

# More bears needed to sustain Pyrenees population: activists

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A protest by shepherds in Pau, southwest France, this year against the reintroduction of bears in the Pyrenees mountains

The release of additional bears into the Pyrenees mountains straddling France and Spain is needed to ensure the fledgling population's survival, the activist group charged with the bears' protection said Wednesday.

"The [good news](#) of 2018 is without doubt the release of two bears in the Bearn region in October," the Ferus association said, referring to the border region.

"But there's still a long road ahead of us," it added.

Government officials have pushed ahead with plans to reintroduce [brown bears](#) in a bid to boost biodiversity, despite fierce resistance by sheep and other livestock producers.

Around 40 bears currently roam the mountains since France began importing them from Slovenia in 1996, with Ferus hoping the two newest, Claverina and Sorita, will have cubs sometime next year.

Environmental activists say they are crucial for maintaining a fragile ecosystem threatened by human activity and climate change.

Some farmers, however, have vowed to shoot the bears on sight, saying they are decimating flocks, which now require costly protection from the predators.

Claims by farmers for government compensation have soared, rising by 70 percent this year to 448 cases in the single French department of Ariège, where opposition to the bears has been particularly intense.

"Complete security for the bears is far from assured because of an anti-bear minority which remains violent," Ferus said.

Ferus also said France's wolf population remained at risk, with 45 animals shot and killed this year under a government programme that lets livestock owners shoot the animals if their flocks are threatened.

The group announced earlier this month that it had filed a complaint

with the European Commission against the French state, saying it was failing to ensure the wolves' protection.

Around 500 wolves are now in France since they began to return to the Alps via Italy in the early 1990s, and are increasingly found elsewhere, including the Pyrenees and wooded northeast regions near Germany.

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