

EVALUATION OF THE NEED AND POTENTIAL OF HARMONIZING METHODS FOR WILDBOAR ABUNDANCE ESTIMATION AND THE DIAGNOSIS OF INFECTIONS WITH THE AUJESZKY'S DISEASE VIRUS – A QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

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BACKGROUND: The APHAEA (harmonized Approaches in monitoring wildlife Population Health, and Ecology and Abundance, www.aphaea.org) project aims to establish a European wildlife disease surveillance network capable of providing reliable estimates on abundance of wildlife species and occurrence and distribution of pathogens in key wildlife species. For this purpose the host-pathogen combination wild boar (*Sus Scrofa*) and Aujeszky's disease virus was selected. **METHODS:** A questionnaire was designed to collect information on host abundance and pathogen occurrence from historical records, current studies or data which will be potentially accessible in the future. The questionnaire was circulated among the core project partners and voluntary external partners.

RESULTS: We received 31 completed questionnaires from 13 participating European countries. In most cases, data available to estimate wild boar density consisted in hunting bags. The information was available at different regional scales and mainly on an annual basis. The definition of hunting seasons and hunting strategies varied widely. But the questionnaire demonstrated that harmonized protocols already exist for the collection of information for the hunting statistics and investigation protocols (e.g. age classification, gender, type of carcass, date, location, test results).

CONCLUSIONS: Although heterogeneity could be shown, the intention to harmonize methods was clearly demonstrated by the participants. Crucial information regarding the used methods for abundance estimation compared to the proposed harmonized methods was obtained. Given the known limitations of hunting bag data, people were encouraged to also provide data obtained by other methods, such as thermal imaging and distance sampling or camera-trapping at local scale. With regard to the disease-related questions, harmonization is already established at a high level.