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THE IBERIAN WOLF: PROTECTED IN PORTUGAL, HUNTABLE IN SPAIN — NOW ONE LAW AND ONE FUTURE

A wolf protected in Portugal can be killed across the border in Spain — the two countries must manage one shared population together.

ROME / LISBON / MADRID / BRUSSELS, June 2026 — The Iberian wolf (*Canis lupus signatus*) — a genetically unique subspecies classified as Endangered in Portugal and protected under national law since 1988, six years before EU law required it — is facing a mounting conservation crisis rooted in the absence of coordinated management across the Portugal–Spain border. The Iberian wolf is a single biological population shared across Portugal and Spain, yet the two countries manage it under radically different legal regimes.

Wolves born and raised under strict protection in Portugal routinely disperse across the border into Spain, where — north of the Douro River — they can now be hunted, culled and poached under a fragmented and recently weakened legal framework. The conservation investment made in Portugal is, in part, systematically undone across the border.

This lack of transboundary governance is compounded within Portugal itself, where poaching, habitat fragmentation and administrative delays in compensation have kept the species' conservation status unfavourable despite decades of legal protection. Three conservation organisations — Green Impact ETS (Italy), Rewilding Portugal (Portugal) and the Fondo para la Protección del Lobo Ibérico (Spain) — are today calling for coordinated action to address both dimensions of this weakness.

KEY FACTS

- ▶ 250–300 wolves in Portugal; 58 packs — area of presence contracted by 20% in two decades
- ▶ Portugal protected the wolf under national law in 1988, 6 years before EU law required it
- ▶ Portugal formally declared at the EU Council (June 2025) it will maintain strict national protection
- ▶ Between 2008–2013, 623 wolves were legally killed in Spain; zero in Portugal
- ▶ 47% of GPS-collared wolf deaths in NW Portugal were caused by poaching (Rio-Maior et al., 2018)
- ▶ The Programa Alcateia 2025–2035 was adopted in December 2025 (€15 million, 45 measures)
- ▶ The wolf downlisting (Directive 2025/1237) is being challenged in two legal cases before the General Court of the EU: T-634/24 and T-563/25

Portugal's position is unambiguous. At the Council of the EU on 5–6 June 2025, the Portuguese Government formally declared that, despite the EU downlisting, it intends to maintain strict national protection for the Iberian wolf under Article 193 TFEU and will notify the European Commission accordingly. This commitment — grounded in law, science and three decades of conservation leadership — is welcomed by the three organisations. But Portugal cannot act alone.

The core structural problem is one of transboundary governance. The Iberian wolf is a single biological population shared across Portugal and Spain. Under the consistent case law of the Court of Justice of the EU - including landmark rulings C-674/17 (2019), C-88/19 (2020) and C-436/22 (2024) - conservation status must be assessed across the species' entire natural range, irrespective of national borders. A wolf born in Portugal and subsequently killed in Spain cannot be viewed solely through a regional or national management lens. Because the Iberian wolf constitutes a shared transboundary population, mortality occurring in one Member State may directly affect conservation outcomes in another, raising important ecological and legal considerations under EU nature legislation and the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union.

"The Iberian wolf deserves a single European conservation space. Portugal has shown extraordinary courage in maintaining strict protection. Now it must use that leadership to build a coordinated response with Spain and demand that the EU provides the funding to make coexistence work."

NGOs statement

The organisations emphasise that effective conservation cannot rely on legal protection alone. Long-term coexistence requires sustained investment in livestock protection, compensation mechanisms, habitat connectivity, scientific monitoring and anti-poaching measures. Existing EU instruments, including the LIFE Programme, Interreg cross-border cooperation funds and the Common Agricultural Policy, provide important opportunities to support these objectives and should be mobilised more strategically in the next programming period.

THE THREE ORGANISATIONS CALL FOR:

- **A binational Portugal–Spain structure for the Iberian wolf, built on the same proven model that brought the Iberian lynx back from the brink** — co-coordinated by the two national authorities (ICNF and Spain's Ministry for the Ecological Transition), producing a joint conservation strategy and a single shared annual census of the transboundary population.
- **Coordinated transposition of Directive (EU) 2025/1237 by January 2027**, with Portugal maintaining strict national protection and Spain restoring or maintaining protection measures necessary to achieve and sustain favourable conservation status across the Iberian wolf population.
- **A permanent, ring-fenced line for transboundary large-carnivore conservation in the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**, securing funding for joint monitoring, habitat restoration, ecological connectivity and enforcement measures that is not dependent on short-term projects.
- **Dedicated EU financial support for coexistence measures in the 2028–2034 MFF** focusing on support for livestock protection and compensation schemes.
- **The full implementation of Portugal's Programa Alcateia 2025–2035**, supported by adequate national funding and complementary EU co-financing through LIFE, CAP and cross-border cooperation instruments.
- **Recognition of the contribution of Iberian wolf conservation to the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the implementation of the Nature Restoration Regulation**, particularly in relation to ecological connectivity and ecosystem resilience.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

This press release is accompanied by a full Briefing Paper:

"The Iberian Wolf: Protected in Portugal, Hunttable in Spain — One Law, One Future"

The Briefing Paper includes: full scientific and legal references, CJEU case law analysis, transboundary governance assessment, CAP funding analysis, Programa Alcateia details, and the full text of Portugal's June 2025 Council statement.

Available from the media contacts below.

ABOUT THE ORGANISATIONS

Green Impact ETS is an Italian third-sector organisation focused on Nature Protection with special programmes about wolf protection and large carnivore conservation in Europe, combining scientific analysis, legal action and advocacy. www.greenimpact.it

Rewilding Portugal works to restore wild nature and natural processes in Portugal, with a focus on the recovery of keystone species including the Iberian wolf.

<https://rewilding-portugal.com/>

El Fondo Para la Protección del Lobo Ibérico is an initiative supported by more than 50 organisations in Spain and Portugal dedicated to the protection and conservation of the Iberian wolf.

<https://fondolobo.org/en/home/>

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