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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

32nd meeting
Strasbourg, 27-30 November 2012

Specific Site - File open

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

REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT

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

**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

- November 2012 -

Following the 28th Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, a case file was opened on Italy as regards 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;*

Besides, the Recommendation asked the Contracting Parties to:

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

In the report prepared by the Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea for the 31th Standing Committee Meeting in 29 November – 2 december 2011 we informed about the progress made in the implementation of the LIFE+ project on “Eradication and control of Grey Squirrel: actions for preservation of biodiversity in forest ecosystems”, launched to provide effective tools, particularly under the awareness raising aspect, for implementing actions aimed at the eradication of the American Grey squirrel in the country.

The 31th meeting of Standing Committee of Bern Convention took note of the information presented by the delegate of Italy and welcomed the information concerning the LIFE+ project. However, noting that the decree concerning the banning of the trade and keeping of the American grey squirrel was not approved yet, the Committee decided to keep the file open and asked Italy to inform the Committee and the Bureau of progress made in the implementation of the LIFE+ Project and the adoption of appropriate legislative tools.

The present report will inform about the progresses made in the last months.

Control and eradication

We recall the objectives of the LIFE+project “Eradication and control of Grey Squirrel: actions for preservation of biodiversity in forest ecosystems” (LIFE09/NAT/IT/095): the main objective of EC-SQUARE is to eliminate or, where eradication will be judged impracticable, to control the risks posed by the introduced alien species, the eastern Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) to biodiversity, and in particular to the conservation of the native Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*). A major challenge for a successful eradication and/or control campaign is to obtain a wide consensus of the civic society for control measures, suitable in different socio-ecological situations.

The Life+ project, as already reported, is co-financed by Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea, and started in September 2010. The Task Force, consisting of a scientific unit and a public relations unit, includes representatives of the three Regions Liguria, Piedmont and Lombardy, ISPRA (National High Institute for Environmental Protection and Research), Universities and the Research Institute Oikos.

Despite numerous meetings and other communication activities organized in the three regions to discuss and support the project with local stakeholders, particularly in provinces and parks interested by the conservation activities, the Grey squirrel management actions, begun in January 2012, triggered some misreporting articles on media and gained sharp criticism by animal welfare organizations.

These organizations complain about the killing of animals, apparently missing overall interest in biodiversity conservation.

Therefore, due to an appeal to Regional Administrative Court of law made by some animalists associations, while drafting of this report the authorization procedures aiming to capture specimens are temporarily suspended in Piedmont.

On the other hand, in the other two regions, Liguria and Lombardy, notwithstanding a wide negative mass-media campaign made by animal welfare organizations, concrete actions on the ground are currently ongoing as foreseen in the General Management Plan of the LIFE project.

Notably, a survey visit by Swiss Canton technicians in charge of IAS control was successfully conducted in Lombardy to evaluate the progress of the Grey squirrel management actions: the project is going on with many captures and the Swiss delegation was comforted about our doings.

Keeping and import

As already reported, a great result was achieved in the frame of Wildlife Trade Regulation - WTR, with the inclusion, promoted by Italy, of the Grey Squirrel in the Annex B of the Council Regulation No. 338/97 under article 3.2.d (the species listed in Annex B of the Regulation are those whose introduction into the Community is particularly dangerous to native species of flora or fauna).

According to this change in EU Regulation, it is now forbidden to import live specimens of 3 squirrel species (besides *Sciurus carolinensis*, also *Callosciurus erytherus* and *Sciurus niger*) in every country of EU, even though there are no restrictions to their movement within the boundaries of EU.

Furtherly, on June 27th 2012 the Ministry of Environment, formally requested the Commission to start up the procedures to enforce Art. 9.6 of Council Regulation (EC) No. 338/97 aiming to establish restrictions on the holding or movement of live specimens of the three species added in Annex B, and to discuss it as soon as possible.

