

Layman's report



LIFE19 NAT/IT/000972



# LIFE WolfAlps Eu Project

*Coordinated actions to improve wolf-human  
coexistence at the alpine population level*



Project Title:

## Coordinated actions to improve wolf-human coexistence at the alpine population level

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LIFE WOLFALPS EU

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LIFE18 NAT/IT/000972

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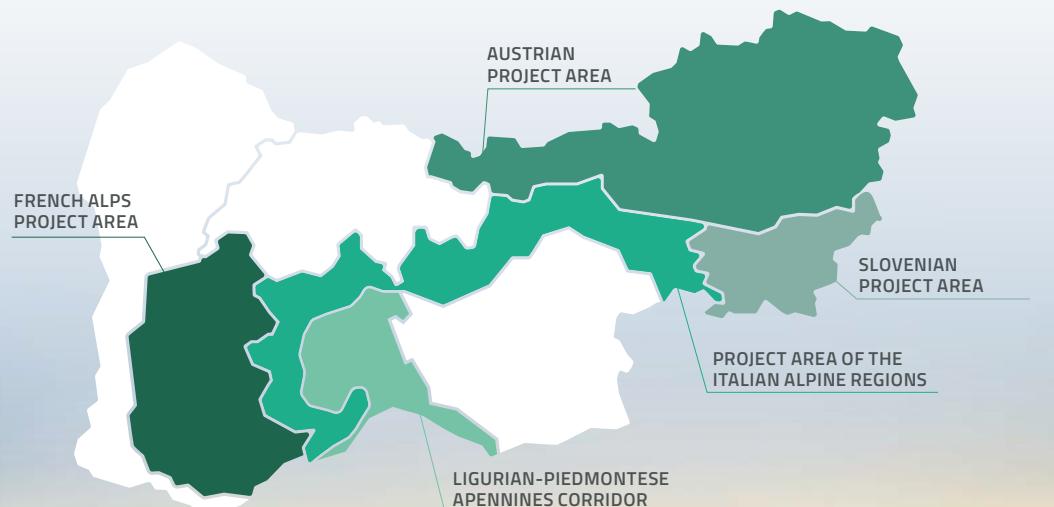
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## LIFE WOLFALPS EU PROJECT



The LIFE WolfAlps EU is a European project co-funded under the LIFE Nature and Biodiversity program, benefiting from the support of six co-funders. The project started on September 1, 2019, and ended on September 30, 2024.

The main goal of the project has been to improve coexistence between wolves and people living and working in the Alps and the Ligurian-Piedmont Apennine corridor, by building and implementing shared solutions together with stakeholders. The actions were carried out thanks to the collaboration of an **international partnership consisting of 20 partners and 119 supporters and 6 co-financers**, working closely together to promote the coexistence of human activities and wolves. For the first time, **actions were developed at the entire Alpine ecosystem level**, both in areas where wolves have been present for over twenty years (Western Alps) and where the recolonization process is more recent (Central-Eastern Alps), with an adaptive approach that allowed responding to population expansion and emerging needs. Given the wolves' great ability to move and the extent of their

LIFE WolfAlps EU worked on three main intervention areas:



### MONITORING

Coordinated and cross-border wolf monitoring, population-level management, and conservation



### COEXISTENCE

Mitigating conflicts between human activities and wolves



### COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION

Increasing the knowledge about wolves

territories, it is essential to work in a coordinated manner at the population level, overcoming administrative fragmentation, which is a significant obstacle to proper management. LIFE WolfAlps EU has made it possible to develop best practices that can be shared and used beyond the borders of protected areas, provinces, regions, and nations.

The project achieved important results through a **multidisciplinary approach** to support coexistence, ensuring a favorable conservation status of the Alpine wolf population in the long term, while mitigating conflicts among the involved groups of interest. Common methods and standards were developed to produce a solid assessment of the Alpine wolf population status, while also working to reduce the impact of poaching, identify and control cases of hybridization, and counter habitat fragmentation. Essential efforts were made to reduce damage to livestock farming: intervention teams for prevention provided support to farmers in setting up efficient prevention systems and accessing compensation measures. Significant efforts were made to promote dialogue and stakeholder engagement through the development of platforms, public meetings, and the Stewardship program. There was a promotion of a higher level of information, awareness of coexistence issues, and dissemination of correct information about wolves through events, exhibitions, workshops, publications, educational activities for students of all ages and teachers, and debunking fake news.



