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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
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**Eradication and trade of the American Grey squirrel
(*Sciurus carolinensis*) in Italy**

REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT

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CASE FILE “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 30th Standing Committee Meeting (Strasbourg, 6-9 December 2010)

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.*

A first document concerning the Italian position on case-file : “Limiting the dispersal of the American Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) in the Ticino valley in Italy” was submitted to the Standing Committee on 23rd November 2009 by the Italian Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea.

In the above document, Italian Ministry illustrated the actions undertaken in close collaboration with other institutional bodies to fulfil the Recommendation and particularly to assure the control and eradication of the population of the Grey Squirrel, the prohibition of its keeping and trading.

Among the illustrated actions, we recall the Memorandum of Understanding about Grey Squirrel control among Ministry of Environment, the three Regions territorially involved (Lombardia, Piemonte, Liguria), the University of Insubria and the national High Institute for Environmental Research (ISPRA). One of the first action promoted by the MoU has been the redaction of a LIFE+ project on: “Eradication and control of Grey Squirrel: actions for preservation of biodiversity in forest ecosystems”. The proposal was submitted for the LIFE+ Call 2009 by Lombardia Region, in partnership with Piemonte and Liguria Regions, University of Insubria and ISPRA, and the Ministry as co-financer.

Moreover, the above document illustrated the preparation of a decree prohibiting the trading and keeping of the American Grey Squirrel.

Control and eradication

A great result was achieved in the frame of the control and eradication of the Grey Squirrel: the LIFE+project “Eradication and control of Grey Squirrel: actions for preservation of biodiversity in forest ecosystems” was selected and financed by the European Commission (LIFE09/NAT/IT/095).

The project started in September 2010.

In the project, methods to control and eradicate Grey Squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*) in different socio-ecological contexts are developed. This is integrated with societal assessments to investigate and shape public perceptions of the general problems posed by alien species and, in particular, in the case of Grey Squirrel.

Developing and carrying out specific control methods linked to local public perception of the alien species will allow to test the efficacy of innovative methods under different local contexts and to introduce new alien species management strategies which will be made available to policy makers at different administrative levels.

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 to biodiversity, and in particular to the conservation of the native Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) in Italy.

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.

At the start of the project a Grey Squirrel task force, consisting of a scientific unit and a public relations unit, has been established. In a preliminary action (first 9 months) the size and distribution of Grey Squirrel populations at each site will be determined. In the next step (months 9-12), the Grey Squirrel task force will develop a General Management Plan (GPM), that will analyse, on a per site basis, the actual population status. The aim of EC-SQUARE is to eradicate Grey Squirrels from all sites in Lombardy. Alternatives actions are control, surgical sterilisation and captive detention in particular cases which will be identified in the GMP. In Piedmont, the major action will be control to reduce Grey Squirrel population size and avoid further expansion. In Liguria, because of high public appeal of Grey Squirrel at Genoa Nervi Park and surroundings, eradication will be carried out by live-trapping Grey Squirrels, with subsequent sterilisation and detention or euthanasia of trapped animals according to criteria from the GMP. All these actions will start in month 13 and continue until the end of the project. Conservation actions (e.g. guidelines for forest ecosystem management, red squirrel reintroduction) with the aim to conserve and/or restore populations of the native red squirrel in and around the current areas occupied by the alien species will be carried out during the project.

A Communication Action Plan will be prepared by end of month 7. EC-Square communication strategies will include 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.

To avoid future introductions of Grey Squirrel, the different Italian ministries involved in animal trade and management will be aided by the EC-SQUARE task force to make a Grey Squirrel risk assessment as necessary input to enforce a Grey Squirrel trade ban.

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

A great result was also achieved in the frame of the keeping and import of the Grey Squirrel population: 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).

The proposal was accepted by the Committee and later this year a draft of the updated annexes of the Regulation No 338/97 including the Grey Squirrel will be circulated among Member States for approval. The new annexes will presumably be published at the beginning of 2011. After the publication and during its next meeting, the Scientific Review Group will give an opinion on the suspension of the import of the specimens of species, that will come into force immediately.

Later in the year, the suspension regulation will be published and at that time the updated list including the species that cannot be imported into the community will be officially published.

Trading

As far as the trading is concerned, Italy promoted the preparation of a decree based on several consultations with the institutional bodies involved. The decree should also include a reference to the suspension regulation mentioned in the above paragraph. Being the process leading to the publication of the suspension regulation not yet concluded and as the drafting of the decree requires a collective effort as well as many interactions among different competencies, the process is still underway.

¹: Strictly protected fauna species in Appendix II of the Bern

²: Protected under Annex II of the Habitat Directive 92/43/EEC

³: Protected under Annex I of the Birds Directive 2009/147/EC