

# GRAZING MANAGEMENT IN WOLF TERRITORIES



1. Iberian wolf (*Canis lupus signatus*) in Montesinho Natural Park 2. Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) – a type of wolf prey abundant in the region 3. Temporary fences to contain small ruminants 4. Livestock protection dog from the north of Portugal – portuguese breed

## THE WHAT AND WHY

### Grazing in Wolf Territory: Sustainability and Coexistence

Grazing in the Iberian wolf (*Canis lupus signatus*) territory follows an itinerant model, guided by traditional knowledge, which optimises the seasonal use of natural pastures. Sustainable and adapted to the ecosystem, it contrasts with intensive livestock farming by promoting animal welfare and the regeneration of resources. The wolf, a top predator, fulfils crucial ecological functions by controlling the numbers of wild animals (e.g. wild boar, deer and roe deer), which in excess can damage crops, and reducing the risk of zoonoses by feeding on carcasses. During centuries, shepherds in Portugal have developed strategies to overcome the consequences of sharing space with wolves. In the north-east of Trás-os-Montes, the abundance of wild prey and the application of measures to prevent wolf attacks - such as livestock protection dogs, constant surveillance and night shelters - favour a model of balance between pastoralism, biodiversity conservation and cultural identity.

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## HOW THE CHALLENGE IS ADDRESSED

### Managing livestock in the presence of wolf

Regardless of the type of livestock, shepherds must have the animals properly identified and in good physical and sanitary condition. Wolves tend to select weaker animals, so sick animals and calving females and their young should be confined. The existence of a shepherd close to the herd deters wolf attacks, allows the identification of safer routes for livestock, and in the event of an attack, facilitates the regrouping of livestock and the management of livestock protection dogs. These dogs, of specific breeds, require appropriate training against wolf and wild dog attacks. Given that wolves are nocturnal, it is important to protect livestock at night in stables or using fixed or mobile metal or electric fences that fulfil the minimum protection requirements.

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## ADVANTAGES

### Advantages of a preventive strategy when grazing in wolf territory

Implementing preventative measures helps to reduce wolf attacks on livestock, reduce farm losses and conserve a top predator, maintaining the region's ecological equilibrium. Consequently, the negative perceptions and attitudes of local residents towards this wild animal could change for the better. Furthermore, as it is not always possible to prove the origin and type of animal causing the damage, if the preventive measures are applied in accordance with the guidelines provided by the competent bodies such as the Institute for Financing Agriculture and Fisheries (IFAP) or the Institute for Nature and Forest Conservation (ICNF), or non-governmental organisations (e.g. Grupo Lobo), the producer will have a better chance of receiving the compensatory measures.

Currently, the measures suggested by various authors and organisations are proven effective resources for protecting domestic animals from wolf attacks. Some measures prevent not only wolves but also other predators from entering livestock containment enclosures (fences). Their effectiveness will depend on the construction and maintenance of the structures and could be improved with the complementary use of livestock protection dogs. This latter measure protects livestock against wolves, roaming dogs and foxes not only when livestock is contained in fenced areas, but also during grazing routes. In addition, producers can benefit from some financial support for each dog as long as they fulfil the requirements imposed (e.g. dog breed, training, number of animals) (see figure 4). Other measures such as fladry (red flags), sounds and lights are predator deterrent strategies, although they are short-lived due to predator habituation to these structures. However, they can be used as an initial measure, in conjunction with other methods, or in emergencies, when cattle are more vulnerable. In short, to ensure that livestock are grazed safely and that in the event of a wolf attack the shepherds benefit from compensatory measures, it is essential to implement a preventative strategy.

## HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Sustainable coexistence allows for success in agro-sylvo-pastoralism and biodiversity conservation.**
- **Preventative measures: daytime surveillance, night-time confinement and livestock protection dogs.**
- **Financial support and compensatory measures to protect livestock from wolf attacks in extensive grazing.**



Herd of sheep grazing in a rural mountainous landscape, protected by a guard dog in a rural mountainous landscape

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