# "Don't shoot!" Developing alternative solutions to resolve human-bear conflict in Slovakia

# **Robin Rigg<sup>1</sup> & Richard Morley<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> SWS – Slovak Wildlife Society, P.O. Box 72, Liptovský Hrádok 033 01, Slovakia. E-mail: info@slovakwildlife.org <sup>2</sup> Wolves and Humans Foundation, 2 Blackrod Cottages, Compton Durville, South Petherton, Somerset, TA13 5EX, UK . E-mail: info@wolvesandhumans.org



#### **Methods**

- Providing shepherds with livestock guarding dogs e.g. Slovenský čuvač and Caucasian shepherd dog.
- Electric fencing around livestock, beehives, food stores and mountain cottages.

# **Sharing responsibility**

- The Slovak Wildlife Society and Wolves and Humans Foundation have 10 years' experience working with local communities in Slovakia to mitigate carnivore-human conflicts.
- Our goal is to reduce unnecessary killing through facilitating improved coexistence of rural people and large carnivores.
- The White Dog Fund raises money from bear and wolf advocates in order to support those who shoulder the real cost of living with carnivores by providing them with financial and practical help, thus "Sharing responsibility for predators".



Sharing responsibility for predators www.wolvesandhumans.org Registered Charity No. 1111289

#### Background

## **Results: beehives**

• Damage reduced to zero with electric fences.



### **Results:** livestock



- Design, testing and installation of bear-proof refuse containers and other secure structures.
- Distribution of bear pepper spray.
- 'Fladry' barriers to protect livestock from wolves.
- Human dimensions research to assess knowledge of and attitudes to carnivores and their management.
- Education and awareness raising activities, e.g.:
  - Slovak version of film 'Staying Safe in Bear Country'
  - travelling photo exhibitions and presentations
  - didactic materials for teachers.

#### Acknowledgments

Brown bear numbers in Slovakia have grown in 80 years from <100 to c.800 inds., with densities now reaching 11 inds./100 km<sup>2</sup> in some core areas (Rigg and Adamec 2007). This has led to a resurgence of human-bear conflict (HBC).

Overlap of bear and wolf distributions with sheep farming is c.90%; predation on livestock is commonplace. Bears also damage beehives and crops, raid bins, orchards and gardens and occasionally injure people, sometimes seriously (Rigg and Baleková 2003).

Although the economic damage resulting from HBC is negligible on a national scale (Rigg et al. in press), it can cause significant hardship for people affected. A heightened sense of fear, aggravated by sensational media reporting, threatens to reduce public acceptance of bears.

To mitigate conflicts, managers have tended to rely since the 1960s on lethal control and compensation. Permits are issued annually for the shooting of  $\leq 10\%$  of estimated bear numbers. According to official guidelines, trophy hunting should be focussed on areas where HBC occurred in the previous year, the assumption being that controlling bear numbers will limit damage to socially acceptable levels. The strategy does not seem to have worked either in controlling bear numbers or reducing HBC (Rigg and Adamec 2009). Non-lethal preventive measures have usually been

• Losses to predation reduced by 70% at trial flocks with livestock guarding dogs compared to control flocks without (Rigg et al. in press).



#### Literature cited

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