

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TRAINING COURSE ON THE SURVEILLANCE OF WILDLIFE DISEASES AND THE ROLE OF HUNTERS



Pravets, Bulgaria, 18 – 19 December 2017

Introduction to the report

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) and the Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the EU (FACE) recognise the important role hunters play in the surveillance of wildlife diseases. Based on this the three organisations conducted a training course for hunters in the surveillance of wildlife diseases. The training course, sponsored by the European Union and the Bulgarian state, was held December 18-19, in 2017 at the CIC Wildlife Health Center in Pravets, Bulgaria lead by Torsten Mörner, representing both the OIE and CIC.

The meeting gathered around 47 people from 18 different countries, with 19 representatives of hunting associations and 24 veterinarians, including 7 OIE Focal Points for wildlife veterinarians.

The following points contain the summary and recommendations from this meeting covering different issues concerning the hunters' role in the surveillance work with wildlife diseases, now with a special focus on **African Swine Fever (ASF)**.

COMMUNICATION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL BETWEEN HUNTING ASSOCIATIONS

- Invite hunting association to prepare an action plan for effective communication with hunters concerning wildlife disease issues.
- This plan shall contain communication strategies for different target groups concerned with ASF.
- Establish an e-mail list of hunting clubs and relevant associations at a local level with focus on wildlife diseases.
- Encourage hunting magazines to publish articles about wildlife diseases on a regular basis.
- Encourage and facilitate hunting associations to publish information on wildlife diseases in their communication channels.

COMMUNICATION CIC/FACE AND NATIONAL HUNTER ASSOCIATIONS

- National hunting associations to inform FACE and CIC if the disease emerges and/or related events occur.
- CIC and FACE to establish an information platform available for national hunting associations.
- Publish information about the global situation of wildlife diseases on a regular basis.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN HUNTERS AND NATIONAL VETERINARY AUTHORITIES

- Establish continuous communication with veterinary authorities concerning wildlife disease issues
- Timely inform veterinary authorities if unusual health events such as unusual mortality occur in wildlife
- Include hunters in national expert groups on wildlife diseases.
- Consult hunters when a veterinary authority produces information material concerning wildlife diseases.
- Veterinary authorities to communicate with hunting associations concerning the dissemination of information on wildlife diseases.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN HUNTERS AND INTERNATIONAL VETERINARY AUTHORITIES ORGANISATIONS

- The hunting associations to nominate a contact person responsible for wildlife diseases.
- Establish communication between national hunting associations and the OIE Focal points for Wildlife.
- Enhance the cooperation between OIE and CIC based on the existing agreement between the organisations.
- Veterinary authorities to consult and involve CIC and FACE when issues involving hunting and wildlife disease control measures are discussed.

THE ROLE OF HUNTERS IN THE SURVEILLANCE OF ASF

- Hunting associations shall appoint a person responsible for wildlife disease issues.
- Hunters should be constantly involved in the design and implementation of surveillance before, during and after an outbreak of ASF in a country.
- Hunters should be recognised and supported for their participation in the surveillance activities.
- Hunting association should be informed by the veterinary authorities when the risk for introduction of ASF changes.
- Hunting associations should inform the hunters and especially the wildlife disease contact person when the risk for introduction of ASF changes.
- National hunting association should collaborate with veterinary authorities in the preparation of contingency plans, which should foresee the role of hunters.
- Participation in the organisation and implementation of simulation exercises.

THE ROLE OF FEEDING

- The general feeling of the attendants was that, while baiting for hunting purposes is regarded as a need for successful wild boar hunting, supplementary feeding should be banned or restricted since it promotes wild boar reproduction and survival
- Evaluate the impact of feeding on wild boar population dynamics and disease transmission, based on local conditions and the disease situation.
- Involve hunters and landowners in the discussions concerning supplementary feeding/baiting (for hunting purposes)
- The terms baiting and feeding needs to be defined.

THE ROLE OF HUNTING

- Evaluate the role and impact of hunting on population dynamics, based on local conditions and the disease situation.
- Involve hunters and wildlife scientists in the decision-making on possible hunting bans or restrictions.
- Adapt legislation to facilitate effective hunting methods and instruments (night vision, thermal imaging cameras, sound suppressers, use of lamps etc.).
- Unjustified and demotivating restrictions on hunting can lead to a reduced interest and involvement in surveillance and disease management activities.

HUNTING WITH DOGS

- Scientific evidence, based on the epidemiology of the disease, is needed to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using dogs in wild boar hunting.
- Consider developing methodologies for training and applying dogs for finding carcasses.
- Field experience among hunters indicates that banning the use of hunting dogs reduces the hunting success.

DRIVEN HUNTS

- Scientific evidence is needed to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of driven hunts. The local conditions and epidemiological situation should be taken into consideration.
- Experience shows that banning driven hunts reduces the hunting success – especially for wild boar.
- For driven hunts, biosecurity measures are particularly relevant.

TRAPPING

- Evaluate the role of trapping, based on local conditions and disease situations.
- Adapt legislation to facilitate effective trapping and culling methods.
- Encourage the most efficient and effective trapping methods, based on experience from other countries.

COSTS

- Create – if not already in place – emergency funds, together with veterinary agencies, government authorities, pig industry, hunters etc.
- Experiences of recent outbreaks demonstrate the advantages of increasing the motivation of hunters by creating economic compensation to those hunters who take part in field work (retrieving carcasses, selective hunting, sampling etc.).

BIOSECURITY

- Biosecurity is a crucial tool in wildlife disease control and requires effective communication strategies.
- Create a best practice framework on biosecurity measures in hunting.
- Train hunters in the implementation of proper biosecurity measures (equipment, clothing, transportation, disposal, etc.).
- Facilitate investments in biosecurity equipment and infrastructure to prepare for disease emergence.

OTHER ISSUES

- Greater communication on ASF is required to improve awareness on ASF in wild boar.
- Prepare a manual for (online) training courses for hunters for wildlife diseases at the national level (train the trainers).
- Support the training of hunters in disease surveillance, prevention, and control at the international level.
- Encourage integrated training of hunters and veterinarians and organise international and national workshops.

- Additional research on infected wild boar populations should be supported, since it is not fully known how the animals behave in ASF infected populations. This information can be vital to understand how and why the virus spreads.
- To recommend the OIE to continue to negotiate with EU for getting resources to continue the training programme in Pravets.
- To provide more details in the policies to be implemented in ASF infected areas on the field of wild boar depopulation and optimal recommended animal densities when the virus is circulating in wild boars and/domestic pigs (the recommendation could be different when the tick *Dermacentor* is present in the infected zone).