

# **The 1<sup>st</sup> European mink EEP Species Committee Meeting 18 – 19 October 2005 in El Pont de Suert, Catalonia, Spain**

Minutes

Compiled by Tiit Maran

The 1<sup>st</sup> committee meeting was held by courtesy of the Catalonian Environmental Authorities under the aegis of the LIFE COOP Project no LIFE 2003NAT/CP/E/000002

**The meeting was attended by 4 committee members out of 5:**

1. Tiit Maran (Chair) – tiit.maran@tallinnlv.ee
2. Sisco Mañas (Representative of Spain) - FRANCESC.MANAS@GENCAT.NET
3. Wolfgang Festl (Representative of Germany) - festl@gmx.de
4. Leif Blomqvist (Representative of Scandinavia and Baltic countries) - leif.blomqvist@zoo.hel.fi

5. Aleš Toman ( Representative of central Europe) excused his non-attendance with the European mink-related expedition to the Ukraine. - zoolog@zoojihlava.cz

**The Committee meeting was attended by following guests:**

1. Dr. Jordi Ruiz-Olmo - head of the Service for protection of the fauna and flora in Catalonia Government
2. Santiago Palazón – species coordinator in Spain
3. Asun Gómez– assistant of species coordinator in Spain

**The agenda of the meeting consisted of the following topics:**

1. Current status of the EEP Population: review of the status.
2. Co-management of WEST and EAST Population.
3. Arrangement of comparative studies of WEST and EAST populations.
4. Formulation of goals for the subprogram in Spain.
5. Revision Husbandry guidelines
6. New members of EEP
7. Experts needed for Species Committee
8. “Male problem”
9. PHVA workshop for the European mink to be held in 2007 in Estonia
10. Any other business information (review the actions in proposed action plan, how to improve the dissemination of information)
11. Next meeting

## 1. Current status of the EEP Population

Status of the population was presented in the form of PM2000 modeling by the EEP Coordinator. The demographic parameters were presented and the status of the population was discussed. The overall goal for the breeding program (90% of initial heterozygity to be preserved for 100 years) was discussed and it was agreed that such goal setting is hardly realistic (even with addition of new founders) and has to be reviewed.

The controversy of Euronerz from point of view of genetic and demographic management was discussed and it was decided that Euronerz will follow the recommendations to breed the animals of significant genetic value under their control and may decide over the need to breed (for release, for display in member zoos) more by deciding itself, but still trying to get the best possible combinations from point of view of mean kinship.

It was agreed that studbook keeping will designate the animals of Spanish/French origin as WEST, animals of eastern European origin as EAST under the “user identified field” SUBPOP.

## 2. Co-management of WEST and EAST Subpopulation.

It was decided that for the time being following the precautionary measure these two subpopulations has to be managed separately as the resolution of the European mink Conservation Conference in 2003 in Logroño, La Rioja, Spain stated in the resolution of the conference. However, it was stressed that the likelihood of pooling the two populations are very likely in the future given to the fact that the additional studies are likely to confirm the present findings for genetic studies, but also because running of several conservation breeding programs in Europe with more that 500 animals in each is hardly affordable. It was stated that the genetic study of all the animals currently in captivity may well make the problem of subpopulation irrelevant.

## 3. Comparative study of two putative “subpopulations”.

- Ex situ

It was decided that the study of the two “subpopulations” must have the following aim in *ex situ*:

- identify possible behavioral, reproductive differences between WEST and EAST populations.
- test the possible effect of out-breeding.

The following parameters were thought to be important to compare for comparative study of reproduction:

Time of estrus

Litter size

Temperature of nest box in WEST and EAST.

Time of copulations

Duration of copulations

Frequency of copulations

The minimum sample size needed for study both in Spain and in eastern part of the range was decided to be three pair on both sides (the larger sample size is clearly appreciated but this would take too much space in breeding facilities needed for conservation breeding purposes, thus the very minimum was agreed for beginning). The preparation of transfer of the animals will be started in autumn 2006 (the latter is greatly the matter of decision of the Spanish Species Committee). The study itself is planned to be launched in 2007. The exact protocol will be decided in 2<sup>nd</sup> SC meeting in Madrid immediately before the EAZA XXIII Conference.

- The study of out-breeding was decided to be launched in 2008. For this study the following was decided:
  - a. In Spain the sample to be consist of the following: 3 males from Spain and females from EAST.
  - b. In the EAST: 3 males from Spain and 3 females from EAST.
  - c. The exact observation protocol and design of the observation will be decided in SC meeting in Madrid in 2006.
  
- In situ: Ecological study.  
For the SC meeting in Madrid the already available ecological data in Spain and Estonia will be compared. If the already available material will not suitable for drawing conclusion on the difference between subpopulations, the results of this comparison will be used for deciding over the feasibility of launching a separate ecological study. For this purpose a small working meeting will conducted in late 2005 in Estonia, where the data collected in Estonia and in Spain will be compared. The result will be made available for the next SC meeting.
  