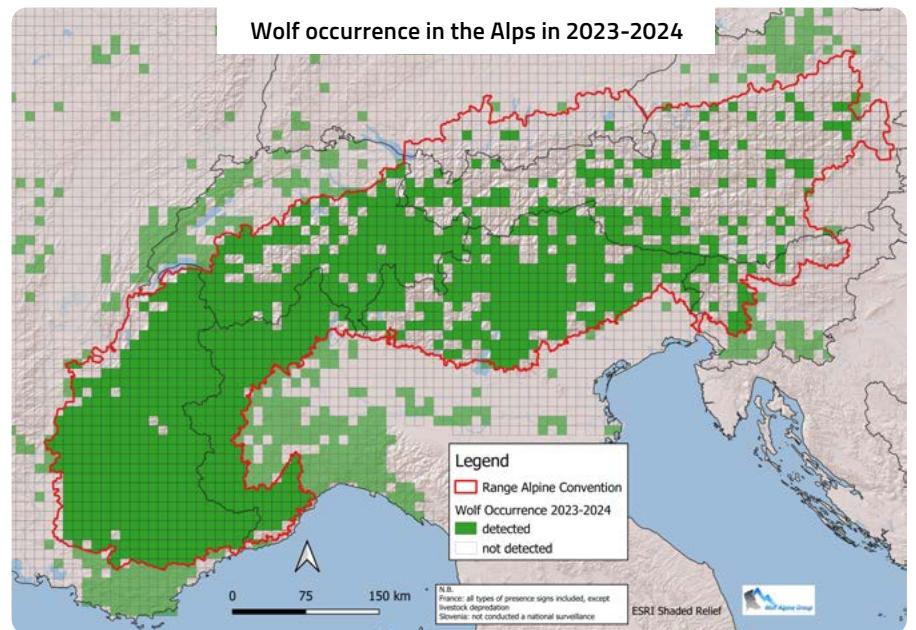
## AN INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY FOR WOLF MONITORING IN THE ALPS

Obtaining an accurate and robust estimate of wolf populations is fundamental to define the necessary interventions for the conservation and management of the species. The wolf population across the entire Alpine arc belongs ecologically to a single population, despite spanning the territories of seven different states: wolves do not recognize our administrative boundaries and can cover considerable distances. With LIFE WolfAlps EU, efforts have been made to **build a coordinated and standardized system for monitoring the Alpine wolf population.**



A [common sampling strategy has been defined](#), a document that identifies the reference criteria for classifying signs of presence and sightings, as well as the parameters to provide for both spatial and numerical assessments of the Alpine population, including the documented presence distribution and the number of packs and reproductive pairs.

The sampling year referred to for estimates corresponds to the wolf's biological year, that is, from one reproductive event to the next.





Each country has developed its national strategy within the framework of close international collaboration. In Italy, France, Austria, and Slovenia, over **135 operator training workshops have been organized**. The training activities were organized before each sampling year with an average of 1.218 participants per year, ensuring a homogeneous approach across the Alps.

The data collected at the level of individual national campaigns were integrated into the overall assessment of the Alpine wolf population status. [In 2020/2021, for the first time, 206 packs and 37 new pairs were documented synergically across 7 nations](#), for a total of 243 reproductive units.



As shown in the [updated 2023/2024 occurrence map](#) on page 7, the Western Alps population is characterised by higher pack density, while the expansion in the Central-Eastern Alps is still ongoing, and the Dinaric population is expanding northwestwards.

The numerical and spatial expansion of wolves makes it even more challenging to achieve estimates at the entire population level. For this reason, international efforts continue to develop increasingly sophisticated genetic analysis methods and statistical models to obtain more accurate estimates, overcoming the difficulties of field data collection. Thanks to the project, an Alpine wolf genetics group was formed, drafting an [international protocol](#) and developing an innovative method for identifying genotypes.

