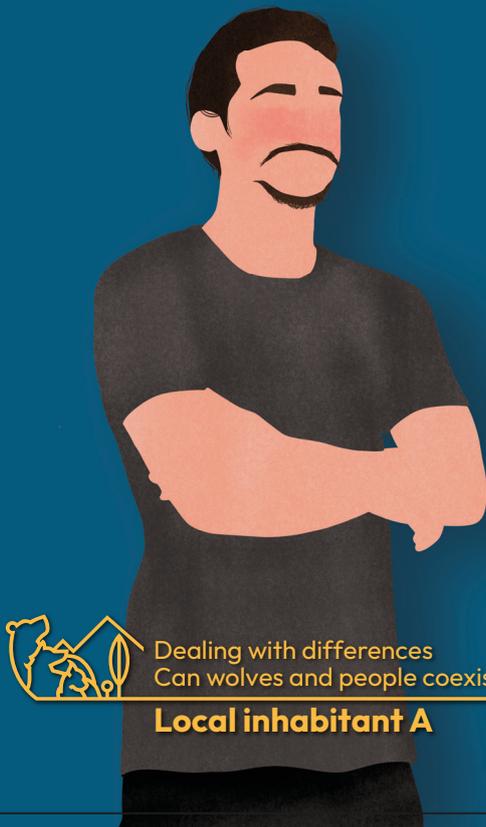
Dealing with differences
Can wolves and people coexist?

Nature conservation agency



Dealing with differences
Can wolves and people coexist?

Environmentalist (NGO)



Dealing with differences
Can wolves and people coexist?

Local inhabitant A



Dealing with differences
Can wolves and people coexist?

Local inhabitant B



Environmentalist (NGO)

- The return of wolves is a conservation success story.
- Wolves are essential to ecosystems and protected by law.
- Public acceptance requires education with scientific facts to counter misinformation.
- Farmers can prevent livestock damage with effective measures.
- Government funding is needed for implementing livestock protection.
- Wolves are not dangerous to humans; they are shy and avoid interactions.

Position

- Proper livestock protection eliminates issues.
- Fear should be addressed with facts.
- Killing wolves is unacceptable and ineffective.
- Discussing hunting quotas risks wolf extermination.
- Everyone must contribute to coexistence solutions

Nature conservation agency

- Wolves are fascinating animals, it's amazing that they have managed to return.
- But it has also complicated our management.
- We need much more and better information about their abundance and distribution.
- Good management is key to stay in control of the situation.
- Some people think shooting them will solve the problem but it won't.
- Even in areas where wolves are rare, it is necessary to better protect livestock.
- With proper use and maintenance of preventive measures, the damage can be greatly reduced – but this is costly.
- We have a lot of pressure from all sides and cannot afford to make even the smallest mistake.

Position

- The safety of people and their property is the number one priority.
- We try to find the best solutions but cannot make it right for everyone.
- There are legal requirements but we are the ones blamed for everything.
- We lack capacity and require more resources.

Local inhabitant B

- The presence of wolves near our villages is a constraint on our freedom.
- We no longer dare let children play on the streets and especially in the nearby forest, where the wolves are.
- I'm terrified by the possibility that my family is not safe anymore and cannot move freely as we have always done before.
- I am also scared for our dogs and cannot take them on forest walks anymore.
- We are constantly drawing attention to the issue, but no one wants to hear us.
- Does an attack have to happen in our region first, for any of those responsible to act?

Position

- Wolves pose a threat to our safety and to our freedom. The government needs to protect us.
- The quality of life in rural areas is already low and now we are put at risk just because some urban politicians think wolves are nice.
- We have become second-class citizens.

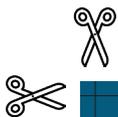
Local inhabitant A

- I often go to the forest for a walk with my dog, but have never seen a wolf.
- It feels strange sometimes walking alone in the forest, knowing that wolves are around.
- I have heard scary stories about wolves as a child and also in the news.
- But I'm not afraid of wolves. I believe they are more scared of us than the other way around!
- Wolves usually avoid encounters with humans.
- The wolves make our forest more interesting and I think they also have a right to be here.
- I cannot understand all the panic and hassle people have over them.
- People should back down a little and grant the wolf its place in our landscape.

Position

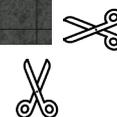
- Conflicts around the wolf are more a construct of the media and certain interest groups than of everyday life in the countryside.
- I live close to nature and understand nature. The wolves are not the problem but the people who don't understand nature.

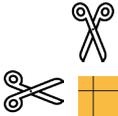




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Can wolves and people coexist?

Wolf card





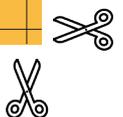
Wolf card

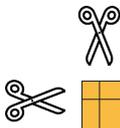
I am the Wolf – or *Canis lupus*, as scientists call us. I am the second largest land predator in Europe. As a carnivore, my favourite food are wild ungulates such as deer, but I go for whatever is easiest to catch, which sometimes includes livestock or other domestic animals.

We are very social animals, living in family groups called packs. Each pack has its own territory, an area where we live, hunt and raise our young. Between 10 to 22 months of age, young wolves leave their family to find their own territory. Scientists call this dispersal, and it can involve traveling long distances to find a place to settle and start a pack. This is why there can only be a certain number of wolves in one area. It isn't easy to raise our young, about half of our pups die within their first year.

