



ACTION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST ILLEGAL POISON USE IN THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SPAIN (LIFE08 NAT/E/000062)

Life+ VENENO

Technical summary and overall context of the project

1. Project objectives

The main aim of this project is to achieve a significant reduction in illegal poison use in various autonomous communities, and especially in their SPA network, where this problem is one of the main causes of non-natural mortality in some of the most endangered species in Europe, such as the Spanish Imperial Eagle, the Monk Vulture, the Red Kite and the Egyptian Vulture (including the Canary Islands subspecies), all of which are included in Annex I of the Birds Directive and in Annexes II and IV of the Habitats Directive.

It is hoped to achieve this through effective and innovative activities in the fight against illegal poison use, all of which are anticipated within the national strategy against the use of poisoned bait in the natural environment, approved by the National Commission for Nature Protection in 2004 and which until now has not been adequately implemented.

2. Actions and means involved

The use of poisoned bait for the illegal control of predators is a widespread practice throughout Spain and elsewhere in Europe. Those who carry out this practice take advantage of the lack of awareness of the people in their local area and of rural remoteness to set poisoned bait. With the aim of achieving a significant reduction in this threat a series of actions is proposed, grouped in the following manner:

1) Adoption of action plans and protocols in the fight against wildlife poisoning. It has been demonstrated that in those regions where there is a legal document which provides the basis for an action plan against wildlife poisoning, the number of poisoning incidents is reduced. These plans indicate by what means this serious wildlife threat can be avoided. The associated protocols guarantee greater effectiveness in the task of pursuing those who carry out wildlife poisoning. In the first half of the project, draft action plans and protocols will be developed by means of technical workshops in the autonomous communities of Aragón, Cantabria, Catalunya, Galicia, Murcia, Castilla y León, Castilla-La Mancha and Fuerteventura as well as studying the





need to modify those documents already in existence. All of these autonomous communities are committed to collaborating in the preparation of these documents, and to approving them. The actions involved will apply throughout each of the autonomous communities involved, although there will be specific measures for the Natura 2000 network.

2) Direct action against the illegal use of poisoned bait. Furthermore, the project will include direct action in the fight against the illegal use of poisoned bait, which will appear in the action plans and protocols which are finally approved. The most important action will be to set up a patrol of forest rangers specialised in this task, which will carry out the relevant actions following the scientific methods used by the police in Castilla-La Mancha. The investigation and prosecution of the crimes detected will be carried out preferentially in the SPA network of Castilla-La Mancha with special emphasis in those sites declared for Spanish imperial eagle, red kite and Egyptian vulture. In addition, specialised training will be given to the forest rangers of the autonomous communities of Andalucía, Aragón, Cantabria, Catalunya, Galicia, Murcia, Castilla y León and Canary Islands (Fuerteventura) This action will enable the direct prosecution of wildlife poisoning offences in the SPA network of these autonomous communities, which until now has not been carried out successfully, because of a lack of adequate training.

3) Persuade wider society to see the wildlife poisoner as unacceptable. A national educational campaign will be carried out in order to reach the rural areas in which many people know the wildlife poisoners, but do not report them because they are not aware that wildlife poisoning is a crime. This campaign will also target those groups involved in illegal poison use. The majority of the poisoning cases occur within the hunting and livestock farming sectors and amongst individuals annoyed by abandoned cats and dogs. For this reason the information campaign will be directed especially at these key groups. The inclusion of *América Ibérica* (a group which specialises in communication with the hunting and rural leisure sectors) as a collaborating body should guarantee that the campaign has an important impact in these sectors. The project will also set up a network of volunteers against wildlife poisoning, allowing wider society to become involved in the campaign against this threat, for example through use of the free phone line "SOS Poisoning". In addition, special attention will be devoted to the SPAs in Fuerteventura, to avoid the use of wildlife poison which risks causing the extinction of the Canary Islands subspecies of Egyptian vulture, with the key actions consisting of demonstrating to livestock farmers that, as long as certain precautions are taken, birds are no threat to livestock and that placing poisoned bait could lead to their imprisonment.





It is intended that, with the assistance of these sectors, this campaign will be directed at the root of the key problems. The information campaign will focus on the following priority points: 1) highlighting the risks associated with poison use, 2) resolving the real problems which are at the root of poison use 3) showing the futility of indiscriminate predator control through scientific studies carried out with the collaboration of livestock farmers and hunters and 4) in the groups involved in the project, identifying those persons or organizations most prepared to tackle this problem in order to obtain their cooperation.

4) Limit the access to legal toxic products and improve their use. One of the problems detected in all of the technical workshops organized to date on wildlife poisoning is the ease with which illegal practitioners can gain legal access to toxic products. During the second year of the project there will be an analysis in Castilla-La Mancha and the Canary Islands of which substances are used in the preparation of poisoned bait, by what means they are acquired (whether legal or illegal) and why it is that the established control mechanisms do not prevent their illegal use. In the same way, various options will be studied which might prevent their illegal use as a wildlife poison, such as improved controls, the possible replacement of the products involved for others with a lower toxicity, proposed changes to the law, etc. Furthermore, in the Canary Islands, the excessive use of toxic products in the control of mice, rats and lizards is a serious problem. For this reason, direct actions will be carried out to reduce the use of these products, especially in SPAs, through field studies and an information and education campaign amongst the farmers and public authorities involved.

5) Legal action in poisoning incidents. Finally legal action will be taken in all the serious cases of wildlife poisoning which are discovered in the most important SPAs considered by the project, as well as all of those detected by the specialised patrol. It has been demonstrated that publicising the fact that a wildlife poisoner is being prosecuted has a very important deterrent effect amongst the other offenders in the region involved.

3. Coordination with other initiatives:

The coordination of the actions of this project with other existing initiatives, or those which may begin in the future is fundamental and will be assured as follows:

1) As soon as the project is under way a meeting will be organized in Madrid with relevant staff from all of the autonomous communities involved in the project (officials in charge of the action plans against wildlife poisoning and for the conservation of endangered species), the Ministry for Environment, Rural and Marine Affairs (coordinator of the National Strategy), the Biodiversity





Foundation and the project partners in order to explain the project in detail and ask for suggestions which would help project coordination.

2) The project proposes to set up an electronic forum in order to guarantee good coordination and continuous communication.

3) Both the Black Vulture Conservation Foundation and SEO/BirdLife are founding members of *Antídoto* Programme, which will guarantee a high degree of coordination between this Programme and the Life+ project.

4. Expected results:

The following results are expected from this project:

- Reduction in the illegal use of poisons for predator control, especially in the SPA network of the autonomous communities in which the project will be carried out.
- Approval of regional action plans and action protocols which will indicate the measures to be taken by the authorities in order to put an end to this problem.
- Preparation of a specialised patrol which will carry on working after the project and which will serve as a model for other new patrols in other autonomous communities.
- Greater involvement of society in condemning the wildlife poisoners, or at least in not tolerating the practice within their district.
- Greater control over the sales of licensed toxic products.