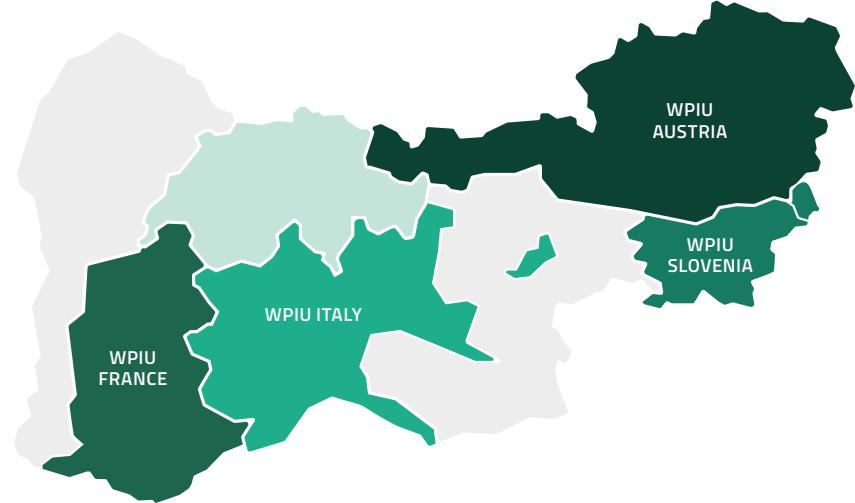


## THE EMERGENCY UNITS FOR LIVESTOCK DAMAGE PREVENTION



Farmers and shepherds are the most affected by the presence of wolves. **Reducing the impact of predation on livestock to economically acceptable and socially tolerable levels is a priority to ensure the maintenance and development of traditional livestock activities**, while simultaneously conserving wolves in the long term in the Alpine territory and beyond.

Experience gained from national and European projects has demonstrated the importance of having specialized technical personnel to assist farmers and shepherds in using prevention systems and for timely intervention in case of attacks. For this reason, LIFE WolfAlps EU has created a new “first aid” approach to prevention that facilitates direct and immediate contact with farmers: the Wolf Prevention Intervention Units (WPIUs). These teams include specialized



operators from various public entities who **operate based on a shared protocol of best practices** to be followed across the Alps, ensuring uniform coordination and approach to different situations. They intervene to support farmers in finding and implementing prevention systems specific to each business context, accessing compensation and prevention support measures, and the proper use of guardian dogs. The WPIUs have carried out over 1800 interventions, engaging with more than 1077 shepherds and farmers, both professional and amateur, who otherwise have difficulty accessing funds provided for prevention and compensation.

**Livestock guarding dogs** are one of the most effective means of preventing livestock attacks but also one of the most complex, as they require proper training and management and can generate conflicts with tourism. For this reason, training courses and meetings with farmers have been organized, and efforts have been made to raise awareness among tourists and visitors to mountain areas, including using **pastoral**



had a higher level of association with sheep and goats than with cattle, suggesting the need for greater attention in the socialization phase between dogs and cattle to improve protection effectiveness.

[\*\*Guidelines for an effective long-term strategy for preventing damage to domestic livestock\*\*](#)

have been defined, to limit, prevent, and reduce the impact of wolves on existing agricultural practices to ensure acceptable coexistence conditions.

**mediators** as in the Mercantour National Park, and providing information panels. In Slovenia, collaboration was carried out with the network of livestock guarding dog breeders. In France, the WPIUs also conducted nighttime observation sessions of livestock grazing using infrared cameras to better understand the effectiveness of the prevention systems and provide farmers and shepherds with useful elements to adapt prevention systems to the context in which they work.

With the same aim, in the Maritime Alps Protected Areas, the effectiveness of livestock guarding dogs was assessed through a study with GPS collars that showed that the dogs





## ENGAGING AND INVOLVING STAKEHOLDERS



The wolf is emblematic of the complex relationship between humans and wildlife: the presence of the species in a territory goes far beyond simple ecology. It also concerns economic, political, and social aspects. Its influence on community life is greater when wolves and people share more spaces. The actual and perceived impacts caused by the species, and the changes in habits that its return entails, generally lead to a low level of acceptance and tolerance of wolves.

**Involving stakeholders is crucial for sustainably mitigating real or potential conflicts in the long term:** it allows for a better understanding of problems, generating new ideas, establishing trust relationships, and sharing reasoning and decisions. The LIFE WolfAlps EU project has, therefore, aimed to establish an increasing



dialogue with local actors who are, in various capacities, affected by the presence of wolves. Coordinated efforts followed a common strategy, adapting it to the local context for a widespread approach. **Specific guidelines for stakeholder engagement and mediation during meetings were developed.** A stakeholder map was created, a very useful tool for planning activities and meetings.

**Eleven thematic platforms were organized**, involving the main categories of stakeholders (farmers, hunters, and environmental associations) in 42 workshops and meetings with over 1250 participants. These are complemented by **162 informational meetings organized for specific stakeholder targets throughout the project area.**





In particular, hunters were involved in the field in the study that aimed to understand the interactions between prey, predators and human activities in the Alps. The research was developed in response to the hunting world's request to know the impact of the wolf on roe deer populations in the Alps, and was developed in 4 areas in Italy, Slovenia and France, characterised by a different degree of anthropisation and presence of the predator. Hunters were an integral part of the construction of the study, collaborating in the identification of the study areas, trapping and monitoring. The results were published in a scientific journal and in a [publication dedicated to hunters](#).