- In situ: Morphological study  
Small comparative study on already available information on morphology will be performed. Tiit Maran will send the relevant information published in Russian (mostly data from Ternovsky's book) to Santiago Palazón. He will compare this data with Spanish data and will make the result available in the next SC meeting in 2006 in Madrid.

Basic measurements to be compared in study of morphology:

1. Body:
  - Head & body length
  - Tail length
  - Ear length
  - Hind foot length
2. Skull:
  - Condylbasal length,
  - Zygomatic length,
3. White areas in the skins (the data on animals in Tallinn breeding facility will be compared with the data in Spain.
4. Presence of pale mask in juveniles will be checked in 2006 breeding season(age to be decided later)

#### 4. Definition of goals and objectives for the conservation breeding in Spain.

##### **Goal:**

1. To ensure the survival of the European mink (“subpopulation?”) and provide opportunity for restoration of the species in the wild in case the wild population(s) will entirely vanish.
2. To contribute for the European conservation breeding program (EEP)
3. To provide opportunities for applied conservation research.
4. To promote public awareness.

##### **Short-term objectives (5-years period: 2006 - 2010):**

1. Assess the relation of Spanish population to other populations in Europe; to decide over the validity of Spanish population as separate management unit.
2. Gain experience in conservation and management of the species *ex situ*.
3. Integrate the *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation management (e.g. release programs and integrated studies).

#### 5. Revision Husbandry guidelines

The 1<sup>st</sup> husbandry guideline was issued 10 years ago and clearly needs to be updated. Current guidelines were reviewed chapter by chapter and the need for modification was discussed in detail. It was decided that Tiit Maran will enter the modification for the end of the year and will send then for revision to the other members of the SC. The final version is expected to be ready for early spring the latest. It was decided that the guidelines should be published in internet, but it must also be available in CD and as printed material. In latter case the video footages planned to be attached cannot be added.

#### 6. New members of EEP

The need for new members was discussed in the meeting. The complications of having only few animals were highlighted: with few animals there the need to exchange animals frequently will arise which is exhaustive for institutions keeping the species and may result in reluctance in keeping the mink. The other option of keeping large animals of animals would ease this problem, but would be costly for institutions. It was decided that is must be recommended for the zoos willing to participate in the EEP to prepare for the species one public display and number of (3- 5) temporary enclosures for keeping the juveniles after the time of weaning until the new location for them is found. It was also

decided that an overview of issues related to maintaining the mink in captivity has to be prepared. (Leif Blomqvist & Tiit Maran agreed to prepare the overview). The overview will be presented in next SC meeting.

It was also decided that if the institution participating in EEP will not respond for 2 years SC may consider of excluding the institution from the EEP.

7. **Experts for Emink SC.** The issue of nutrition was discussed. Sisco Manas informed about the elaboration of diet for mink in Spain and promised to make this available for others for evaluation.
8. **Male problem.** The issue of male inefficiency in reproduction was discussed extensively. It was agreed that despite of repeated attempts of revealing the cause of this malfunction of males, the essence of the problem still remains largely unsolved. Tiit Maran and Wolfgang Festl reviewed their attempts to solve the problem. The importance of solving the issue was fully underlined by all participants. It was agreed that the key for solving the problem lies in getting more information on the weaning and dispersal of litter in the wild. However, given to the critical status of the species in the wild such a study is very difficult to perform. It was suggested that the hormonal study of inefficient males might be useful. It was decided that Wolfgang Festl will send his Euronorz recordings on litter development to Tiit Maran for reviewing with the hope to find any regular pattern which might help to solve the issue.
9. **PHVA for European mink in 2007 Estonia.** Tiit Maran informed the SC about the GBSC Europe and Foundation LUTREOLA's plans to perform a PHVA Workshop in Tallinn in spring 2007. Euronorz planned to organize the European mink conservation conference in the same time in Osnabrück (Germany). To avoid the overlap of events it was decided that the conference will be held in October 2007 in Saarland/Neukirchen (Germany) and the results of the PHVA Workshop could be presented in this conference.
10. **Any other business:**
  - a. Information dissemination. Tiit Maran expresses his worry that despite of several events going on in conservation of the European mink, the information about all this is rather scattered and not easily accessible. It was proposed to issue once a year a small electronic Mink News, which will be distributed through computer discussion list, such as EEP list, LUTREOLA list, Small Carnivore Specialist Group list. It was decided that Tiit Maran will send the respective request for information to all relevant parties and the end of the year the first information bulletin will be launched.
  - b. Plans in Slovakia for reintroduction of European mink. Tiit Maran informed the SC about the very provisional plans for starting with European mink recovery project in National park Velka Fatra in Slovakia in collaboration with the Ukraine.
  - c. Wolfgang Festl informed SC about the intention to start with re-introduction of European mink in Saarland (Germany) in Illriver river restoration area.
11. **Next meeting.** It was decided that the 2<sup>nd</sup> SC meeting will be held in autumn next year in Madrid immediately before EAZA XXIII Conference. Spanish colleagues promised to take care for rooms where this meeting could be held.