

Effects of Alpine Marmot re-introduction in the Pyrenees



In conservation biology there are a growing number of re-introduction schemes that are successful in terms of establishing a breeding population of the re-introduced species. However it is also important to ascertain the impact that a species re-introduction may have on the rest of the ecosystem. Alpine marmots became extinct in the Pyrenees in the Pleistocene but were re-introduced in the mid-twentieth century. Populations have grown and spread and alpine marmots are now common in the Pyrenees. We are investigating their effect on alpine meadow plants. Marmots dig for bulbs and tubers in the early spring and appear to damage the turf. However, results so far show that this disturbance is in fact beneficial for many plant species as it avoids them being out competed by strongly-growing grasses. A species that appears to particularly benefit from the digging activity of marmots is the *Iris latifolia*, a large blue Iris plant endemic to the Pyrenees and northern Spain.

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