In fact, according with the Council Regulation No. 338/97 under article 9.6: “The Commission can establish restrictions to possession and movement of specimens of species for which restriction to introduction in EU are adopted.”

Despite a major support received from Member States attending the UE CITES Committee, the Italian request was rejected by European Commission on October 12th 2012. The European Commission wrote to Ministry of the environment, as Italian CITES Management Authority, that, though welcoming the efforts that Italy is deploying to eradicate or control the three species of squirrels in its national territory, it does not intend to take action on the basis of Article 9.6.

The main motivation for this denial is that there is an on-going process to elaborate a wide EU strategy for IAS, and they see no reason to take action in advance for specific cases. In this respect we still do believe that a case-by-case approach would tackle more efficiently urgent cases as that one at the stake.

Trading

With regards to Recommendation n. 123 (2007) about ban trade, in order to avoid future introductions of Grey Squirrel, after several consultation activities and in consequence of positive advices received from the Legal Services of the Directorates of the State Forestry Corps, of the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies and of the Ministry of Economic Development, a ban decree was eventually signed by the Minister of the Environment and forwarded to the other Ministers involved in animal trade and management for their definitive countersignature.

We are confident that this decree could be issued by the end of the year.

07th November 2012

**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

- August 2012 -

Following the 28th Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, a case file was opened on Italy as regards 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:

4. *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;*

Besides, the Recommendation asked the Contracting Parties to:

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

In the report prepared by the Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea for the 31th Standing Committee Meeting in 29 November – 2 december 2011 we informed about the progress made in the implementation of the LIFE+ project on “Eradication and control of Grey Squirrel: actions for preservation of biodiversity in forest ecosystems”, launched to provide effective tools, particularly under the awareness raising aspect, for implementing actions aimed at the eradication of the American Grey squirrel in the country.

The 31th meeting of Standing Committee of Bern Convention took note of the information presented by the delegate of Italy and welcomed the information concerning the LIFE+ project. However, noting that the decree concerning the banning of the trade and keeping of the American grey squirrel was not approved yet, the Committee decided to keep the file open and asked Italy to inform the Committee and the Bureau of progress made in the implementation of the LIFE+ Project and the adoption of appropriate legislative tools.

The present report will inform about the progresses made in the last months.

Control and eradication

We recall the objectives of the LIFE+project “Eradication and control of Grey Squirrel: actions for preservation of biodiversity in forest ecosystems” (LIFE09/NAT/IT/095): the main objective of EC-SQUARE is to eliminate or, where eradication will be judged impracticable, to control the risks posed by the introduced alien species, the eastern Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) to biodiversity, and in particular to the conservation of the native Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*). A major challenge for a successful eradication and/or control campaign is to obtain a wide consensus of the civic society for control measures, suitable in different socio-ecological situations.

The Life+ project, that, as already reported, is co-financed by Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea, started in September 2010 with the preparatory activities. The Task Force, consisting of a scientific unit and a public relations unit, was established including representatives of the three Regions Liguria, Piedmont and Lombardy, ISPRA (Institute for Environmental Protection and Research), the Universities and research institute Oikos.

Although numerous meetings were organized in the three regions to present and discuss the project with local stakeholders, particularly in provinces and parks interested by the conservation activities, as foreseen in the CAP (Communication Action Plan), the Grey squirrel management actions, begun in January 2012, registered some problems with animalist organizations.

These organizations complain about the killing of animals, without any consideration of the main environmental purpose of the actions.

Therefore, at the moment of this report the authorization procedures for capture of specimen are temporarily suspended in Piedmont due to an appeal to Regional Administrative Court of law made by some animalists associations.

On the other hand, in the other two regions, Liguria and Lombardy, despite a wide negative mass-media campaign made by animalist associations, concrete actions on the ground are currently ongoing as foreseen in the General Management Plan of the LIFE project.

