

The magazine of The UK Wolf Conservation Trust, published quarterly

# WolfPrint

Issue 27 Summer 2006



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## Aims of The UK Wolf Conservation Trust

- To enhance the conservation, scientific knowledge and public awareness of the environment.
- To stimulate greater interest in Wolves, their food, their habitat and their behaviour.
- To provide opportunities for both ethological research and for people to interact with Wolves.
- To improve the chances of survival of European Wolves in the wild.
- To set up an education programme for schools, conservationists and dog trainers.

Cover price: £3.00  
Subscription rates (incl P&P):  
United Kingdom: £14.00 (non-members);  
£12.00 (UKWCT members).  
Rest of world: £16.00 (non-members);  
£14.00 (UKWCT members).

# E ditorial



The cycle of life has been very much evident at the UK Wolf Conservation Trust in the last week. Recently the Trust 'adopted' four cubs (three females from Dartmoor Wildlife Park and a male from the Anglian Wolf Society). Just as we were getting to know these wonderful bundles of fur and sharp teeth, and revelling in their antics, we were faced with the sad news that our grand dame, Kenai, had given up the fight for life following a battle with cancer. Her departure was as peaceful as it could be for her, but nevertheless painful for the rest of us who will miss her presence greatly.

The three female pups didn't have a particularly auspicious start in life, having been born to an elderly mother and being neglected by her, and then having their den flooded after heavy rains. Just prior to collecting the pups we were told that two of them might not survive. Watching them now, it is difficult to believe that things could easily have turned out different for them. Little Mia, who looked more like a young hyena than a wolf cub at three weeks old, was very soon showing off her wolfie behaviour, dominating the male, Torak, who had had a much better start in life and who was much bigger and more robust. I'm pleased to report that although it's still early days, the cubs seem to be thriving, and enjoying exploring their different roles in their small pack.

Following another successful seminar in April 2006, we report on one of the presentations: Wolves in France (see page 6). We are still working on an article on the Wolves in Germany based on Oliver Matla's presentation, and this will be published in Issue 28. Lise Donnez is passionate about wolves and wildlife conservation in general. She gave an impassioned talk about the situation of wolf conservation in France, which is currently polarised. We have used the basis of Lise's presentation together with material from Gilbert Simon to bring you an in-depth article.

It is hard to believe that in the modern world bounties still exist on wolves. But there are countries in Europe where the hunting of wolves provide a subsistence income. In Russia, Vladimir Bologov, and his father before him, have worked for many years to change attitudes through education and the collection of biological research data. One of Vladimir's students, Alistair Williams, spent time at the Chisty Les Biological Research Station, and has written an account of the wolf conservation issues in that region. (See page 10)

The very nature of ethics is to provide a framework for moral and ethical values. This often means challenging the thinking, assumptions or actions of social groups, and even individuals within those groups. Our practical ethics adviser, Bill Lynn, once again invites us to engage in some critical reflection following the death of Kenton Joel Carnegie in Saskatchewan last November (see Wolf Print, Issue 26).

And finally, in this issue, we bring you the latest report from Bulgaria. Chris Senior and Alex Hampson, colleagues from Education 4 Conservation, joined me recently on a trip to the Balkani Wildlife Society's Large Carnivore Education Centre nestled in the foothills of the Pirin mountains. What was meant to be a straightforward visit to check on the progress of the new education centre turned out to be an adrenalin charged week of dogs (dead and alive), bears, and wolves (wild and captive). Other flora and fauna proved fascinating too, but that's another story. You can read about our adventures on page 14.

If you have any comments or thoughts about the conservation of wolves throughout the world, then please do write to us. Send your letters to Denise Taylor, Editor, Wolf Print Magazine, UK Wolf Conservation Trust, Butlers Farm, Beenham, Reading RG7 5NT, England or email ukwct@ukwolf.org.

FRONT COVER PHOTO: ALEX HAMPSON  
BACK COVER PHOTO: UKWCT



WolfPrint is printed on re-cycled paper. Printed by Colorco. Coventry (024) 7671 1005



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# WOLVES of the WORLD ...