## Participating in Coexistence: the Stewardship

Another way the LIFE WolfAlps EU project has involved associations and individuals is through the **stewardship program**: an initiative created to experiment with new forms of **active collaboration with stakeholders** who want to engage with the project in terms of idea exchange, knowledge sharing, and **pilot action building**. Stewards are stakeholders who decide to participate because they believe it is in their interest to do so, therefore committing to work with project partners to find solutions and cooperate in implementing them using project resources, but not necessarily embracing the general mission.

The stewardship program has its dedicated logo, representing the different key stakeholders: farmers, hunters, and environmentalists. Joining the stewardship program was formalized by signing an agreement between the parties. The diversity

of the stakeholders involved (farmers, hunting associations, environmental associations, and environmental guides) and the collaboration agreements stipulated within the program reflect the variety of activities developed: prevention measure demonstrations, studies on predator-prey-human dynamics, monitoring, exhibitions, educational activities, ecotourism, and outreach events. The results were compiled in a booklet, ["Engaging in Coexistence"](#).



## THE INTERNATIONAL APPROACH TO FIGHT AGAINST POACHING



The use of poisoned bait is one of the most serious threats to wolf conservation and is a dangerous practice that affects a large number of wild and domestic species both directly and indirectly. It contaminates watercourses and soil, causing incalculable damage to ecosystems, with effects that can be very long-lasting.

The LIFE WolfAlps EU project has **worked to fight this insidious and cruel practice by acting in a coordinated manner along the Alps**. An operational strategy was developed that defines a central structure, managed by the Carabinieri Forestali, capable of supporting and coordinating environmental police forces in fighting environmental crime. The strategy aims, in particular, to combat poaching and the poisoning of wolves while promoting international cooperation in environmental crime investigations through the EnviCrimeNet network.



**1** Operational anti-poaching strategy



**7** Operational Anti-Poison Dog Units: 6 in Italy and 1 in Austria



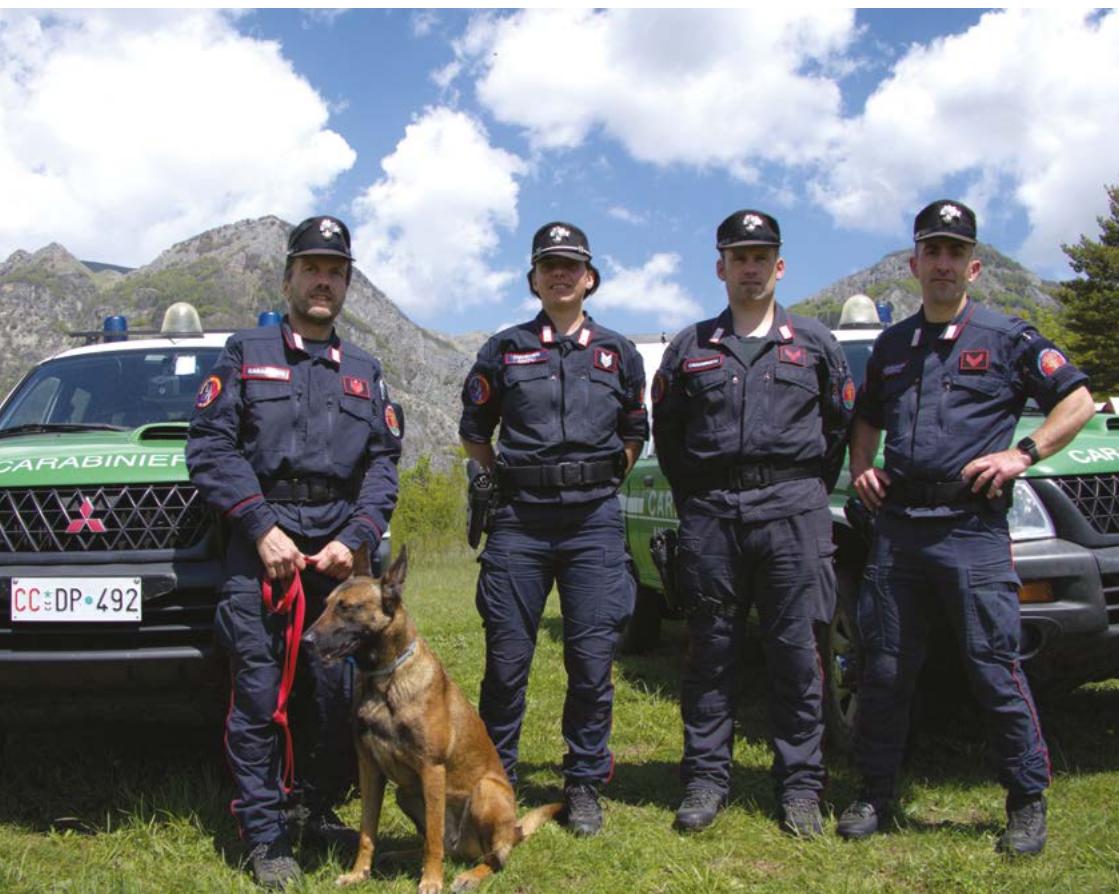
**1124** Interventions carried out  
snail killers, rodenticides, pesticides are the most frequently detected substances in baits and carcasses

