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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

36th meeting
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Specific Sites - Files open

**Eradication and trade of the American grey
squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)
(Italy)**

- REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT -

*Document prepared by
the Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea, Italy*



CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Case file “Eradication and trade of the American Grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) in Italy”

Governmental Report prepared by the Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea

Following the 28th Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, a case-file was opened on Italy regarding the “implementation of Recommendation n° 123 (2007) on limiting the dispersal of the Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) in Italy and other Contracting Parties”.

The Recommendation n. 123 (2007) asked Italy to:

1. *urge the Lombardia Region and the other competent local authorities to start without further delay the eradication program of the Grey Squirrel in the Ticino Valley, so as to significantly delay invasion of Southern Alps;*

Furtherly, the Recommendation asked the Contracting Party to:

2. *ban trade and possession of the Grey Squirrel;*
3. *eradicate new possible introduced populations of Grey Squirrels.*

This paper reports the state of the play of the issue, in order to give the 33rd Standing Committee the broader information needed to discuss the case-file.

Background

In response to the Recommendation 123(2007) Italian Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea started a series of activities aimed to achieve the requested objectives, consisting of:

- a memorandum of understanding involving Lombardy, Piedmont and Liguria Regions, Universities and ISPRA (Italian high Institute for protection and research of the environment), to agree on necessary interventions in the field and to share consequent responsibilities and burdens. The MoU was signed in 2009.
- An action in the context of EU CITES Committee to promote community measures limiting trade of Grey squirrel.
- The preparation of a ministerial Decree to ban trade a possession in Italy of specimens of Grey squirrel.

Of all the carried out activities, the Standing Committee has been periodically and punctually kept informed.

National ban of Grey squirrel’s trading and possession

The ban Decree “Dispositions for the control of detention and trade of alien squirrels of the species *Callosciurus erythraeus*, *Sciurus carolinensis* and *Sciurus niger*” was issued on December 24th 2012 by the Minister of the Environment Land and See, in agreement with the Minister of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies and with the Minister of Economic Development; the Decree was published on 2nd February 2013 in Official Journal n° 28.

With the Decree it is forbidden to trade, to breed and to detain, in the whole national territory, specimens of three squirrel species (besides *Sciurus carolinensis*, also *Callosciurus erytherus* and *Sciurus niger*), defined as “alien squirrels”.

Control and eradication of Grey squirrel on the ground

LOMBARDY

Management of alien squirrels in Lombardy was carried out within LIFE09 NAT/IT/00095 EC SQUARE. Controlling activities have been conducted in 3 macro areas in the eastern part of the distribution range. Moreover, to avoid colonization of Switzerland, the removal of *Callosciurus* started in the province of Varese, where monitoring revealed a population at only 5 km of the Swiss border.

Staff of the LIFE project and of local authorities responsible for wildlife management, carried out trapping and euthanasia in 80 sites inside 4 out of 8 macro areas identified in the region; totally 3,500 animals were removed. Trapping of squirrels resulted in a marked decrease in population size and halted any further expansion in the macro areas where control was carried out. In some trapping sites, complete eradication was achieved. Moreover, most sites where grey squirrels were strongly reduced were recolonized by native red squirrel. Although trapping activities here were successful, must be underlined that new sightings of grey squirrels have been reported, in various urban contexts, including the suburban outskirts of the city of Milan.

Eradication/control of IAS is continuing after the LIFE project, following priorities defined in the Grey squirrel permanent control plan for Lombardy.

Regional authorities with Resolution n° 4180 on 16th October 2015 provided for the allocation of additional resources for post-LIFE activities for the years 2015 - 2017. These funds up to a maximum of € 80,000 are used for the implementation of the Grey squirrel permanent plan in the provinces of Milan and Varese and the Parks Adda and Parco Lambro Valley, in the priority areas of intervention. Other € 25,000 were made available for the continuation of communication activities.

A further number of 238 grey squirrels were captured between the end of 2015 and beginning of 2016 in the area of Parco Lambro Valley, and an estimated number of 300 *Callosciurus* have been controlled in the Province of Varese. Activities are on-going in the area of Adda Regional Park.

Controlling activities will also continue within the framework of LIFE GESTIRE 2020, started in 2016. A selection procedure for technical external assistance for field support in controlling activities of grey squirrels is currently underway. As soon as the selection is completed the assistance identified will carry out controlling of grey squirrels in the priority areas in order to stop the further spread of the species and reduce its distribution, thus intensifying the activities that are at present already being carried out. A control management plan for the areas not yet managed has been drafted and will be discussed and shared with local management authorities. Further training for personnel dedicated to controlling activities has been schedule for end of 2016/beginning of 2017.