## NORTH AMERICA

### United States

#### Yellowstone

#### Yellowstone's wolves in decline

It was not a good year for Yellowstone's wolves. Of the 69 pups born in the park during 2005, only 22 survived. Canine parvovirus, usually found in domestic dogs, is the likely culprit for the biggest population drop in the 11 years since wolf reintroduction. In 1999, the population pulled through a suspected parvo outbreak, but pup survival was 40 percent then, far better than last year's number. Parvo immunity is passed along in the mother's milk, but once pups stop nursing, they become vulnerable.

The hardest hit packs inhabit Yellowstone's Northern Range, where only 8 of the 49 pups survived. "It's shocking," says Yellowstone Wolf Project Leader Douglas Smith (see "Yellowstone's Heroine Wolves," February 2005). In the northern areas, the wolves live closer together, which helps spread parvo. Plus, a road goes right through the region, providing easy access for domestic dogs and the virus. Smith says a pet dog probably brought parvo to Yellowstone. The virus lasts up to five years in the soil and spreads easily; an animal can become infected just by sniffing contaminated scat. Laws require park visitors to pick up after their dogs, but not everyone does.

Most research shows that, over the long-term, parvo does not hurt wolf populations. However, Smith speculates that the future may be bleak for Yellowstone's well-protected wolves because their social system differs from that of other wolf populations. In the park, he's seen a few older

animals live to exert a strong influence over the pack. "Seven- and eight-year-old matriarchs are calling the shots," says Smith. At the current population level, the wolves will have a chance to recover, he predicts, because the virus tends to be episodic. But the loss of so many individuals from one generation concerns him. Seven years from now, the wolves' social system may suffer from a lack of matriarchs. By killing off so many pups, the parvo outbreak may just have reduced the pool of potential pack leaders of tomorrow.

Source:

By Corey Binns  
<http://www.wildlifeconservation.org/wcm-home/wcm-article/24214846>

#### The Ecology of Fear Scientists Say Wolves Are Helping Restore Yellowstone's Ecosystem

For four years, they toiled in parallel wilderness laboratories a thousand miles from home, both quietly minding their own business, which is plant science. Bill Ripple and Bob Beschta were working in separate obscurity, attempting to explain the decline and rise of three key tree species in Yellowstone National Park's northern range.

The two Oregon State University scientists scarcely noticed the distant mournful howls of the grey wolf. They paid scant attention to the caravans of wolf watchers who traversed Yellowstone's remote Lamar Valley with their binoculars and video cameras. Ripple and Beschta concede they had little more than a passing interest in what park naturalist James Halfpenny calls "the greatest ecology experiment of the 20th century."

"Too busy," recalls Beschta, a professor emeritus in forest engineering whose forte is stream hydrology and riparian areas. One moment, they are immersed in the obscure study of aspen, willow and cottonwood; the next, they are suddenly, unwittingly joined at the hip, boot on the national ecological stage for their landmark assertions about ... wolves.

After spending four years connecting dozens of dots, they published a study crediting *Canis lupus* with unilaterally beginning a dramatic restoration of the ailing Lamar River valley. And the implications, like the wolves themselves, have spread beyond the borders of Yellowstone to other regions of the Pacific Northwest, where splinter packs are eventually expected to take up residence. "To me, it's an incredible trip Bill and I have embarked on," Beschta says. "But it was not by intent. We were not going over there to show that wolves are doing incredible things."

Their unlikely journey began in the summer of 2000, when Ripple and OSU graduate student Eric Larsen first ventured to Yellowstone. They hoped to explain a 70-year gap in aspen recruitment in the northern range, a mountainous region outside the park's famed caldera and geyser basins. It wasn't long before they connected their first dots. In what Ripple and Larsen affectionately call their "aha" moment," they noted that most aspens were either younger than 10 or older than 80.

