

STUDY AREA DESCRIPTION

MONT LOZÈRE

LOZÈRE, FRANCE



© Alice Ouvrier

STUDY AREA DESCRIPTION

MONT LOZÈRE

LOZÈRE, FRANCE



**Funded by
the European Union**

CoCo is funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe - Research and Innovation programme (grant agreement No. 101181958). The project, started in November 2024, has a duration of three years.

TABLE OF CONTENT

1	Introduction	5
2	Overview	5
3	Socioeconomic Context.....	6
4	Farming Context.....	8
5	Local Conflict Associated with Large Carnivores.....	9
	References	10

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	The Mont Lozère landscape is a plateau characterised by a wide variety of habitats, but above all it is an extensive grazing area to which flocks of sheep and cattle migrate (Photo Credit: Alice Ouvrier).	5
Figure 2.	In addition to the few sedentary (i.e. year-round) herds on the Mont Lozère plateau, it is common for farmers to gather their herds for summer transhumance (Photo Credit: Alice Ouvrier).	6
Figure 3.	References to and representations of the Beast of Gévaudan are widespread in the region, such as this statue in Aumont-Aubrac (Photo Credit: René Hourdry).	7
Figure 4.	Shepherds, huts, nighttime enclosure and livestock guarding dogs are gradually returning to the summer pastures (Photo Credit: Alice Ouvrier).	9

1 INTRODUCTION

Located in southern France within the Cévennes National Park, Mont Lozère is a vast upland massif reaching nearly 1,700 metres in elevation. Its landscapes combine granite plateaus, river gorges, and forests, shaped by strong climatic seasonality. Mont Lozère lies at the heart of the Causses and Cévennes UNESCO World Heritage Site, where summer transhumance, the seasonal movement of livestock to high mountain pastures, remains a living tradition that continues to shape local agro-pastoral systems and heritage. However, this traditional landscape is now facing new challenges. After decades of absence, wolves have returned over the past ten years, disrupting extensive livestock farming practices.



Figure 1. The Mont Lozère landscape is a plateau characterised by a wide variety of habitats, but above all it is an extensive grazing area to which flocks of sheep and cattle migrate (Photo Credit: Alice Ouvrier).

2 OVERVIEW

- **Municipalities:** Allenc – Altier – La Bastide Puylaurent – Brenoux – Chadenet – Cubières – Cubières – Lanuéjols – Laubert – Malons et Elze (30) – Montbel – Mont-Lozère et Goulet – Pied de Borne – Pontails et Brésis (30) – Pourcharesses – Prévencières – Saint André Capcèze – Saint Étienne du Valdonnez – Saint Fréal d’Albuges – Saint Hélène – Villefort (Domergue, 2028).
- **Geographical size:** Mont Lozère covers an area of 716 km², with elevations ranging from 219 m to 1,699 m (Domergue, 2028).

- ▶ **Human population:** The Mont Lozère Federation of Municipalities is home to 5,511 inhabitants across the 21 municipalities (Domergue, 2028).
- ▶ **Number of livestock farmers (approx.):** Mont Lozère comprises seven pastoral units: six are used by 20 sheep farmers with 10,000 transhumant sheep, whilst one is home to 150 beef farmers.
- ▶ **Livestock farming systems:** Extensive livestock farming, mainly of sheep and beef cattle, is prevalent, with communal herds gathered from multiple farmers for seasonal transhumance (Figure 2).
- ▶ **Wild large carnivore species:** Wolves (*Canis lupus*) are the only large predators in the area, having been present for just over a decade.
- ▶ **Wolf population:** Mont Lozère lies at the frontier of wolf recolonisation, where population size is difficult to estimate. At least one unestablished pack appears to frequent the area.



Figure 2. In addition to the few sedentary (i.e. year-round) herds on the Mont Lozère plateau, it is common for farmers to gather their herds for summer transhumance (Photo Credit: Alice Ouvrier).