In the past we were widespread across Europe but we have a difficult relationship with humans, and by the mid twentieth century, we had been exterminated in much of western Europe. But we have made an impressive come-back! When our numbers reached a historic low, we became a protected species and could no longer be hunted or poisoned. We started to return! We are incredibly clever and adaptable, and can live in many different kinds of habitats. We often live in forests but also thrive in mountains, wetlands and even farmland.

Our populations in Europe have therefore increased significantly in recent years. We're now present in all continental Europe. This doesn't mean we have it entirely easy. Because we do sometimes eat livestock, we are not loved! If we develop a preference for eating sheep, we often do not survive long. Although many populations are doing well, others are small and isolated, and we often suffer because of human disturbance and roads bisecting our habitat.





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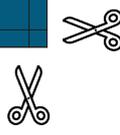
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Public awareness and education

There are many myths, stories and misinformation about wolves and how they behave. It is important to counter these misconceptions with accurate scientific evidence about large carnivores in order to increase understanding, awareness and acceptance of wolves as a part of the ecosystem.

Requires communication campaigns, workshops, environmental education activities and materials.



Communication and conflict mitigation

Depending on the level of polarization and conflicting positions and interests with regards to wolves, there are ways to mitigate and mediate them and try to find common ground among those involved.

Examples are dialogue platforms, mediation services, community meetings, and conflict resolution training.

Requires long-term time and financial resources, willingness of stakeholders to engage.



Compensation payments

Governments issue compensation payments in the case of damages caused by wolves.

Eligible are people who keep sheep and goats, as these animals are specifically affected by the wolf.

Sometimes there are rules for the minimum standard of measures protecting these animals. Sticking to these rules is necessary in order to be eligible for potential compensation payments.

The payments often involve bureaucratic application procedures and take a lot of time.

They also depend on killed/injured animals being found and the damage verified as having been caused by wolves, which is not always easy/possible.

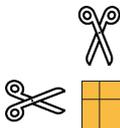


Wolf management and population control

When wolves become habituated to humans (e.g. because they are being fed intentionally) they might lose their natural caution towards them.

In other cases, they might become accustomed to eating livestock and cause too many damages.

In such cases it can be necessary to kill these individuals. Measures to control the population to a certain number can also include the shooting of a given quota of animals.



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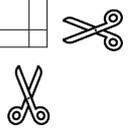
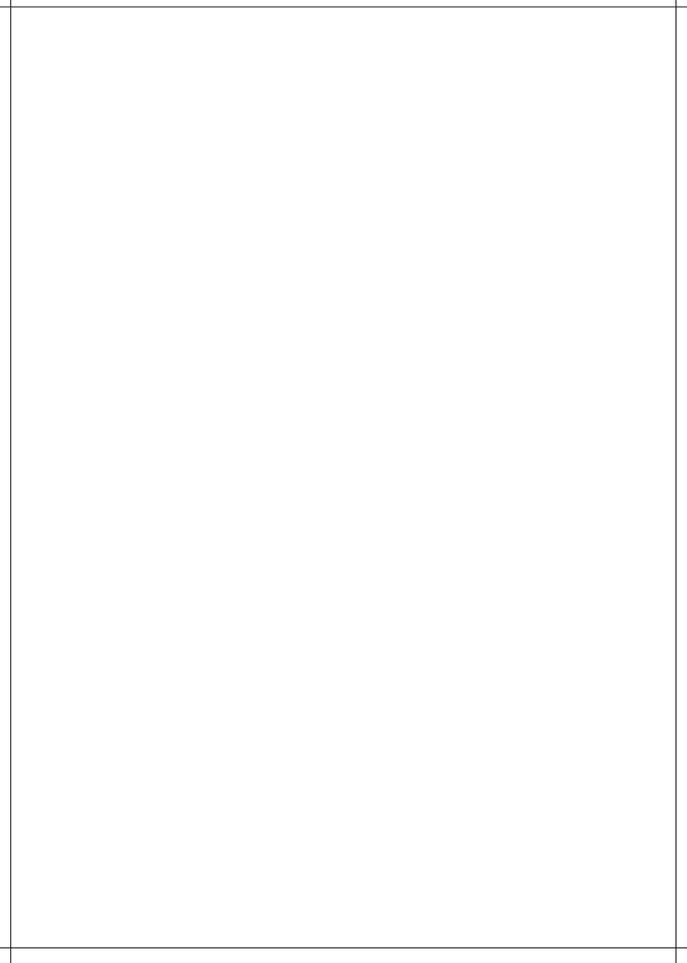
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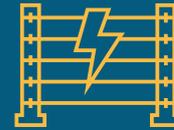


Livestock protection with guarding dogs

Livestock guarding dogs protect livestock on pastures from predators like the wolf. They are often raised together with the animals and guard the herd, to prevent attacks.

They often work together in groups.

Investments are required to acquire suitable pups, take care of them and raise them to be effective guardians.



Livestock protection with electric fencing

Electrified fences have proved to be efficient for protecting livestock. As wolves tend to dig under instead of jumping fences, it is important that the lowest strand has a maximum distance of 20 cm from the ground. In order to keep electrical voltage in the strands high, the fence needs to be thoroughly grounded. It should have a height of at least 120 cm. It is also important to have enough wires so that the space between them is not so big that animals step through.

Requires time and money investments, not always feasible e.g. with large mobile herds in mountains.



Population research and monitoring

The basis for good management decisions regarding wolves is a scientifically robust and systematic monitoring of the population. Involving stakeholders in monitoring can not only help improve its accuracy but also increase trust.

Equipment, training and personnel for wolf population monitoring and research required.