

# Flora & Fauna of Spain

## Of Wolf and Man

The wolf has since time immemorial been considered human enemy number one in most European countries and the Spanish state battled to limit the population for centuries. Hunters were expected to kill at least one wolf every season and up until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the state paid a considerable sum for each female wolf that was brought down, and even more if she was pregnant.

However, the concept of the wolf as a pest has gradually changed and biologists now consider the wolf every bit as important to the eco system as any other animal. As an example of this, the wolf is the only species that can control the population of wild boar.

There used to be wolves in almost all the major mountain ranges in Andalucía and about a hundred years ago there were packs around Istán, near Marbella.



Now the main area for the Spanish wolf population is the north western part of the country where the mountain ranges go from Galicia to Cantabria and Castilla y León, an area of 120,000 km<sup>2</sup>. There the population has grown steadily since the wolf became a protected species in the 1970s.

A couple of winters ago a pack was discovered in Cerdanya in Catalonia, south of Andorra. It is assumed that they arrived from the French mountains. The pack is thought to consist of five animals who survive in a desolate mountainous area with difficult access.

There are also wolves in the Sierra Morena mountain range between Andalucía and La Mancha.

The threat to the wolf does not only come from man. The limited number of animals and the distance between packs makes mating difficult. The law of conservation protects the animals in theory, but neither the Guardia Civil nor the regional police forces have the men to enforce it. Furthermore there are still groups who oppose the conservation, noticeably big game hunters for whom hunting is a profitable hobby. Any individual who might threaten the hunt for deer or other animals on the large, private hunting estates of Córdoba and Jaén is considered a threat. So hunters try to poison the wolves in spite of the fact that it also kills other animals.

The losses to live stock farmers are limited due to the fact that in Spain the animals are normally put to pasture with a shepherd and one or more sheep dogs.

It is estimated that there are some 2,000 wolves living in the wild in Spain, and although they are no longer considered a threatened species, their situation is 'problematic'.