

A photograph of an Iberian wolf standing in a field of yellow flowers. The wolf is shown in profile, facing right. The background is a dense field of yellow flowers and green foliage. The image is framed by dark green circular shapes in the top-left and bottom-right corners.

Webinar
A Future for the
Iberian Wolves

The Iberian Wolf in Portugal and the Transboundary Challenge

Marta Cálix
Rewilding Portugal

The problem in one sentence

A wolf protected in Portugal can be legally killed after crossing an invisible line into Spain — yet both countries are managing the same shared population.

1 Shared, not separate

The Iberian wolf population spans the border. Packs use territories on both sides; individuals disperse across it routinely.

2 Divergent regimes

Portugal maintains strict protection nationwide. Spain reopened hunting north of the Douro in March 2025.

3 Asymmetric outcome

Conservation investment made in Portugal is partly undone across the border — with no mechanism to reconcile the two.

Portugal: the current picture

~58

wolf packs confirmed
nationally

~20%

contraction in area
of presence

30%

of original range
remaining

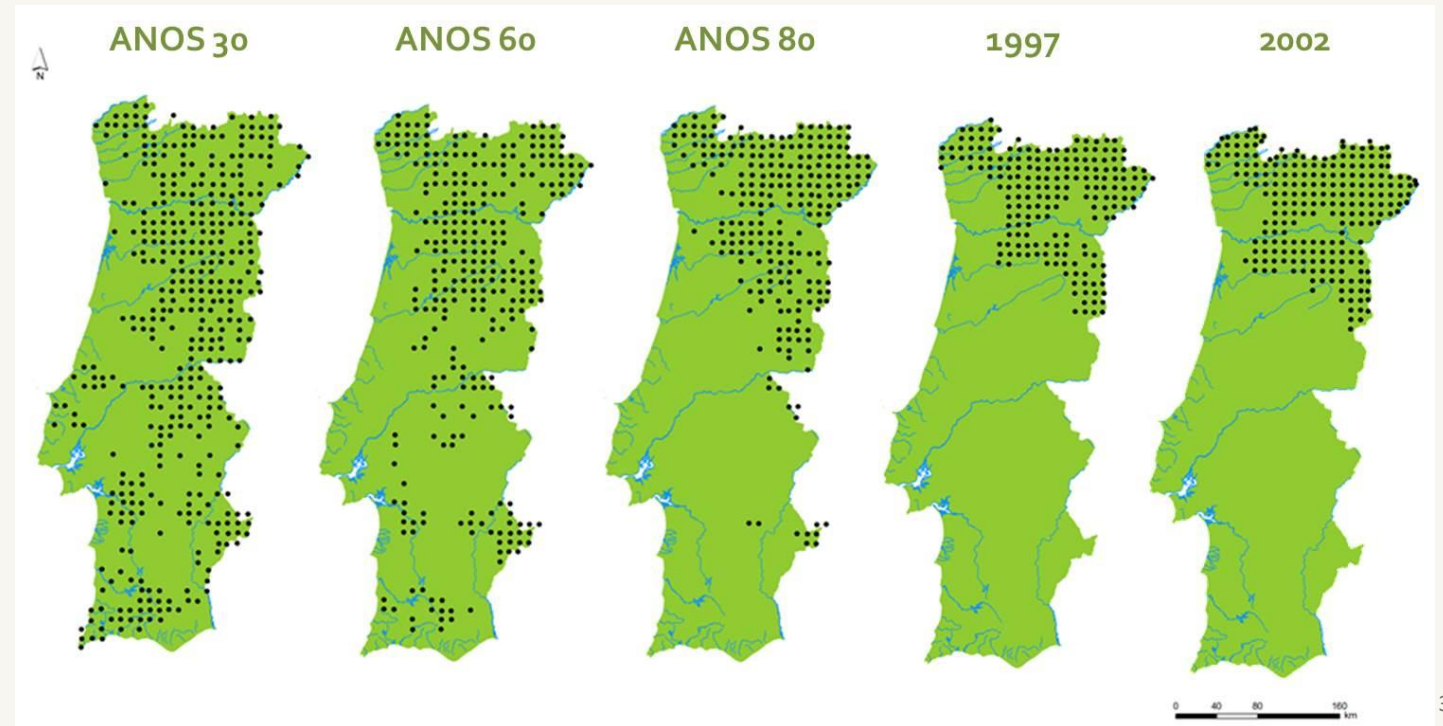
0

legally culled in Portugal
(623 in Spain, 2008–13)

Strictly protected since 1988 — and still unfavourable

Legal protection alone has not delivered recovery.

