

STUDY AREA DESCRIPTION

GREDOS

ÁVILA, SPAIN



© Asociación Raza Avileña

STUDY AREA DESCRIPTION

GREDOS

ÁVILA, SPAIN



**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:	Extensive grazing of Avileña-Negra Ibérica cattle in the high-mountain pasturelands of the Sierra de Gredos (Ávila, Spain), exemplifying traditional low-intensity livestock systems in the region (Photo: Asociación Raza Avileña).	5
Figure 2:	Shepherd on horseback guiding Avileña-Negra Ibérica cattle during transhumance through the Puerto del Pico mountain pass (Ávila, Spain), exemplifying traditional pastoralism in highland environments (Photo: Asociación Raza Avileña). ...	6
Figure 3:	Winter feeding of Avileña-Negra Ibérica cattle in the high-mountain pastures of the Sierra de Gredos (Ávila, Spain), illustrating the adaptation of traditional extensive livestock systems to harsh climatic conditions (Photo: Daniel Martín Collado).	7
Figure 4:	Hispano-Bretón horses in Navarredonda de Gredos in pasture plots delimited using traditional stone-and-wire fencing (Photo: D. Martín Collado).	8
Figure 5:	Avileña-Negra Ibérica cattle grazing in traditional extensive pastures of the Sierra de Gredos (Ávila, Spain), where fencing is absent or widely spaced, reflecting long-established grazing practices (Photo: Asociación Raza Avileña).	9

1 INTRODUCTION

Nestled in central Spain, the Sierra de Gredos has shaped mountain life for centuries through transhumance along the iconic Puerto del Pico pass, a route dating back to Roman times. Today, its economy blends nature-based tourism with extensive cattle farming, much of it still relying on seasonal migrations to the wolf-free lowlands of southwest Spain. After wolves disappeared in the 1950s, they naturally returned just a decade ago, bringing both renewed challenges and a reminder of Gredos' deep ties between high-mountain meadows, forests, and enduring pastoral traditions.



Figure 1: Extensive grazing of Avileña-Negra Ibérica cattle in the high-mountain pasturelands of the Sierra de Gredos (Ávila, Spain), exemplifying traditional low-intensity livestock systems in the region (Photo: Asociación Raza Avileña).

2 OVERVIEW

- ▶ **Municipalities:** Hoyos del Espino, Navarredonda de Gredos, and San Martín del Pimpollar.
- ▶ **Geographical size:** Combined area of approximately 175 km².
- ▶ **Human population:** The 3 municipalities host roughly 1,007 permanent residents.

- ▶ **Number of livestock farmers:** There are approximately 109 extensive beef cattle farms across the area. However, this figure likely overestimates the actual number of professional farms, as it also includes hobby farmers and holdings with only a few animals.
- ▶ **Livestock farming systems:** Mainly extensive beef cattle farming through low-input family operations that rely on natural grazing resources.
- ▶ **Wild large carnivore species:** The wolf (*Canis lupus*) is the only large carnivore with an established presence in the area.
- ▶ **Wolf population:** Ávila Province is home to 12-15 stable wolf packs.
 - Last official census in the study area identified 1-2 breeding packs.



Figure 2: Shepherd on horseback guiding Avileña-Negra Ibérica cattle during transhumance through the Puerto del Pico mountain pass (Ávila, Spain), exemplifying traditional pastoralism in highland environments (Photo: Asociación Raza Avileña).

3 SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT

- ▶ Nested within the Gredos Regional Park and recognised as part of the Natura 2000 network, the landscape includes forests of Scots pine and Pyrenean oak, alongside

extensive shrublands. Above 1,800 metres, the landscape features glacial cirques and high-mountain meadows. Winters are long and snowy, while summers are brief and dry. These climatic factors determine seasonal grazing activities throughout the year.

- ▶ The local economy is structured around extensive cattle farming and nature-based tourism. Seasonal tourism has grown steadily due to the area's scenic beauty and outdoor recreational offerings (hiking, birdwatching), but livestock production remains vital to the rural economy, cultural identity, and landscape conservation.
- ▶ These rural mountain communities face severe demographic challenges: population decline, ageing, limited job market, and outmigration of the younger generation. However, traditions like summer cattle drives through the Puerto del Pico and festivities tied to pastoralism still persist and foster a strong sense of belonging and cultural heritage among local residents.



Figure 3: Winter feeding of Avileña-Negra Ibérica cattle in the high-mountain pastures of the Sierra de Gredos (Ávila, Spain), illustrating the adaptation of traditional extensive livestock systems to harsh climatic conditions (Photo: Daniel Martín Collado).

4 FARMING CONTEXT

Farming is primarily based on the extensive beef cattle rearing, featuring the local Avileña-Negra Ibérica breed alongside international breeds such as Limousine or Charolais. The Hispano-Breton horse breed is commonly raised in the area for meat production. Animals graze year-round across a diverse mix of private holdings and communal lands and birth outdoors. Transhumance remains an active tradition, with herders moving cattle to high-mountain pastures in summer and to warmer areas in winter, mainly to Dehesa forest pastures in the region of Extremadura. Most farms are managed by one or two individuals, and mechanisation is limited.