Nine Anti-Poison Dog Units (APDUs) were established (7 operational in the field and 2 will be operational in 2025), adding to the four formed in the previous LIFE WOLFALPS project. These units are fundamental tools in combating poisoning and consist of a handler and a specially trained anti-poison dog capable of detecting even the smallest amounts of toxic substances scattered on the ground. Continuous training of the APDUs is cru-



cial to foster bonding between the dog and handler and their effectiveness in the field. In Italy, 13 coordination meetings were organized between the teams, which also served as opportunities for joint training sessions. **In Austria, the first APDU was formed at the University of Veterinary Medicine in Vienna**, and 8 training workshops were organized, attended by 199 environmental police officers.

Along the Alps and the Ligurian-Piedmont Apennines, the APDUs carried out 740 preventive patrols and 384 urgent interventions following reports of carcasses or suspected baits (110 inspections with positive results), in addition to multiple **awareness-raising activities**. This important work in preventing and protecting wild and domestic fauna will continue beyond the project's end, thanks to the commitment of these "six-legged" units.

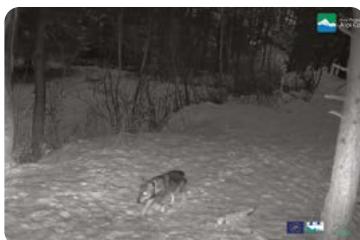


In Italy, the UCAs consist of Arma dei Carabinieri personnel, staff from the Alpi Maritime and Alpi Cozie Protected Areas, the Metropolitan City of Turin, the Provincial Police of Brescia, the Wildlife and Environmental Surveillance Unit of the Liguria Region, a professional trainer/handler, and selected breeds of anti-poison dogs.

Concrete support for the activities of some of the project's UCAs has been provided by the **Fondazione Capellino**, a non-profit commercial entity and one of the project's main co-financers. The Foundation has donated over 5 tons (20,000 meals!) of Holistic Almo Nature pet food to the large family of anti-poison canine units to support them in their demanding work.



## CONTROL OF WOLF-DOG HYBRIDIZATION



Hybridization occurs when two individuals from genetically distinct species or subspecies interbreed, and their offspring are fertile. When hybridization occurs between domestic and wild species, such as dogs and wolves, it is called **anthropogenic hybridization**. This poses a severe threat to wolf populations in Europe as it can alter the genetic identity of wolves and, consequently, the ecology, morphology, and behavior of the species. Wolf-dog hybrids are fertile and can backcross with wolves, thereby **transmitting traits unsuited to the species' ecological role**. For this reason, the Bern Convention advises Member States to "adopt appropriate measures to monitor, prevent, and mitigate wolf-dog hybridization."

The LIFE Wolfalps EU project has worked to develop management skills within public entities by forming local multidisciplinary task forces, involving public institutions (such as Parks, Regions, and Universities) on a regional scale in the Alps, and working in collaboration with ISPRA. The "[Guidelines for the Management of Wolf-Dog Hybrids in the Alpine Regions](#)" are one of the outcomes of this important work: they propose an authorization and procedural process for interventions, including reproductive inhibition of hybrids through capture, sterilization, and application of GPS collars, followed by release into their original areas. The guidelines provide a unified and coordinated intervention approach for the Alpine regions, within a national regulatory context that does not currently regulate hybrid management.



