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PRESS RELEASE

COEXISTENCE IN FOCUS

European Large Carnivores and the Path Forward

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The return of large carnivores such as wolves, bears, lynx, and wolverines to Europe's landscapes is a remarkable conservation success story. However, their resurgence has brought renewed challenges for rural communities, particularly farmers, as they navigate the realities of coexistence with these predators. Fresh insights into the challenges and opportunities of coexistence with Europe's large carnivores were shared today by Prof. John Linnell, Inland Norway University of Applied Science and CoCo Project lead, at the *Sustainable management of populations of protected animals that cause losses in agriculture* conference organised by the Polish Presidency of the European Council.

- **Depredation Data: A Fragmented Picture**

Data on livestock depredation by large carnivores remains inconsistent and fragmented. While some regions have robust monitoring systems, others lack reliable data, making it difficult to assess the full scale of the issue. This complicates efforts to develop effective, evidence-based strategies for managing conflicts.

- **Localised Impacts: Small Numbers, Big Consequences**

In the broader context of livestock farming, carnivore depredation is relatively minor. However, for specific farmers in certain regions, the impact can be devastating. These localised challenges highlight the need for tailored approaches rather than one-size-fits-all solutions. It is also important to keep in mind that pastoralism is under threat from many social and economic forces, with large carnivores representing an additional challenge.

- **Protection Measures: What Works and What Doesn't**

Proven protection measures, such as electric fencing and livestock-guarding dogs, have shown success in reducing depredation. However, adoption remains uneven across Europe. Cultural, logistical, and financial barriers often prevent farmers from implementing these tools, leaving many vulnerable to repeated losses.

- **Barriers to Change: More Than Just Tools**

- Adopting new practices is not just a matter of introducing tools—it requires a shift in attitudes, access to resources, a better coordination of policies in different sectors and ongoing practical support. Luckily, there is considerable funding available from the EU to help pastoralists adapt.

- **Lethal Management: A Controversial Tool**

The role of lethal management in addressing carnivore conflicts remains highly contentious. While some argue that it can provide immediate relief for affected farmers, others warn that it risks undermining long-term conservation goals. Recent policy changes, such as the downgrading of wolves' protection status under the Bern Convention and Habitats Directive have intensified this debate. In reality it may represent a useful tool in some contexts, but it is not a magic-bullet solution by itself.

- **Bridging the Gaps**

The Co-creating Coexistence (CoCo) project, an EU-funded initiative involving 18 partner institutions across 12 countries, is working to address these challenges. By integrating scientific research with the voices of local communities, CoCo aims to design coexistence models that are both practical and inclusive.

For more information, visit <https://cocoproject.eu/>.

Quotes:

“Coexistence is not just a technical challenge—it’s a social process that starts with listening to those on the frontlines.”

“The CoCo Project arrives at a critical moment – it will provide valuable knowledge to guide policy as the focus shifts from ‘how do we prevent large carnivores from extinction?’ to ‘how to live with a conservation success?’.”

“We can’t promise easy answers, but we can at least ensure that a diversity of perspectives are given a voice in the discussion.”

“We welcome the opportunities provided by seminars like this to bridge the gap between science and policy, and congratulate Poland on taking the initiative to use their presidency to give this challenging topic the attention it deserves.”

Professor John Linnell, Inland Norway University of Applied Science, CoCo Project lead