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Cultural dimension of wolves in the Iberian Peninsula: implications of ethnozoology in conservation biology. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*. Volume 24, 2011 – Issue 3: Biodiversity and Society. Why should social scientists have a say?

In the Iberian Peninsula, the coexistence between pastoral communities and wolves has given origin to a rich ethnographic heritage, expressed in myths and legends, practices related to medical uses of wolf parts, and constructions for hunting wolves. This article assesses such cultural dimension through interviews with inhabitants, field prospecting and a literature review. Our review indicates that cultural manifestations related to wolves are associated with two distinct perceptions of this carnivore: as a real threat to livestock and as a symbolic creature. This cultural legacy is still present in the memory and practices of Iberian rural communities and is unparalleled in other European regions. Ethnographic knowledge can enhance our understanding of the perceptions of local people towards the wolf and help to promote the recreational and utilitarian value of this species as an important element in rural culture and tradition. Such an approach can be crucial in attenuating wolf–human conflict in humanized areas and consequently should be incorporated in wolf conservation and management programs.

Key words: Iberian Peninsula, wolves, ethnography, oral tradition, rural architecture, traditional knowledge, wildlife management, human-wolf conflict.

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