The trees had stopped growing about the time Yellowstone's wolves were eradicated in the 1920s. Ripple and Larsen suspected that wolf predation was impacting elk, which in turn was impacting aspen growth, but they weren't sure how—and

they were apprehensive about going public without more thorough knowledge.

Given the intense emotions surrounding the wolf, especially in nearby ranching and hunting communities that view the nomadic predator as little more than a frothing killer of elk, cattle and sheep, they knew their claims would elicit scepticism. "I thought, 'If this is wrong, boy is there going to be egg on my face,'" Ripple says. "But I felt strongly about it intellectually and intuitively, so we went ahead and published [in 2000]. But we put it in at the end and discussed some other potential causes."

The next summer, though, Ripple literally stumbled on what appeared to be similar phenomena with cottonwood and willow along Soda Butte Creek, his thoroughfare into the northern range's high country. He e-mailed Beschta, who had been struck by the lack of vegetation along the Lamar during his first visit in 1997. Still, Beschta had been sceptical when Larsen had attempted to correlate the park's population of some 120 to 160 wolves with aspen recruitment during a thesis defence.

"I could never figure out how wolves could eat that many elk to make a difference," he recalls. Beschta didn't get on board until he confirmed a similar age gap in riparian cottonwood and willow growth in the Lamar Valley. The broad swath of grassland bisecting the northern range, nicknamed the "Serengeti of Yellowstone" for its prolific wildlife, was conspicuously absent of middle-aged trees.

Beschta found cottonwoods dating to the time of Lewis and Clark, others growing since the Civil War and still others born in the Roaring '20s. Yet, "something shut it off past the 1920s." Beschta crunched data back in



Corvallis and compared his figures to Ripple and Larsen's. "It was like, 'Holy smokes, they're right!'" Beschta says.

Yet the connecting of dots still had only just begun. Wolves had been reintroduced into the park and central Idaho in the winter of 1995 to 1996, and in 2001 both Ripple and Beschta noticed young willows and cottonwoods were beginning to reach heights unseen for many decades.

Ripple and Beschta began touting a concept called "trophic cascade," where a top predator has a profound domino effect on an entire ecosystem. In Yellowstone, they believe, the wolf's impact starts with its favourite cuisine, the elk. They believe the wolf's return has restored a long-lost "ecology of fear" in the ungulate, which instinctively recognizes that it can no longer browse in the open or as casually on aspen, willow and cottonwood. The key is not simply that elk numbers are lower. Populations were similar in the 1960s, when elk were removed or killed by the Park Service, but the saplings were still mowed down. The difference is that the elk won't stand in one place as long with wolves nearby.

Willow and cottonwood are returning in northern Yellowstone, and a ripple effect has begun. Beaver are recolonising due to the availability of trees. New dams and lodges have re-created wetlands, which in turn are restoring habitat for native trout and songbirds. Berry bushes are also reappearing, offering hope anew for Yellowstone's island of endangered grizzly bears. The predator's future has been clouded by beetle decimation of whitebark pine and the cones it needs for hibernation sustenance.

"This ecological chain reaction is what's so amazing," Ripple says. "This is a great experiment that I feel honoured to be a part of."

But scepticism abounds. Some park biologists say the return of willow, cottonwood and, to a lesser extent, aspen reflects a natural cycle. Another supposition is that recent flooding has reseeded the area with cottonwood and willow saplings. Duncan T. Patten, a biologist at Montana State University in nearby Bozeman, suggests that unusually mild recent winters have reduced snow cover and provided more grasses, the elk's food of choice.

Robert Crabtree, chief scientist at the Yellowstone Ecological Research Center in Bozeman, told a Portland, Oregon, newspaper that ecosystems are simply too complex for a single explanation as basic as ecology of fear. "Everybody's in a rush to grab the thunder and attention of wolves," Crabtree says. "Certainly, wolves are a factor, but the whole story is not being told. You can't ignore other explanations for one pet theory."

Ripple and Beschta agree that other factors play a role, but they say logic and evidence is overwhelming. They're unconvinced that climate, elk hunting or flooding were decisive.

