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**Eradication and trade of the American Grey
squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)**

REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT

*Document prepared by
the Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea of Italy*

**ERADICATION AND TRADE OF THE AMERICAN GREY SQUIRREL
(SCIURUS CAROLINENSIS) IN ITALY**

**Governmental Report prepared by the Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea for
the 31th Standing Committee Meeting (Strasbourg, 29 November- 2 December 2011)**

Following the 28th Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, a case file was opened on Italy as regards the “implementation of Recommendation n° 123 (2007) on limiting the dispersal of the Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) in Italy and other Contracting Parties”.

The Recommendation n. 123 (2007) asked Italy to:

1. *urge the Lombardia Region and the other competent local authorities to start without further delay the eradication program of the Grey Squirrel in the Ticino Valley, so as to significantly delay invasion of Southern Alps;*

Besides, the Recommendation asked the Contracting Parties to:

2. *ban trade and possession of the Grey Squirrel;*
3. *eradicate new possible introduced populations of Grey Squirrels.*

In the report prepared by the Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea for the 30th Standing Committee Meeting in October 2010 we informed about the progress made with the LIFE+ project on “Eradication and control of Grey Squirrel: actions for preservation of biodiversity in forest ecosystems”, launched in September 2010, and about the inclusion of Grey squirrel in Annex B of Regulation n° 338/97, which concerns introduction in EU of species which are particularly dangerous to native species of flora or fauna, successfully proposed during the 52nd CITES Committee of the EU Member States Management Authorities.

The 30th meeting of Standing Committee of Bern Convention took note of the information presented by the delegate of Italy and welcomed the information concerning a LIFE+ project which had been launched in September 2010 to provide effective tools for implementing actions aimed at the eradication of the American Grey Squirrel in the country. However, noting that the decree concerning the banning of the trade and keeping of the American grey squirrel was not approved yet, the Committee decided to keep the file open and asked Italy to inform the Committee and the Bureau of progress made in the implementation of the LIFE+ Project and the adoption of appropriate legislative tools.

The present report will inform about the progresses made in the last year.

Control and eradication

The Life+ project, that, as already reported, is co-financed by Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea, started in September 2010 with the preparatory activities. Some administrative problems have resulted in delays in carrying out some actions that the group of beneficiaries is committed to recover by the end of 2011. The Task Force, consisting of a scientific unit and a public relations unit, was established including representatives of the Regions, ISPRA (Institute for Environmental Protection and Research), the Universities and research institute Oikos. The Task Force has developed a re-entry programme necessary to recover the delay for some actions. The fundamental point of the programme is the intensification of activities from May onwards, so as to catch up by December 2011.

We recall the objectives of the LIFE+project “Eradication and control of Grey Squirrel: actions for preservation of biodiversity in forest ecosystems” (LIFE09/NAT/IT/095): the main objective of EC-SQUARE is to eliminate or, where eradication will be judged impracticable, to control the risks posed by the introduced alien species, the eastern Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) to biodiversity, and in particular to the conservation of the native Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*). A major challenge

for a successful eradication and/or control campaign is to obtain a wide consensus of the civic society for control measures, suitable in different socio-ecological situations.

The size and distribution of Grey Squirrel populations at each site are being determined. In the next step, the Grey Squirrel task force will develop a General Management Plan (GMP), that will analyze, on a per site basis, the actual population status. The aim of EC-SQUARE is to eradicate Grey Squirrels from all sites in Lombardy. Alternative actions are control, surgical sterilization and captive detention in particular cases which will be identified in the GMP. Three concrete actions on the ground are currently ongoing: Monitoring of population of grey squirrel in Lombardy, in Piedmont, in Liguria; the end of these actions is scheduled for December 2011.

A Communication Action Plan has been prepared with a mix of different tools and channels in order to best address the selected target audiences in order to: increase awareness and understanding of grey-red squirrel competition and forest ecosystem dynamics; mobilize and increase the number of citizens that lobby decision makers to implement coherent conservation policies; increase correct information on biological diversity and reduced negative attitudes and behaviors. A project website has been operational since February 2011 (<http://www.life-ecsquare.eu/en/homepage>); a French part will be activated soon to increase the fruition by French and Swiss neighbours.

Public meetings were organized in the three regions for the presentation of the project (Liguria, Lombardy and Piedmont Region) with civil servants of different administrative services and with stakeholders: one in Lombardy with representatives of regional parks hosting grey squirrel populations, four in Piedmont one with representatives of regional Parks and provinces and three with the Voluntary Ecological Guards (GEV) of the Province of Turin, in order to involve them in monitoring red and grey squirrels.

A questionnaire on the human dimension of grey squirrel management has been prepared and distributed. At the end of the project, this integrated system of actions will be used to evaluate innovative strategies for the management of alien species with a high social appeal and to produce recommendations to policy makers.

Keeping and import

As already reported last year, there is an activity of Italy aimed to ban introduction of Grey squirrel in EU: during the 52nd CITES Committee of the EU Member States Management Authorities, Italy proposed the inclusion of the Grey Squirrel in the Annex B of the Council Regulation No. 338/97 under article 3.2.d [1] [1] (the species listed in Annex B of the Regulation are those whose introduction into the Community is particularly dangerous to native species of flora or fauna).

In August 2011 the proposal was accepted by the CITES Standing Committee and in the present year a draft of the updated annexes of the Regulation No 338/97 including the Grey Squirrel has been approved by Member States.

At the moment the only passage needed is the approval by the European Parliament. After this passage, for which we don't expect any problem, the new annexes will be published by early 2012.

We are confident that the CITES Scientific Review Group, after the publication and during its next meeting in February 2012, will give a positive opinion on the suspension of the import of the specimens of 3 squirrel species, (besides **Sciurus carolinensis**, also **Callosciurus erytherus** and **Sciurus niger**), that will come into force immediately.

Then, according with the Council Regulation No. 338/97 under article 9.6 "The Commission can establish restrictions to possession and movement of specimens of species for which restriction to introduction in EU are adopted."

Within Life+ project, the three regions involved (Liguria, Lombardy and Piedmont Region) communicated to be disposed to capture, to sterilize and to keep in captivity till natural death grey squirrels of private owners.

Trading

As far as the trading is concerned, to avoid future introductions of Grey Squirrel, Italy promoted the preparation of a decree based on several consultations with the different institutional bodies involved in animal trade and management.

At the moment the process leading to the publication of the trade ban is suspended: there are some resistances by legal services of other Italian ministries to produce a decree without a solid legal basis. Such being the case, the pause for reflection in the preparation of the decree can be useful, considering that the decree should also include a reference to the suspension regulation mentioned in the above paragraph. We are confident that the incoming results from CITES process will give more solid juridical basis useful for issuing the ban decree.