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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee
29th meeting

Strasbourg, 30 November- 3 December 2009

File open

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

Report by the Government

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ITALIAN REPORT FOR THE BUREAU OF THE BERN CONVENTION STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE CASE FILE “GREY SQUIRREL”

Following the 28th Standing Committee of the Bern Convention (Strasbourg 24-27th November 2008) 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”.

A list of actions, to be implemented by Italy, were recommended by the Committee and the Italian government was asked by the Secretariat to report to the Bureau of the Standing Committee in this respect before its first meeting in March 2009.

Hereunder follows a brief description of the degree of implementation has been reached so far for every action recommended.

“To produce an agenda detailing short, medium and long term actions oriented to eradicate the American grey squirrel, as well as periodic reports in order to facilitate the follow-up of the implementation of the previous Recommendations from the Standing Committee”.

The Italian government has finally succeeded in convening a meeting in Rome on the 5th of March, to which representatives of Lombardia and Piemonte local authorities as well as representatives from local nature reserves and universities participated. The meeting had the purpose to agree a Memorandum of Understanding in which the various roles, competencies, duties and actions to take would be specified for every subject involved. During the meeting a Working Group that will follow and monitor all the activities specified in the MoU was also established. The Memorandum was agreed with minor changes and it is expected to be officially signed by the participants during the next meeting of the Working Group provisionally scheduled for next 2nd of April.

Therefore such an agenda will be available as soon as the MoU is signed and ratified.

Nevertheless a shared vision of the urgency of the matter was expressed by all the participants during the meeting and some priorities were individuated as follows.

1. Start with the eradication of those squirrel colonies in Lombardia much closer to the Swiss border. This action would start simultaneously with a public awareness campaign funded by the Ministry of Environment.
2. Complete the monitoring (broadly insufficient right now) and subsequently plan the interventions in Piemonte.
3. Find a strategy to involve local authorities and raise awareness for the need of planning and management of the squirrels in the city Park of Nervi (Genova, Liguria region).

To give, without delay, a clear and public support to the Regione Lombardia for the programme of monitoring and eradication of the American grey squirrel in Lombardy. Particular emphasis should be put on aspects dealing with the eradication.

This point has already been achieved by the Italian government. As clearly explained in our document prot. DPN-2008-0021445, dated 15th of September 2008, the Region has full legal competence and autonomy to proceed with the eradication. The Ministry of Environment has always clearly supported the eradication in accordance to its institutional role, also by sending numerous documents inviting the Region to comply with the recommendations of the Bern SC, and it will contribute to raise awareness by funding a campaign.

To promote regional collaboration among Piedmont and Lombardy in order to undertake common actions in the Ticino Valley.

A first dialogue between the two Regions is already started during the meeting of the 5th of March and will be reinforced by regular meetings of the WG and the ratification of the MoU.

To put forward urgently the decree prohibiting the trading and keeping of the American grey squirrel.

Such a draft decree has already been evaluated and given positive opinion by the legal office of the Ministry of Environment. Since it involves other Ministries, the Ministry of Environment will shortly start the consultation process.

To give legal protection to the responsible/executors of the mitigation measures.

This is not possible. The legal protection is granted by the proper application of the existing laws. In Italy we have regional authorities, they are empowered to regulate themselves (in the framework of national legislation) with their own regional laws. The wildlife control is always regulated by regional laws of implementation of national Law 157/92. Therefore the legal protection for the executors of the mitigation measures has to be granted by the authority who directly (with proper legislative act) authorizes that.

To strengthen the national legal framework concerning alien and invasive alien species in order to facilitate management initiatives.

In accordance with national Decree 357/97 (implementing the Habitat Directive) and its amendments (D.P.R. 120/003), guidelines for the translocation of wildlife species have been published by the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea Protection, (“Linee guida per l’immissione di specie faunistiche” – Guidelines for the translocation of wildlife species (AA. VV., 2007)). These guidelines contain measures for prevention and control of IAS but, since the proposal to incorporate them into a Ministry of Environment Decree is still under discussion, their implementation is limited at some voluntary regional and local initiatives. Nevertheless each Region has the possibility, in the legislative framework of the regional law of implementation of Law n° 157/92, to regulate independently the control of dangerous alien species (e.g. Piemonte regional law n° 70/96, art. 29).

To investigate urgently: whether the Region has competence to put forward a decree to prohibit the trade of the American grey squirrel independently from the Ministry of the Environment; and whether the current national and regional legal framework is suitable to undertake actions.

A decree can only be issued by a Ministry or other high level institutional body; moreover it would be useless to prohibit trade at regional level where in other regions grey squirrel could still be purchased. The draft decree the Ministry of Environment has put forward will cover whole national territory. In the MoU the Ministry of Environment has specifically mentioned that each Region signing in will have to check that the prohibition of introduction and trade of squirrels is properly implemented.

Current national and regional legislation is more than suitable to take action; the main problem in implementing existing laws is the strong lobbying, at the policy level, of animal rights associations.

To implement the measures for *Sciurus carolinensis* approved by regional decree n. 7/4345/ from Lombardy in 2001.

The “regional programme for the conservation and management of wildlife in protected areas”, approved with regional deliberation n. 7/4345 is an act of regional legislation, therefore its application falls into regional jurisdiction and has to be implemented at that level. In the deliberation the Regional Committee establishes that “the measures of the programme have to be interpreted as general guiding principles for the regional authority and as compulsory reference for the bodies in charge of managing protected areas”.

To build appropriate co-operation with provinces in order to eradicate the American grey squirrel in the Lombardy and Piedmont regions so that the American grey squirrel is managed in the Ticino valley and other bordering areas.

During the meeting of the 5th of March it was established that the Working Group will contact the involved provinces of Lombardia and Liguria (the province of Varese-Lombardia was already attending the meeting and expressed the intention to take action, being the province much closer to the Swiss border), while the Piemonte Region expressed the preference to contact and inform the provinces itself in this initial phase.