

REGHAB PROJECT (RECONCILING GAMEBIRD HUNTING AND BIODIVERSITY)

CONCLUSIONS THAT MAY HAVE POLITICAL APPLICATION IN THE NEAR FUTURE

JUNE 2002

Javier Viñuela and Beatriz Arroyo (Coordinators)

Among the several conclusions reached during this Concerted Action, that have been reflected in several reports already delivered or to be delivered in short, we have selected those that we feel may have a more clear political application in the near future.

Those are:

- 1) The agriculture changes occurred during last decades in Europe, many of them promoted by the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy), are the main reason explaining the decline of gamebird species, and the scarcity of these species is at the root of the conflicts with predator conservation. The hunting and conservationist worlds have a clear scope of collaboration in this respect, and the European Community should promote a framework for collaboration between these two sectors, as well as considering changes in the CAP that may help to promote recovery of wild populations of gamebirds, because hunting may be a good alternative to intensive farming, providing economical inputs to rural communities and promoting preservation or improvement of habitats.
- 2) There is a big problem of lack of coordination between farming and hunting, because often the managers of game are not the same than the land owners or farmers. In some cases it seems that money provided by hunting activity may be an input for agriculture, but agriculture is often against game preservation. An European Rule regulating rights and obligations of landowners/farmers with respect to managers hiring hunting rights should be implemented, and more specifically a legal framework about damages induced by game species to cultivations, in some countries paid by hunters, but not in others. When game species are a critical resource for conservation of endangered predators (e.g. rabbits for Iberian lynx or Spanish imperial eagle), governments should provide at least partial financial support to pay for damages to agriculture, thus avoiding a more intense control of populations of those game species.
- 3) Predator control must be considered as an acceptable management technique, provided it is necessary to maintain the economical sustainability of hunting, and when this hunting activity, at the same time, is proved to be useful to maintain or improve habitats. In this respect, the acceptance of selective methods for controlling predator populations, some of them already proved to be a good alternative in some countries (i.e. Spain), is a good option to avoid the illegal use of massive non-selective methods such as poisoning, that is causing serious problems of raptor conservation in some countries.

4) The economical importance of hunting in some areas, that usually are easily identified at a geographical scale, is at the root of the conflict too. The conservation of predators may cause economic damage to game exploitations, and the owners or managers should be compensated in some way. The European Community should promote financial support to game exploitations using “wise use of resources and good hunting practices” proved to be important for conservation of endangered predators. The best way to do this probably may be through tax management, increasing tax charges to game exploitations that do not provide benefits for biodiversity conservation (e.g. intensive hunting lands with artificially increased game densities obtained by releases, and that do not make any effort to preserve habitats or species other than game), and reducing tax charges in hunting lands providing benefits for biodiversity.

5) Game releasing has experienced a dramatic increase during the last decades, reaching in some cases impressive numbers (e.g. million of birds released per year and country). In some cases releases may be associated to good management practices promoting biodiversity conservation (e.g. pheasant in UK), but in others, the cost of releases for biodiversity conservation are higher than the benefits (e.g. red-legged partridge in Spain). Thus, a more strict control of releases should be implemented, and more specifically, an European Rule requesting mandatory marking (rings, transponders, etc.) allowing traceability of animals released is urgently required.

6) The European Community should implement a new organism, or making better use of some already existing one, to keep a constant communication between hunting and conservation organizations at European level. This organism should have technical personnel able to provide guidelines for management at European level, such as hunting pressure on migratory species or monitoring of abundance of game species. This would allow a more agile detection of possible conflicts, and searching of solutions, before they may reach a dangerous or irreversible stage.