

CHRONICLE

Game under Spotlight: Scientific and Practical Knowledge in Game and Wildlife Management in 2011



Game animals have assumed a very significant component of forest ecosystems in ecological, economic, scientific cognitive, recreational, aesthetic and other aspects. Since prehistoric times peoples are known to have hunted wildlife striving to survive, providing food, tools, clothing for themselves, protecting their shelters and later also crops. Some game species have gone extinct (e.g. aurochs, wild horse, wild cat, flying squirrel, wolverine, brown bear, European mink in Lithuania) meanwhile most because of their sensitivity to changes in habitats, less fertility, small distribution area, strict stenotopicity and less because of hunting or other direct elimination. The vitality and sustainability of the living system including forest ecosystems depend on their diversity as the system becomes more vulnerable if species diversity is decreasing. The long-term expansion of humans into nature has caused the deep and often irreversible environmental changes. These changes affect animals and their response to usual natural events, habitats, food, migration, relationship between species etc. To prevent the depletion of game species, their usage and habitats has to be managed. To understand the role of game in ecosystems, to determine, use game resources sustainably and protect them and their habitats, the knowledge and its dissemination is significant including animal ecology, their relationship with environment, mitigation of human-game conflicts etc. This problem is solving not only at national but also at European and international levels.

Since the mid-1950's every two years, the International Union of Game Biologists (IUGB) has brought together international game biologists, forest researchers, game managers, hunters and others who have an interest in game or wildlife biology. The IUGB encourages the exchange of scientific and practical knowledge in the field of game and wildlife management, the broad field of game biology and international co-op-

eration in game and wildlife management. The aim of the union and its congress is to create a bridge among researchers, wildlife managers and authorities and those studying the human dimensions of wildlife management, promoting the advancement of knowledge in game biology, wildlife habitat conservation, improving the management of game populations and contributing to the comradeship amongst IUGB Members. It is also an excellent opportunity to identify research gaps, conservation action needs and co-ordinated research projects.

The XXXth IUGB Congress was held in Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain on 5th - 9th September 2011. The Congress was hosted by the University of Barcelona, in co-operation with the Department of Agriculture, Farming, Fish, Food and Environment, the *Instituto de Investigación en Recursos Cinegéticos* and the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust.

The Congress has focused on a wide area of game research. Near 400 official attendees representing many countries of the world, including many of the world-famous leading wildlife scientists, have come to Barcelona. The Congress based upon submitted contributions offered by registered participants and included opening and closing ceremonies, plenary and parallel sessions, workshops, poster sessions, and field excursions. There was possibility to choose interested lectures of eight keynote speakers, eight plenary sessions and six workshops that were initiated and performed by researchers themselves. Attendees have given 128 oral presentations and presented 136 posters. In addition, after Limassol in 2011 and Braga 2003, Perdix XIII has joined the IUGB Congress thirdly. The Perdix series traditionally unite Partridge, Quail and Francolin researchers and conservationists across Europe and North America, and have invited game bird biologists engaged into grouse, pheasant or megapode research. The Chair of the XXXth IUGB Congress Manel Puigcerver (*Universitat de Barcelona*, Spain) and all Organizing and Scientific Committees have done their best to prepare an outstanding scientific programme, a great job in planning, coordinating and controlling all Congress.

The general topic of the Congress was "Human-wildlife conflicts and peace-building strategies". The