The two scientists are now more attentive to wolves, which are seen more frequently in Yellowstone than anywhere in the world. Those distant mournful howls have entirely different meaning. "It's fun to see them at play and hunting and all aspects of wolf societies," Ripple says.

Beschta adds, "Ranchers have real concerns, and so do hunters at some level, but everything's

pretty much that wolves are bad, bad, bad. Hopefully, if we've done anything at all, we've broadened the discussion on wolves to include some of these very, very important ecological components."

Source:

By Jeff Welsch

Oregon State Leopold Project  
<http://www.emagazine.com/view/?3077>

### **Killing wolves works - briefly**

**From the Billings Gazette.**

Killing wolves that attack cattle or sheep may take care of the immediate problem but doesn't stop conflicts later, according to a new University of Calgary study.

Researchers looked at wolf attacks in Alberta and in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming for more than 15 years to determine the effectiveness of removing wolves that prey on livestock.

Marco Musiani, the study's lead author and an assistant professor at the University of Calgary, said that once a "problem" wolf is killed, others simply to move in and take its place, Musiani said.

"This study shows that wolves are being killed as a corrective, punitive measure -- not a preventative one," Musiani said in a statement. "People hope that killing individual wolves will rid the population of offenders, but this isn't happening."

The study is published in the current issue of the Wildlife Society Bulletin. Musiani recently discussed his findings at the North American Wolf Conference at Chico Hot Springs, an annual gathering of scientists, policymakers and wolf enthusiasts.

Conflicts between livestock and wolves have been a long-running, contentious issue since wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park and Idaho in 1995 and 1996.

In recent years, as prime habitat in Yellowstone has filled up, wolves have been spreading into areas outside the park, causing ranchers to fear for their livestock.

Even though coyotes every year kill far more livestock than wolves, the presence of wolves - especially in new areas -- always generates hot debate.

Musiani and other researchers looked over data in Alberta from 1982 to 1996 and in the northern Rocky Mountains from 1987 to 2003.

During that time, there were 219 confirmed reports of cows killed in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming and 602 sheep kills. Most of the attacks occurred between March and October and began with the onset of calving season.

During that time, 120 wolves were killed.

More recently in the Northern Rockies, investigators confirmed that wolves killed 97 cows, 244 sheep, 11 dogs and two horses in 2005. In response, 103 wolves were killed by wildlife managers.

Killing wolves that prey on livestock isn't intended to reduce the overall population but to get rid of offending animals. But Musiani said the results can be short-lived.

"In our study area, even if entire wolf packs are extirpated through control actions, neighboring or dispersing individuals may readily fill home-range vacancies," the study said.

Instead, it might be more useful to pay attention to when attacks occur over a predictable schedule and take preventive action including lethal and nonlethal methods such as guard dogs, fencing, wolf repellents and relocating wolves to "wilder areas," the study said.

"We see the greatest promise for reducing wolf depredation by improving animal husbandry, especially in high-risk seasons," it said.

But another issue then must be addressed: covering the cost of extra efforts to prevent attacks and compensating those who lose livestock to wolves.

Source:

By Mike Stark

Of The Gazette Staff

**Editor's Note: Our thanks to Pat Morris (Wolfseeker) for the regular supply of wolf news from around the world. Articles that are reprinted in full are appropriately credited with the author's name and details of where the article was first published.**



# Wolves in France

by Chris Senior and Denise Taylor

Based on source material supplied by Gilbert Simon and Lise Donnez  
French-English translation provided by Gwynne Power

The bulk of this article is reworked into English from material provided by Gilbert Simon. It is composed of diary extracts from France's National Group for Wolf Planning and is designed to provide some insight into the problems encountered, and the campaigns undertaken, in wolf conservation, and related attempts to improve relations between predator support groups, livestock farmers, national and local government agencies, and the community at large. Additional information has been taken from Lise Donnez's wonderful presentation at the Trust's spring seminar: If you missed this, don't forget that there will be another one in October of this year.