Main Challenges:

- ▶ Ageing farming population and low generational renewal.
- ▶ High production costs, low profitability, and dependence on CAP subsidies.
- ▶ Predation by wolves and related emotional or administrative burdens.
- ▶ Sanitary and animal health regulations, particularly tuberculosis and brucellosis.
- ▶ Scarce rural infrastructure and limited public services.



Figure 4: Hispano-Bretón horses in Navarredonda de Gredos in pasture plots delimited using traditional stone-and-wire fencing (Photo: D. Martín Collado).

5 LOCAL CONFLICT ASSOCIATED WITH LARGE CARNIVORES

Number of attacks:

Livestock predation by wolves in Ávila Province has remained stable in recent years, though at consistently high levels. According to official data over 1,525 animals were killed in 2024.

- ▶ Dozens of attacks are reported annually in the study area. In 2024 the three municipalities under study area suffered more than 50 livestock casualties by wolf attacks. Most attacks occur during summer grazing, but winter attacks also occur near villages.



Figure 5: Avileña-Negra Ibérica cattle grazing in traditional extensive pastures of the Sierra de Gredos (Ávila, Spain), where fencing is absent or widely spaced, reflecting long-established grazing practices (Photo: Asociación Raza Avileña).

Social conflict:

- ▶ **Emotional and psychological stress among farmers:** Feelings of frustration, fear, and helplessness are widespread, often linked to the prohibition of lethal control.
- ▶ **Perceived insufficiency of compensation systems:** Payments are seen as slow, incomplete, or unfair, failing to reflect real losses or the full scope of the problem.

- ▶ Many attacks remain unregistered or unconfirmed due to rugged terrain and scavenger activity removing evidence.
- ▶ **Limited perceived effectiveness or feasibility of preventive measures:** Guard dogs and electric fences are often unsuitable in extensive mountain systems or constrained by cost and terrain.
 - Farmers perceive prevention as almost unfeasible; gathering cows close to calving implies high labour and feeding costs, leading to underuse of mountain pastures.
- ▶ **Growing polarisation and tension between different social positions:** The conflict transcends material damage and reflects broader social divisions between control-oriented and protection-oriented perspectives. This is one of the areas with the most wolf attacks in all Spain.
 - **Conflict intensified by legal changes:** prohibition of lethal control (2021-2025) and new management authorisations (2025–2026).

REFERENCES

- Ayuntamiento de Hoyos del Espino. (n. d.). Parque Regional de la Sierra de Gredos. <https://www.hoyosdelespino.es>
- Blanco, J. C., Herraiz, P., Barroso, A., & Olmeda, C. (2021). Extensive beef cattle grazing and wolf damage in Ávila province (Spain): The search for solutions [Report for the Regional Platform on the Wolf in Ávila]. Istituto di Ecologia Applicata. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.22254.69448
- Diario de Ávila. (2020, 23 de septiembre). Las tres Casas del Parque suman 8.704 visitantes en 2 meses. <https://www.diariodeavila.es>
- Diputación Provincial de Ávila. (2023a). Hoyos del Espino – Población, altitud y superficie. <https://www.diputacionavila.es>
- Diputación Provincial de Ávila. (2023b). Navarredonda de Gredos – Población, altitud y superficie. <https://www.diputacionavila.es>
- Diputación Provincial de Ávila. (2023c). San Martín del Pimpollar – Población, altitud y superficie. <https://www.diputacionavila.es>
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística. (2023). Padrón municipal continuo. INE. <https://www.ine.es>
- Junta de Castilla y León. (2024, 19 de noviembre). Censo regional del lobo ibérico en Castilla y León 2022–2023: Plan de monitorización del estado de conservación de la biodiversidad en Castilla y León (Valladolid). <https://www.agronewscastillayleon.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Censoregionaldeloboiberico2022-2023.pdf>

Junta de Castilla y León. (2024, 3 de marzo). Los ataques del lobo al ganado en Castilla y León alcanzan los 3.558 con el resultado de 5.566 cabezas muertas en 2023 [Nota de prensa]. <https://comunicacion.jcyl.es/web/jcyl/Comunicacion/es/Plantilla100Detalle/1284877983892/NotaPrensa/1285371550379/Comunicacion>

Junta de Castilla y León – Turismo. (n. d.). Camping Navagredos (Navarredonda de Gredos). <https://www.turismocastillayleon.com>

Marsden, K., Eul, J., & Blum, P. (2022). EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores: Cattle farming and wolves – Case studies and lessons learned. adelphi consult GmbH. https://adelphi.de/system/files/document/231219_eu_lc_platform_livestock_protection_print_version.pdf

Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico. (2025, 27 de junio). El censo nacional del lobo 2021–2024 arroja una cifra total de 333 manadas en toda España [Nota de prensa]. <https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/prensa/ultimas-noticias/2025/junio/el-censo-nacional-del-lobo-2021-2024-arroja-una-cifra-total-de-3.html>