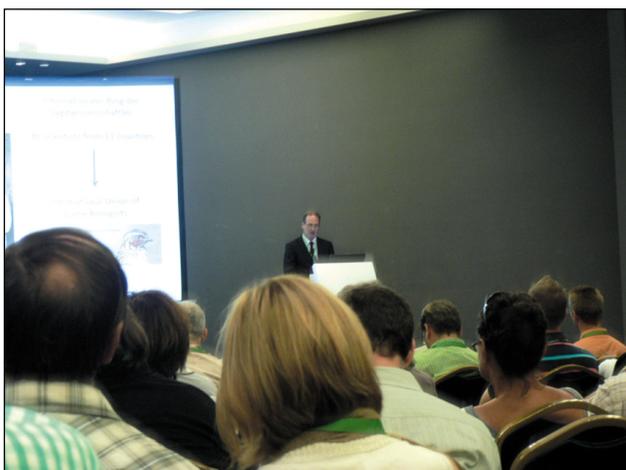
main topics of the plenary sessions were as follows: *Wildlife Biology, Behaviour and Game Species Management*, (keynote speaker Dr. Nicholas Aebischer from The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, United Kingdom, the title “The Grey Partridge in the UK: population status, research, policy and prospects”); *Veterinary Aspects of Wildlife and Conservation* (keynote speaker Dr. Peter Walsh from VaccinApe, US; the title “Bushmeat Hunting Regulates Ebola Emergence”); *Interactions Humans-Wildlife* (keynote speaker Dr. Steve Redpath from Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability, Aberdeen University, United Kingdom, the title “Managing conflicts between conservation and game bird management”); *Methodologies, Models and Techniques* (keynote speaker Dr. Lisette Waits from Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, University of Idaho, USA, the title “Molecular genetic tools and techniques for improving the management of wildlife and game species”); *Species Extinctions and Population Dynamics* (keynote speaker Dr. Phil McGowan from the World Pheasant Association, United Kingdom, the title “Galliformes science and species extinctions: what we know and what we need to know”); *Human Dimensions of Game Wildlife Management* (keynote speaker Dr. John Linnell from Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, Norway, the title “Elusive coexistence: exploring the challenges of integrating wildlife into a multi-functional landscape”); *Wildlife Law and Policy* (keynote speaker Dr. Borja Heredia, United Nations Environment Programme, Secretariat of the Convention of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, Germany, the title “Policy responses to human/wildlife conflicts. A perspective from the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)”); *Conservation and*

Management of Migratory Game Species (keynote speaker Dr. Manel Puigcerver from *Universitat de Barcelona*, Spain, the title “Conservation and management of the Common Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) in Europe: past, present and future”).

The field excursions have included visits to the Cadi’s Mountain Range, The Ebro River Delta, Can Balasc Biological Station and the ‘Secans’ (Drylands) of Lleida.

The excursion to the Cadi’s mountain range was in the great demand. This area is located in the axial Pyrenees of Catalonia (NE Spain). The highest altitude is 2,648 m (*Vulturó peak*). The northern slope is more abrupt, with vertical walls and narrow valleys. The natural heritage of this area is based on the sub-alpine forest habitats, being the Scotch pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) forest the most extended, followed by *Pinus uncinata* forest including some deciduous tree species. The local fauna is comprised by wildcat (*Felis silvestris*), pine marten (*Martes martes*), red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), Tengmalm’s owl (*Aegolius funereus*) or capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*). Alpine habitats (above 2,000 m) are represented by meadows, rocks and rocky debris where some examples of postglacial species are still remaining: Pyrenean grey partridge (*Perdix perdix hispaniensis*), chamois (*Rupicapra pyrenaica*), lammergeyer (*Gypaetus barbatus*), alpine marmot (*Marmota marmota*), and ptarmigan (*Lagopus muta*). Since 2000, Cadi’s mountain range is naturally inhabited by wolf coming from the Italian populations that can cross the south of France. Natural landscape has been modified during centuries by human activities: agriculture, cattle pasture, forestry, hunting, and most recently, the ski facilities. From a cultural point of view, the Middle Age settlements (castles, fortified buildings, places...) and Romanic religious architecture can be found. Since 1966 this area becomes a Game National Reserve (526.5 km²) and since 1983 it is protected as a Natural Park (413.4 km²). The European Union declared the Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park as a bird special protection area (ZEPA). The main task of this field excursion was to observe habitats of grouse species as Pyrenean grey partridge, ptarmigan and capercaillie as well as some examples of their management and conservation measures. Chamois, vultures and raptors are the most common species to spot but also it is likely to watch some lagomorphs.