3 SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT

- ▶ Mont Lozère is a granite massif, rising to 1,699 metres at Finiels Peak. It is one of five massifs within the Cévennes National Park in southern France's Massif Central (Lozère). Established in 1970, the park uniquely combines nature conservation with inhabited areas, being the only park located in the mid-mountain terrain that includes forestry operations (Parc National des Cévennes, n.d.).

- ▶ The region is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site “The Causses and the Cévennes, Mediterranean agro-pastoral cultural landscape”, recognised for its millennia-old pastoral systems, transhumance routes, traditional villages and farms, and the sustainable management of natural resources that have shaped the landscapes throughout time (UNESCO, 2011).
- ▶ Located in one of France’s most rural and sparsely populated regions, Mont Lozère has seen little industrialisation. Agriculture remains traditional and closely connected to nature. Tourism, mostly “green” and attracting visitors from urban areas, values this pastoral heritage and the harmony between humans and nature (O’Rourke, 2001).
- ▶ Tourism, hiking, and nature-related activities (wildlife and botanical observations, heritage trails, etc.) form important components of the local economy, particularly during warmer seasons. The presence of the GR 70 (Stevenson Trail) further enhances the appeal.
- ▶ Population density is among the lowest in France (7–8 inhabitants/km²), and the population is ageing, as young people often leave for urban centres.
- ▶ In Mont Lozère, the memory of the Beast of Gévaudan remains vivid. This creature, responsible for fatal attacks on multiple humans in the 18th century, nurtured a deep and lasting fear of wolves that continues to shape the pastoral imagination and collective memory (Fehlmann, 2020).



Figure 3. References to and representations of the Beast of Gévaudan are widespread in the region, such as this statue in Aumont-Aubrac (Photo Credit: René Hourdry).

4 FARMING CONTEXT

Agriculture and livestock farming—especially pastoral and extensive systems—remain a pillar of the local economy. However, as in many mountain areas, farms are typically small and family-run, that struggle with establishing themselves, passing on ownership, and promoting their products. Other agricultural activities, such as beekeeping, forestry, and chestnut production, complement livestock farming.

Farms may focus on a single breed or mixed breeding. During the summer season, some herders gather their sheep or cattle to graze in high-altitude areas, following the seasonal cycles of vegetation and climate. Flocks typically consist of around 1000 sheep guarded by the owner or hired shepherds, or around 50 cows.

Local livestock breeds have been preserved, reflecting a long standing agro-pastoral heritage. Sheep raised for lamb meat include the Blanche du Massif Central, and the Caussenarde des Garrigues, whilst the local beef cattle breed is the *Aubrac* (Parc national des Cévennes, n.d.).

Main Challenges:

- ▶ The site's inclusion in the National Park places constraints on some pastoral and agricultural activities, whilst also providing budgetary support, such as access to land or shepherding infrastructure.
- ▶ Coexistence between pastoralism and recreational activities in the mountains can be challenging. For example, pastoralists worry about negative interactions between walkers and livestock guarding dogs.
- ▶ Limited fodder resources in the valley encourage transhumance, but new herders often struggle to find available summer pastures.
- ▶ The grouping of herds from different farms increases the health risks for animals through the potential transmission of diseases and the risk of conflict within pastoral groups due to collective decision-making and practices.
- ▶ Severe epidemics, such as bluetongue disease in 2024, have affected Mont Lozère and surrounding areas.
- ▶ Ageing of the agricultural population and division between rural and urban areas.
- ▶ Heavy dependence of farms on the CAP.
- ▶ The return of wolves after for several decades of absence has completely disrupted pastoral practices, both on the summer pastures and on the farms (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Shepherds, huts, nighttime enclosure and livestock guarding dogs are gradually returning to the summer pastures (Photo Credit: Alice Ouvrier).