**1**  
Management protocol



**1**  
International genetic identification protocol



**3**  
Intervention teams for hybrid capture and translocation



**1**  
Roundtable with stakeholders



**4**  
Hybrids captured

During the planning phase of the project, the Ligurian-Piedmont Apennine ecological corridor was identified as a high-risk area for hybridization due to its proximity to the northern Apennines, where hybridization is present. Conversely, hybrids had never been detected in the Alps before 2019. However, during the genetic monitoring of 2020/2021, 4 hybrid packs were identified, two in the Apennine corridor and two, unexpectedly, in the Julian and Cozie Alps. The project thus decided to address hybridization in the Cozie Alps as well, reallocating resources and coordinating interventions. In total, four hybrids were captured, sterilized, fitted with GPS radio collars, and released back into the wild (two in the Cozie Alps, one in Liguria). In addition, one hybrid was managed in Lombardy according to the outlined management strategy.

This action has allowed for the creation of **3 multidisciplinary teams** consisting of technicians, trappers, park rangers, and veterinarians—task forces that can ensure long-term competence in the Piedmont and Liguria regions, even beyond the project's conclusion. These teams will be able to respond quickly to cases of hybridization, capture individuals in urban areas, or rescue injured animals.





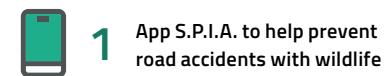
## REDUCING HABITAT FRAGMENTATION AND PREVENTING INCIDENTS

Roads and railways cause habitat fragmentation and reduce their quality, as well as posing a high mortality risk for wildlife attempting to cross them. **Reducing road incidents involving wildlife is crucial for conservation** and because they result in significant economic, social, and health-related damages.



The Upper Susa Valley in Piedmont, Italy, is a hotspot for these issues: it features areas of high natural value while being crossed by a continentaly significant highway, two state roads, an international railway, ski lifts, and predominantly tourist-oriented towns. It is a true "ecological trap": a highly attractive territory for wildlife but at high risk of incidents.

After evaluating the main critical elements by the Metropolitan City of Turin in collaboration with the Cottian Alps Protected Areas, the University of Turin, ANAS, RFI, SITAF, and TELT, interventions were carried out in the area to improve



road signs and panels (with variable message light panels, warning signs with reinforcing lights), clean underpasses to make them suitable for wildlife passage, secure railway sections by installing nets along the tracks, and raise awareness and provide training on the topic, even at driving schools, and an App for Smartphones to prevent animal-vehicle collision.

Additionally, the "Guidelines for Integrating Wolf Conservation into Landscape Planning and Development" were defined, aimed particularly at those responsible for planning, development, and territorial management. Their objective is to promote the integrity of habitats in areas crucial for wolf conservation, fostering territorial management that reconciles the implementation of best practices to preserve ecological needs with socio-economic development.



## THE WOLF AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: ECOTOURISM AND WOLF-FRIENDLY PRODUCTS



Being a highly charismatic species, the wolf can represent an **important opportunity for economic and social development of the territory and its community**, rather than being perceived solely as a threat to livestock farming and alpine tourism. With LIFE WolfAlps EU, efforts were made in **synergy with local realities to create ecotourism proposals and products to support the local economy and the work of mountain farmers**, while also seeking to improve knowledge about wolves, raise tourist awareness of the impact of hiking, and promote appropriate behaviors during excursions in areas protected from predators.

Promoting coexistence between wolves and human activities is the principle that inspired the drafting of the "[Guidelines for Non-Consumptive use of wolves in tourism](#)", approved by the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe specialist group. Sixteen training and informational events for guides and tourism operators were organized to disseminate the contents of the guidelines, and 143 ecotourism events respecting local biodiversity and culture were held.

New ways to promote coexistence were also experimented with, such as organizing a **themed art camp in Slovenia**, the card game "**Do the Right Thing in the Mountains!**" to experience this environment safely and sustainably, and a small but ambitious project, "**A Pillow for Coexistence**" aimed at creating a virtuous cycle for transforming greasy wool from local farms



into comfortable pet pillows. Valuing greasy wool is a concrete tool to provide sheep farmers with new perspectives. With the involvement of farmers, companies, and local artisans, 80 wool pet pillows were produced: the proceeds from sales were partly used to pay a fair price for the raw material to the involved livestock farmers and partly addressed to the 2024 **Coexistence Fund** managed by the project steward "Io non Ho paura del Lupo" and made available to farmers. Additionally, based on the experience of Slovenian partners in the LIFE DINALP BEAR project, a special tool—a "speaking label"—was developed to reward the practices of those producers, artisans, and tourism professionals who contribute to supporting coexistence with large carnivores. Everyone can do much, depending on their activity: farmers by effectively protecting livestock, artisans by giving their handmade products a positive message, guides and accommodations by spreading correct information about large carnivores to local hikers and clients. All these entities are included on the Ecoesistenza.it website, making the silent efforts of small producers, ecotourism operators, and accommodations visible.





## EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE NEW GENERATIONS

Raising awareness creatively and stimulatingly among new generations is essential for **fostering critical and informed thinking on environmental issues**. The wolf, one of the most charismatic animals that has captivated human imagination since ancient times, has been a source of inspiration for developing a **wide variety of educational programs and tools dedicated to all school levels, teachers, and nature guides**. These initiatives aim to help understand the diverse perspectives on the species, touching on various educational fields, from sciences to social studies, art, and physical education.



Twenty-seven **training courses** and **Summer Schools for teachers**, the project's Ambassadors, were organized, and over 110 **educational activities for schools**, including debates, role-playing games, and quizzes, were promoted, **involving stakeholders such as farmers and hunters**. Additionally, new products were developed to reach a broader audience and remain available beyond the project's duration: the **"Wolf in a Backpack"** outdoor activity kit, board games, the illustrated book **"The Wolves of the Alps"** which tells the true story of wolves, their biology, conflicts with human activities, and the kamishibai Japanese theater, an original and effective tool for reading animation (**"The Wolves' Tree"** and **"The True Story of Lupois"**).

The educational proposals were received with great enthusiasm, involving over 9,000 young students and 900 university students, even beyond the project's boundaries. Some have been included in the **annual educational proposals for schools** by various involved park entities.