The Ebro River Delta is located in the province of Tarragona, Catalonia, and it is one of the largest wetland areas (320 km²) in the western Mediterranean region. The Ebro River Delta has expanded rapidly on soils washed downriver—the historical rate of growth of the delta is demonstrated by the town of Amposta.



Plenary session *Conservation and Management of Migratory Game Species*: keynote speaker the Chair of the XXXth IUGB Congress Dr. Manel Puigcerver from *Universitat de Barcelona*, Spain

A seaport in the 4th century it is now located well inland from the current Ebro river mouth. The rounded form of the delta attests to the balance between sediment deposition by the Ebro and removal of this material by wave erosion. The modern delta is an intensive agriculture area of rice, citrus and vegetables. The Ebro delta also has numerous beaches, marshes, and salt pans that provide habitat for over 300 species of birds. A network of canals and irrigation ditches constructed by both agricultural and conservation groups are helping to maintain the ecologic and economic resources of the Ebro delta. The Natural Park of Ebro River delta was established in 1986 and occupies 7,802 ha. It is of international importance for 8 of its plant species and 69 of vertebrate animals. Since 1993 the Ebro Delta was designated as Ramsar site and the European Union declared it as a special protection area for birds (ZEPA). It is very important for the 95 breeding species of birds in the Natural Park but also for the wide range of overwintering species and because serves as an essential stopover point for a large numbers of migratory birds. Three hundred and sixty bird species have been recorded. The Ebro delta has the world's largest colony of Audouin's Gulls (*Larus audouini*). In 2006 it held a record number of more than 15,000 pairs. More than 15 species of ducks and other wetland bird species are hunted traditionally in private and public game areas within the delta and in one National Game Reserve (Encanyisada).

The 'Secans' (drylands) of Lleida are the remaining non-irrigated lowlands in the Ebro basin in Catalonia, characterized by flat terrains, treeless or just with few scattered and with low herbaceous vegetation. The natural vegetation was replaced in some areas by large cereal and legume crops, forming the steppe-lands of Catalonia. Nowadays the landscape is a matrix of farmland with natural vegetation patches. This territory is inhabited by a rich variety of fauna species, mostly steppe-lands birds. Two of the most important sites of dryland are well known for the high amount of biodiversity. Those are 'Mas de Melons-Alfès' (7,600 ha) and 'Bellmunt-Almenara' (4,000 ha), in which the natural vegetation was replaced by farmland (cereals, olive-trees, almond-trees...). Due to the need of protecting both birds and the steppe-land habitat, some sites in the area of 'Secans' were declared as a Natura 2000 site. Furthermore, they were also declared as Natural Protected Site by Catalanian environmental



XXXth IUGB Congress attendees in the 'Secans' (drylands) of Lleida

policies. The management rules are addressed to reconcile the farm activities with the habitat and steppe-land species conservation.

Participants of the excursion have been introduced to the ongoing project at the "Dryland Project" Office. They have visited the *Mas de Melons and Alfès* drylands, Utxesa wetlands and Utxesa Information Centre, Bellmunt - Almentara drylands and "Estany d'Ivars i Vila-sana" basin learning about its restoration and management and have observed waterfowl. Participants have possibility to know some examples of management and conservation measures developed recently such as the management of crops and the construction of water points and the Pin-tailed sandgrouse (*Pterocles alchata*); the reconstruction of farm traditional builds as a nesting place for Lesser kestrel (*Falco naumanni*) and European Roller (*Coracias garrulus*); the surveillance of agriculture practices to protect the ground-nesting of Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*) and Little Bustard (*Tetrax tetrax*). Attendees visited The Wildlife Recovery and Breeding Centre of Vallcalent (Lleida), observed the bird breeding and hospital facilities and learned about the project on the lesser grey shrike (*Lanius minor*) recovery and breeding in captivity.

The Closing Ceremony has finished the momentous event. The next meeting locality and time have been approved at the meeting of IUGB Liaison Officers. The IUGB 2013 Congress will be held in Brussels. The congress will take full advantage of the existing diversity in research and management practices trying to highlight the most appropriate for local conditions and objectives.

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