It must be underlined that, although controlling activities are ongoing, control of grey squirrels on private properties can be conducted only where the private owner grants access to the areas and consents the activities. Italian law doesn't provide for specific indications or enforcements in case of private owner who doesn't grant access to his land where controlling of grey squirrels is necessary. This can result in the impossibility of carrying out a successful and complete eradication project.

Moreover in Italy a re-organization of the Provinces is currently on going, and this implicates a reduction of personnel from the provincial police, identified by Law 157/92 and Regional law 26/93 as responsible for the control of wildlife, including alien species. This involves difficulties in assuring specific and dedicated personnel for long term controlling activities.

PIEDMONT

With Regional Council Resolution no. 19-3006 on 7th March 2016 was approved as part of the project LIFE + EC-SQUARE and in implementation of Article 19, paragraph 2 of Law 152/1997, the "Permanent control of the gray squirrel Project in Piedmont the period 2016-2020 ".

This project includes the activation of the control measures in areas where the presence of the species was recorded. Measures will be implemented according to a general protocol based on permanent monitoring and control of alien squirrel populations. This protocol does not exclude further action in other areas where new nuclei of non-native squirrels are identified. Given the large size of the territory subject to the control activities, interventions will be made on the basis of identification of operational priorities. The project provides for the adoption of capture and subsequent killing the animals, euthanasia, implemented according to a standardized protocol. All management operations will be coordinated by the Region of Piedmont.

With the aforementioned DGR has been allocated € 20,000.00 to fund activities. Implementing measures for the realization of the planned activities are being considered at this time.

LIGURIA

The activity of capture and sterilization of grey squirrels in the parks of Nervi and neighboring areas continued after the conclusion of the EC-SQUARE Life project. Further 83 capture sessions, which led to the capture of 34 grey squirrels in addition to the 324 captured during the course of the Life project, were conducted from April 2015 to late August 2016.

The capture rate decreased sharply over the previous period (averaging 0.4 catches/session in the after-life period compared with 2.4 catches/session in LIFE project period) and also the observations of grey squirrels are more and more sporadic. Since it is likely that there are still some groups of squirrels settled in private gardens close to the municipal parks, operators are trying to catch these individuals both in the moments when returning in the parks, currently rich in food resources, and placing new capture sites in some of these gardens, by prior arrangement with the owners. Both Region of Liguria and University of Genoa agree for the continuation of monitoring and trapping activities until the total removal of the last remaining individuals.

Even after the conclusion of the Life project the captured squirrels undergo surgical sterilization and subsequently are released in other urban park in Genoa. To this aim the agreement with the Veterinary clinic that already had operated sterilizations during the Life project was renewed.

Action contesting and disturbance by opinion groups opposed to the removal of grey squirrels still take place, but with less frequency and intensity. There were some damage episode or theft of traps, but overall the capture operations may take place sufficiently quiet.

EU and National commitment on IAS

Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down rules to prevent and manage the introduction and spread of invasive alien species, obligates EU countries to take pressing measures for the management of alien species of particular importance, with the aim of eradication. The measure is in force since January 1st, 2015.

This regulation allows to address the rapid growth of invasive species, serious threat to biodiversity. Regulation is a key step to achieve the EU's objectives for 2020 to protect biodiversity.

According with art. 4 of the EU Regulation 1143/2014, the first List of IAS of Union Concern, which includes alien squirrels, and inter alia *Sciurus carolinensis*, entered into force by the end of August 2016.

To the Invasive species of Union relevance already in the territory of the Member States certain management measures are applied, consisting of physical, chemical or biological, lethal or non-lethal methods, aiming to eradication, control or containment of the population of Invasive alien species (art. 19, Chapter IV of the Regulation).

Moreover, with Law n.221 approved on 22 December 2015, National law on wildlife protection and hunting has been amended; new provisions have been set for invasive alien species, management should aim to eradicate, or whereas not possible, to maintain population at a certain level.

Conclusions

National decree establishing the prohibition of detaining and trading Grey Squirrels in Italy, was an important result and basically stopped the trade of this species; furthermore the amendment to the Law on wildlife protection and hunting has assigned to the Regions binding duties.

The LIFE Project EC SQUARE concluded its momentum with many important goals as a pilot project. Beyond this experience the entry into force of Regulation (EU) N. 1143/2014 can finalize the efforts made by Italy in order to fulfil the international commitments taken.

Within this renewed national and international regulatory framework, we believe that the case-file has finished its driving force and can be closed.

07th October 2016