Keeping and import

As already reported, a great result was achieved in the frame of the keeping and import of the Grey Squirrel population, with the inclusion of the Grey Squirrel in the Annex B of the Council Regulation No. 338/97 under article 3.2.d [1] [1] (the species listed in Annex B of the Regulation are those whose introduction into the Community is particularly dangerous to native species of flora or fauna).

During its last meeting in February 2012, the CITES Scientific Review Group, gave a positive opinion on the suspension of the import of the specimens of 3 squirrel species, (besides **Sciurus carolinensis**, also **Callosciurus erytherus** and **Sciurus niger**), that came into force immediately in every country of EU, with the inclusion of the 3 species in the Annex B of the Council Regulation No. 338/97.

With the suspension of the import is now forbidden to import specimen of the 3 squirrel species in every country of EU, however there are no restrictions to their movement within the boundaries of EU.

Furtherly, on June 27th 2012 the Ministry of Environment, as Italian CITES Management Authority, formally requested the Commission to start up the procedures to enforce Art. 9.6 of Council Regulation (EC) No 338/97 aiming to establish restrictions on the holding or movement of live specimens of the three species added in Annex B, and to discuss it as soon as possible. In fact, according with the Council Regulation No. 338/97 under article 9.6: "The Commission can establish restrictions to possession and movement of specimens of species for which restriction to introduction in EU are adopted."

We are confident that the issue could be discussed by the end of the year.

In that case, it will be very important that the proposal could receive a wide support by the other Countries attending the UE CITES Committee.

Trading

With regards to Recommendation n. 123 (2007) about ban trade, in order to avoid future introductions of Grey Squirrel, the draft of a ban decree prepared by the Italian Ministry of Environment, after several consultation activities, has obtained positive advices by the Directorates of the State Forestry Corps, of the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies and of the Ministry of Economic Development.

In consequence of these positive advices, on August 2nd 2012 the draft of the decree was forwarded to the Legal Services of other Ministries involved in animal trade and management, for their definitive opinion.

At the moment the results from CITES process give more solid juridical basis useful for issuing the ban decree. Such being the case, considering that the decree should also include a reference to the suspension regulation mentioned in the above paragraph, we are confident that legal services of other Italian ministries will give positive answer for issuing the ban decree.

10th August 2012

**CASE FILE “ERADICATION AND TRADE OF THE AMERICAN GREY SQUIRREL
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Governmental Report prepared by the Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea

- March 2012 -

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Besides, the Recommendation asked the Contracting Parties to:

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In the report prepared by the Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea for the 31th Standing Committee Meeting in 29 November – 2 december 2011 we informed about the progress made in the implementation of the LIFE+ project on “Eradication and control of Grey Squirrel: actions for preservation of biodiversity in forest ecosystems”, launched to provide effective tools, particularly under the awareness raising aspect, for implementing actions aimed at the eradication of the American Grey squirrel in the country.

The 31th meeting of Standing Committee of Bern Convention took note of the information presented by the delegate of Italy and welcomed the information concerning the LIFE+ project. However, noting that the decree concerning the banning of the trade and keeping of the American grey squirrel was not approved yet, the Committee decided to keep the file open and asked Italy to inform the Committee and the Bureau of progress made in the implementation of the LIFE+ Project and the adoption of appropriate legislative tools.

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Control and eradication

We recall the objectives of the LIFE+project “Eradication and control of Grey Squirrel: actions for preservation of biodiversity in forest ecosystems” (LIFE09/NAT/IT/095): the main objective of EC-SQUARE is to eliminate or, where eradication will be judged impracticable, to control the risks posed by the introduced alien species, the eastern Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) to biodiversity, and in particular to the conservation of the native Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*). A major challenge for a successful eradication and/or control campaign is to obtain a wide consensus of the civic society for control measures, suitable in different socio-ecological situations.

