



Int. Agrobiodiversity Seminar Ghent, 21 August 2009
Identifying & Monitoring Feral Populations in Europe

Identifying and Monitoring Feral Populations in Europe

Short overview on the topic
and applications to the SAVE Commissions

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Credit to pictures is made in
the project paper mentioning
contacts (available on request)



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Structure of the Presentation

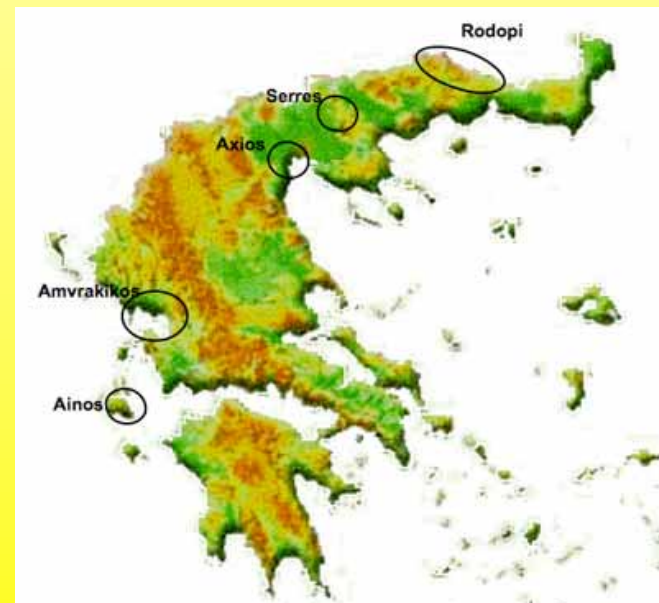
- Why and how of this project proposal
- Old and well known populations with importance to tourism
- Actual and new occurrences
- Importance and problems
- Special case of tarpan-like horses
- Possible engagement for SAVE
- Applications to the SAVE Commissions



Why and how of this project

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- A study on feral horses in the Axios Delta in Greece - executed for SAVE by the national partner Amaltheia - showed the problematic occurrence of feral populations
- It also showed that feral populations are more widespread than commonly known and occur in many countries





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Old and well known populations

A) white Camargue horses, important to tourism



SAVE Foundation and SAVE Network, www.save-foundation.net and www.agrobiodiversity.net



Old and well known populations

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B) Cavallini
della Giara;
On a plateau
in Sardegna,
Italy





Old and well known populations

C) Cattle in the Coto Doñana National Park, Spain

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Old and well known populations

D) Not only in Southern countries, also in the North:
Dülmener horse in Germany (or the Konik in Poland)



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Actual and new occurrences

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- Many new occurring feral populations are a result of diverse reasons for human depopulation:
 - Rural migration, which leads to empty villages
 - Repelling in war times (Cyprus, Balkan)
- New feral groups also have been built to solve problems with landscape management (mainly for grazing)
- Other new groups were built to keep genetics (Polish Konik) or to rescue endangered breeds (Rodopi cattle)
- SAVE has already made a list of various examples of feral or semi-wild populations of cattle, horse, donkeys and pigs (not for the widespread goats which generate quite another problematic)



Actual and new occurrences

Also donkeys can be found in a feral or semi-wild stage as shown e.g. on Skyros Island or in Cyprus

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Actual and new occurrences

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Turopolje pigs are kept in semi-wild status by private owners in the pastures & oak forests of Lonjsko Polje Nature Park in Croatia





Actual and new occurrences

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Identifying & Monitoring Feral Populations in Europe

Nebrodi pigs are living all year free in the high area of the Nature Parks of Nebrodi and Madonie, Sicily





Actual and new occurrences

Projects to return rare cattle breeds to the wild have been started with locally adapted autochthonous breeds

e.g. with

- Small Rodopi cattle in Madjorovo, Bulg. (see picture)
- Others are planned: Kopacki Rit, Croatia (with Slavonian-Syrmian Grey cattle)
- With crossbreeds in the Baltics and NL





Pro & Contra feral populations (FP)

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Importance of FP:

- Most FP are genetic resources
- They have adapted to and live often in very marginal areas
- They are interesting objects for scientific studies (ethology, population dynamics, etc.)
- Nature protection is often looking for 'grand herbivors'; in many regions FP could replace lacking wild forms
- FP could be a last chance to keep some rare breeds alive

Endangerments and Problems:

- Nobody cares about FP
- FP often suffer from diseases, instead of managing them they get culled
- FP have bad reputations as they often get in conflict with other land uses (eg. agriculture)
Public opinion is against them
- Nature Protection often likes to get rid of 'domestic breeds' and doesn't see advantages
- Often FP are hunted

=> There are, of course, interdependences between pro and contras



Special case: Tarpan-like horses

The Tarpan, a wild ancestor of horses in Europe, was extinct in early 19th century. But there are still horses showing signs of the wild ancestor: e.g. eel line and zebra stripes on legs

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Special case: Tarpan-like horses

Example of the successful **Polish Konik**, returned to the wild and distributed to many nature reserves, also outside Poland

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Special case: Tarpan-like horses

Example of endangered **Sorraia horse** - the 'Iberian tarpan' - rescued in a sanctuary just for it, the Vale de Zebro, Portugal

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Special case: Tarpan-like horses

Also, in the Balkans there are still tarpan-like horses, so called 'local horses'. They could be as important and successful as the Polish Konik. But action to save them should be in time!

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What could/should be done?

- Nobody feels responsible for feral populations, neither nature protection nor agriculture, so SAVE Foundation should act and start a project doing the following:
 - Make a survey of feral populations
 - Collect best practice and experiences
 - Investigate the status of the populations (health, etc.)
 - Organise impact assessments
 - Network experts and stakeholders
 - Take PR-measures to improve the reputation of FP
 - Raise funds for financing the whole project
- To rescue the tarpan-like local horses in the Balkans SAVE should make a feasibility study looking especially:
 - for appropriate horses for a breeding scheme
 - for partners and possibilities to place new breeding nuclei



Applications to the SAVE Commissions:

11 August 2009
Applications in Europe

- SAVE should agree to feel responsible also for feral populations
- Start a project as outlined
- Try to rescue the tarpan-like horses in the Balkans

Thank you for
your attention!