5 LOCAL CONFLICT ASSOCIATED WITH LARGE CARNIVORES

Number of attacks:

On Mont Lozère, 19 predation events were recorded in 2024. In the same year, across the wider Lozère department, there were 217 domestic animals killed and 124 injured during 104 attacks in which wolf predation could not be ruled out (Les constats de dommage de l'année en cours, n.d.).

- ▶ Whenever a farmer or shepherd finds a carcass that may have been killed by a wolf, National Park agents conduct an expert assessment to confirm the cause of death. If the farmer has followed correct reporting procedures and implemented at least two herd protection measures, such as guarding dogs, shepherd presence or fencing, they are entitled to financial compensation determined by prefectural decree.
- ▶ Attacks primarily affect sheep and cattle, and more rarely goats and horses.
- ▶ Attacks occur both on summer pastures and on farms in the valleys.

- Predation remains highly random and unpredictable at the herd level, making it extremely difficult for farmers to anticipate attacks and adapt their practices accordingly.

Social conflict:

Social conflict emerged as soon as, or even before, the first wolves arrived in the area in 2012 (Martin, 2012) and intensified following the first breeding of a pair in 2021. This conflict has been marked by strong local opposition, including numerous demonstrations and press articles. Resistance has been expressed mainly by the pastoral community, but also by hunters.

- Farmers criticise a lack of information about the number and locations of wolves.
- The return of wolves to the area has damaged the relationship of trust between farmers and the Cévennes National Park.
- Beyond concerns about livestock predation, part of the local population worries about the risk of attacks on humans.
- Adaptation of pastoralism to the presence of wolves entails increased workload and a considerable anxiety for farmers.
- As elsewhere in France, though unusual for the heart of a national park, derogations allow the lethal removal of problematic wolves or packs, authorised by a prefectural decree.

REFERENCES

Domergue, A. (2018, June 28). Territoire et histoire. *Communauté de Communes Mont-Lozère*. <https://www.ccmontlozere.fr/2018/06/28/territoire-et-histoire-de-la-communaute-de-communes>

Fehlmann, M. (2020). The Beast of Gévaudan as a history of the changing perceptions of fatal human–wolf interaction. In *Managing the Return of the Wild*. Routledge.

Les constats de dommage de l'année en cours. (2025, July 30). Les services de l'État en Lozère. Retrieved 17 October 2025, from <https://www.lozere.gouv.fr/Actions-de-l-Etat/Environnement-Risques-naturels-et-technologiques/Biodiversite/Dossier-Loup/Les-dommages-sur-troupeaux-en-Lozere-l-Etat-mobilise/Les-constats-de-dommage-de-l-annee-en-cours>

Les races d'élevage /. Retrieved 16 October 2025, from <https://www.cevennes-parcnational.fr/fr/des-connaissances/le-patrimoine-naturel/la-biodiversite-cultivee-et-elevee/les-races-delevage>

Loup: Un nouveau dispositif pour la protection des troupeaux | Parc national des Cévennes. (n.d.). Retrieved 18 October 2025, from https://www.cevennes-parcnational.fr/fr/actualites/loup-un-nouveau-dispositif-pour-la-protection-des-troupeaux?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Martin, M. (2012). *Entre affection et aversion, le retour du loup en Cévennes comme problème public*. *Terrains & travaux*, 20(1), 15-33. <https://doi.org/10.3917/tt.020.0015>.

O'rourke, E. (2001). Changing social representations of the countryside: Rurality, nature and heritage within a French National Park. In *Food, Nature and Society*. Routledge.

UNESCO, C. du patrimoine. (n.d.). *Les Causses et les Cévennes, paysage culturel de l'agro-pastoralisme méditerranéen*. UNESCO Centre du patrimoine mondial. Retrieved 14 October 2025, from <https://whc.unesco.org/fr/list/1153/>

Un territoire reconnu | Parc national des Cévennes. (n.d.). Retrieved 14 October 2025, from <https://www.cevennes-parcnational.fr/fr/le-parc-national-des-cevennes/un-territoire-reconnu>