## THE YOUNG RANGER PROGRAM: NATURALLY CURIOUS ABOUT NATURE

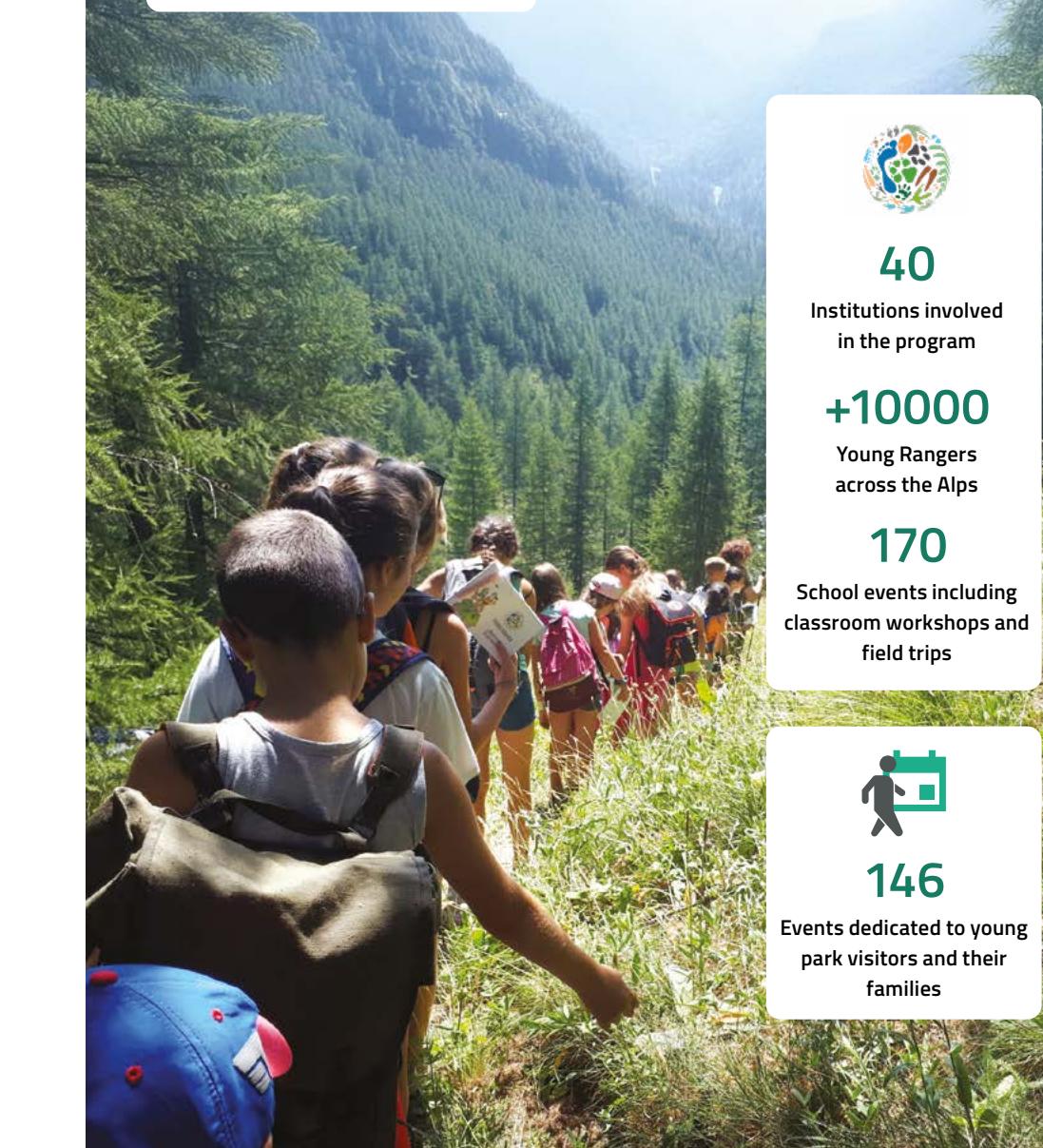


Focusing on the education and awareness of new generations through empathic and emotional experiences in contact with the natural environment is also the foundation of the **Young Ranger Program**, inspired by the popular American Junior Ranger program.

The program is aimed at children aged between 7 and 12, who visit one of the 40 participating institutions (protected areas, museums, and zoos) across the Italian, French, and Slovenian Alps. Young Ranger uses the wolf as a starting point to provide an opportunity to learn about the Alpine environment in which it lives, aiming to stimulate curiosity and empathy towards the natural world through play and active exploration of the surrounding environment while simultaneously conveying some important scientific concepts.



An activity booklet, a badge, and a Passaparks are the starting points for the **exploration journey of Alpine biodiversity**, enriched with various game posters focusing on one or more special features of different areas.



**40**

Institutions involved  
in the program

**+10000**

Young Rangers  
across the Alps

**170**

School events including  
classroom workshops and  
field trips



**146**

Events dedicated to young  
park visitors and their  
families



## COMMUNICATION AS A TOOL FOR COEXISTENCE WITH WOLVES



Communication plays a substantial role in conservation, and even more so in promoting coexistence. The wolf is an animal that evokes strongly polarized opinions. In the LIFE WolfAlps EU project, efforts were made to disseminate accurate information, with the aim of conveying the message that there is no "good wolf" or "bad wolf," but only the real wolf, with its eco-ethical characteristics. The international communication strategy was developed and then adapted to national and local levels to meet the needs of different territories. Dialogue and engagement were at the core of many LIFE WolfAlps EU actions; at the same time, efforts were made to inform about the main activities carried out and raise awareness on coexistence issues: prevention, distribution, abundance,



People Reached:

 **390** Journalists attended the training courses

 **13 697** Facebook followers

 **139 000** YouTube users

 **4400** Instagram followers

 **120 000** People reached in events, conferences, and exhibitions

 **300 000** Website views





ecology and behavior of wolves, monitoring, and addressing threats such as poaching, hybridization, and habitat fragmentation.

The project website contains downloadable project outputs and over 870 articles in 5 languages detailing the progress of actions, which were also regularly communicated through social media and the newsletter. While the web has been a very

important information channel, direct interaction with people has been equally important: the project organized or participated in **223 public events**, many of which were **requested directly by local communities**. A great deal of effort was put into producing **informative materials**: brochures and posters on hybridization, poisoning, how to contact the WPIU, or the canine anti-poison units. Additionally, infographics were produced on behaviors to adopt in case of wolf sightings, designed for newly colonized areas and more anthropized contexts, which were also adopted by some municipalities and parks outside



the project area. **Six international conferences** were organized on topics such as bold wolves, prevention, monitoring, management, coexistence, and the project's progress. **Extensive networking was carried out with other European and non-European projects working on similar themes**, and three workshops on ecotourism and education, communication, and stakeholder engagement were organized, with a total of 450 participants.

**Fact-checking news** is one of LIFE WolfAlps EU's strengths: being a frequently divisive topic, wolves are often at the center of false news or alarmism. A **press review at the Alpine level was conducted**, collecting almost 5,000 articles about wolves. For fake news, efforts were made to debunk and disseminate the correct information. **Thirteen workshops for journalists** were organized. Finally, the manual ***"Lupus in Bufala"*** was produced, aimed at debunking myths about wolves and providing readers with tools to verify news and develop a critical approach.

Lastly, new languages were experimented with to reach a wider audience, using videos, 3 podcasts, and especially the **immersive exhibition "Through the eyes of the Wolf"** which toured three different locations, reaching over 50,000 visitors.





## PARTNERS



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For more information visit the project web site:  
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