Poaching, habitat fragmentation, declining wild prey and administrative delays in livestock compensation have kept the species' conservation status unfavourable despite nearly four decades of full legal protection. The law is necessary — it has not been sufficient.



Programa Alcateia 2025–2035

Portugal's first dedicated wolf recovery programme — ambitious in design, partially funded in practice.

What it commits to

- 45 measures across prevention, monitoring and coexistence
- €15 million indicative total budget
- Ten-year horizon to 2035
- Includes a binational coordination component

● The funding gap

€3M

secured to date
(Fundo Ambiental, 2026–2028)

€12M

not yet committed —
the implementation risk

A strong plan is not the same as a funded plan. EU co-financing is the obvious route — and the reason the MFF matters.

The transboundary problem

Wolves do not read borders. Governance does.

Dispersal is the mechanism. Young wolves leave natal territories and travel long distances to establish their own. Those born under strict protection in the Portuguese north routinely cross into Spanish territory where — north of the Douro since March 2025 — they can be legally hunted.

The consequence: Portugal bears the cost of protection; the population-level benefit leaks across a border it cannot manage alone.



Two regimes, one population

PORTUGAL

LEGAL STATUS

Strictly protected nationwide since 1988

CULLING

No legal culling

GOVERNANCE

Centralised — ICNF

DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

Maintained protection; Council statement June 2025

SPAIN

LEGAL STATUS

Protected south of the Douro; huntable to the north since March 2025

CULLING

Culling and hunting quotas permitted in the north

GOVERNANCE

Devolved to 17 autonomous communities

DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

Protection reduced after the EU downlisting

Same species. Same population. Opposite trajectories.

What EU law does — and doesn't — resolve



Directive (EU) 2025/1237

Downlisted the wolf from 'strictly protected' to 'protected'. Member States must transpose by January 2027 — but retain discretion to maintain stronger national protection.



CJEU case law

Conservation status must be assessed at the level of the population's natural range — across borders, not within them. This is an assessment principle, not a binding duty to co-manage.



The gap

Nothing in EU law compels two Member States sharing a population to actually coordinate their management. That gap is where the Iberian wolf falls.

It has already been done — for the Iberian lynx

Portugal and Spain already co-manage a shared Iberian carnivore. The machinery exists and it works.

● A joint working group

Co-coordinated by Spain's ministry and Portugal's ICNF, with the Spanish autonomous communities at the table.

● One shared annual census

A single population-level count across both countries, using harmonised methodology.

● A single joint strategy

The 2024 strategy was the first drawn up bilaterally for the species — not two national plans side by side.

● Continuous EU funding

A chain of LIFE projects across three decades — not one time-boxed grant.



Where the lynx analogy holds — and where it doesn't

● Transferable

- The governance machinery: a co-coordinated working group
- A jointly adopted conservation strategy
- Harmonised monitoring and one shared census
- Sustained EU funding as the financial backbone

● Not transferable

- The politics. Everyone wants more lynx; the wolf carries real conflict
- No hunting lobby or livestock conflict shapes lynx policy
- The lynx strategy is administratively adopted — not legally binding
- So it justifies the structure, not a demand to reverse Spanish law

The conflict is harder for the wolf — which is precisely why a standing structure is needed, rather than ad hoc contact.

What we are calling for

Joint position — Rewilding Portugal · Fondo para la Protección del Lobo Ibérico · Green Impact ETS

- 01 A binational Portugal–Spain structure**

Co-coordinated by ICNF and Spain's ministry on an equal footing, engaging the autonomous communities — producing a joint strategy and one shared annual census.
- 02 Coordinated transposition by January 2027**

Both countries maintaining or restoring the protection needed to reach favourable conservation status across the shared population.
- 03 Ring-fenced, multi-annual EU funding**

Sustained support across the 2028–2034 MFF for joint monitoring, shared data and cross-border coexistence — not one-off projects.
- 04 Full implementation of Programa Alcateia**

With the EU co-financing to match national commitment, including its binational coordination component.

**The Iberian wolf is one population in two countries.
Its conservation must be too.**

Thank you — questions welcome

Marta Cálix · Head of Ecological Restoration, Rewilding Portugal
marta.calix@rewilding-portugal.com

*Full briefing paper and joint press release available on request —
including references, CJEU analysis and the detailed policy asks.*