

## **MORTALITY, AGE STRUCTURE AND FERTILITY OF A NON RANDOM SAMPLE OF 206 DEAD WOLVES RETRIEVED IN ITALY DURING 1986-2001**

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During the period 1986-2001, 206 wolf carcasses retrieved in Italy have been examined. For each dead wolf data and locality of retrieval were available. Causes of mortality were assessed by standard necropsies and specific examinations. Age was obtained by tooth eruption, cementum-annuli count and cranial sutures. Female fertility was assessed by pregnancy or uterine scares count. Yearly and monthly retrieval trends were calculated. Age structure of the sample has been defined, along with the number of reproductive females and their mean number of uterine scares.

No apparent trend have been observed by years, whereas the autumn/winter months are more likely in having dead wolves. Male-female sex ratio was 1.04; when age was clumped in three main classes, 38.6% of the animals were younger than one year, 18.4% ranged from one to two years and 43% were older than three years. Five of the females older than three years were pregnant (N=1) or showed uterine scares (N=4), representing 5.1 % of the whole females collected in the sample. The mean number of uterine scares or foetus was 4.4 (SD 1.67). The main mortality causes was poaching (illegal shooting and poisoning). The data are discussed and criticised.

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**Key words: Wolf, Mortality, Age structure, Fertility**

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