The Life+ project, that, as already reported, is co-financed by Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea, started in September 2010 with the preparatory activities. The Task Force, consisting of a scientific unit and a public relations unit, was established including representatives of the Regions, ISPRA (Institute for Environmental Protection and Research), the Universities and research institute Oikos. The Task Force has developed a re-entry programme in order to recover the delay for some actions. On 31 January, the delay has been almost completely removed

Numerous meetings were organized in the three regions to present and discuss the project with local stakeholders, particularly in provinces and parks interested by the conservation activities foreseen in Grey squirrel management actions. The actions to determine population size and

distribution of grey squirrel were completed and their reports were produced. The survey to evaluate the societal perception for each grey squirrel presence site is finished and the results were used for the preparation of the CAP (Communication Action Plan) and the PGS Progetto di Gestione dello Scoiattolo grigio (General Management Plan GMP -) has been prepared; the PGS includes the Decision Support System. The Task Force met MATTM and ISPRA to discuss action for Enforcement and assessment of the grey squirrel trade ban; MATTM requested a technical report accompanying the draft legislation of trade ban.

The Grey squirrel management actions began in January 2012: Piedmont and Lombardy have started their authorization procedures; Liguria has triggered a technical coordination of different authorities to evaluate action C3 and the permissions required.

In January 2012 the production of guidelines for forest ecosystem management to improve habitat quality and connectivity for red squirrel formally started; surveys were made in Piedmont and Genoa .

The development of the CAP has led to a revision of the communication strategy and the environmental education activities . Numerous meetings were held with stakeholders . The project website has been operational since February 2011 and has been completely reorganized in October-November. The task of producing the film was allotted in June, and filming is under way.

Many foreign researchers visited the project site sharing their experiences . In February 2012 the presentation of the project activities to national and international conferences will start. The assessment of the actions aimed to determining population size and distribution of grey squirrel was made in January .. The (evaluation of conservation actions and evaluation of dissemination actions will begin on time. The Task Force, Supervising Team and Project Steering Committee meetings have been organized, as well as other technical and administrative meetings.

At the end of the project, this integrated system of actions will be used to evaluate innovative strategies for the management of alien species with a high social appeal and to produce recommendations to policy makers.

Keeping and import

A great result was also achieved in the frame of the keeping and import of the Grey Squirrel population: during the 52nd CITES Committee of the EU Member States Management Authorities, Italy proposed the inclusion of the Grey Squirrel in the Annex B of the Council Regulation No. 338/97 under article 3.2.d [1] [1] (the species listed in Annex B of the Regulation are those whose introduction into the Community is particularly dangerous to native species of flora or fauna). The proposal was accepted by the Committee

Eventually, during last meeting in February 2012, the CITES Scientific Review Group, gave a positive opinion on the suspension of the import of the specimens of 3 squirrel species, (besides **Sciurus carolinensis**, also **Callosciurus erytherus** and **Sciurus niger**), that will come into force immediately in every country of EU, with the inclusion of the 3 species in the Annex B of the Council Regulation No. 338/97.

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/cites/pdf/srg/59_summary_srg.pdf

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32012R0101:EN:NOT>

With the suspension of the import is now forbidden to import specimen of the 3 squirrel species in every country of EU, but there are no restrictions to their movement within the boundaries of EU.

However, according with the Council Regulation No. 338/97 under article 9.6 “The Commission can establish restrictions to possession and movement of specimens of species for which restriction to introduction in EU are adopted.”

Trading

As far as the trading is concerned, to avoid future introductions of Grey Squirrel, Italy is working on the preparation of a decree based on several consultations with the different institutional bodies involved in animal trade and management.

At the moment the results from CITES process give more solid juridical basis useful for issuing the ban decree. Such being the case, , considering that the decree should also include a reference to the suspension regulation mentioned in the above paragraph, we are confident that legal services of other Italian ministries will give positive answer for issuing the ban decree. MATTM requested to the Task Force of the Life+ Project a technical report accompanying the draft legislation of trade ban.

22th March 2012