Friends,  
You are in Dévoluy, a splendid country shaped and maintained by generations of farmers and sheep breeders. The new presence of the wolf is a threat to their business. Their future and their reason for being are questioned. Let's try to think today about the right reasons for fighting for the protection of nature.  
Signed: The Mayor of Agnières

Already, 14 years have passed since wolves returned to France in 1992, crossing the French-Italian border into the Parc National du Mercantour. Since then, pressure has steadily mounted from farmers to get rid of these large predators from a country where they had previously been absent for 60 years.

Like in so many other countries throughout Western Europe, the human-wolf relationship is a complex one, underpinned by the many myths and legends that dominated cultural and social history in the past, and which still prevail today. With the absence of the wolf, France has forgotten how to live with these large carnivores, animal husbandry practices have changed, and sheep farming has become economically unsustainable.

France has nine million sheep, of which six million are reared for meat. However, 60% of sheep meat is imported into France from

other countries, such as New Zealand. The sheep farming industry is currently heavily subsidised and aimed at the much larger farms. According to some sources, farmers need to rear at least 1,500 animals before it is economically viable to employ a shepherd.

Paradoxically, whilst some of these negative and seemingly old fashioned attitudes still persist, the world has also moved on. The environmental movement that started in the 1960s started to slowly change attitudes towards nature and there is now a greater level knowledge, and a growing awareness of conservation issues. More and more people want large predators to have their rightful place in habitats and ecosystems.

These different world views have led to opinions on wolves in France becoming polarised, with heavy opposition from farmers on the one side, and animal protection and environmental groups, and the general public on the other.

So what is the current situation? ...

### Conservation status not yet reached

Early in 2005, France's National Group for Wolf Planning met to review the overall situation of the wolf in the country. The IUCN stated in 1993 that France requires a population of 100-150 wolves, plus 20 installed packs, to reach conservation status. The wolf has not yet reached this status with current numbers standing at 13 packs and 70 individual wolves. **Wolves – how much damage do they really cause?**

While the number of wolf attacks on livestock, mostly sheep, remained stable, at around 2,500 (around half of these cases not actually proven to be wolves) – and this is out of a total of over nine million farmed sheep in the country, although the huge subsidies and increasing imports are making this industry increasingly unsustainable – the area over which these occurred became wider as wolves dispersed (to put this into context, it is interesting to note that 100,000-200,000 sheep are killed by dogs each year, whilst 45,000 die from disease and accidents). These attacks motivated a representative of the Ministry of Agriculture to propose the use of Zones of Permanent Presence (ZPP) in which a strategy is devised around the use of shepherds, guard dogs and enclosures, referred to as 't-measures' – with dogs and fencing subsidised by the government – to protect the flocks: Since t-measures are used in only 25% to 30% of grazing areas, there is a great deal of additional work to be done before an accurate assessment can be made of wolf impact where this strategy is implemented. As of 2005, 16 ZPPs contained

13 packs totalling 39-48 individual wolves, and an additional 20-30 roaming, still short of the suggested total.

In addition to the subsidies, 2005 saw 3,665 reimbursement payments made to farmers for the loss of sheep to wolves. This is up 31% on the previous year. Where it is not clear whether it was a wolf or dog which killed the sheep, then blame is put on the wolf: Sixty percent of reported attacks were blamed on wolf kills.

### Prevention and protection measures

Despite these subsidies for t-measures, implementing this protection means a tacit acceptance of the wolf's presence by the sheep farmers, and poaching continues to be a problem, as official figures of 15 wolves poached since 1992 probably belie the true total: The general opinion is that many wolves are shot and poisoned in silence, with those responsible having little fear of being caught and prosecuted.

Additionally, the 600 *patous* (livestock-guarding dogs, of the Pyrenees mountain dog breed) are perceived to cause some difficulties for hikers. Moreover, elected officials, and permanent residents of villages object to the presence of the dogs in populated areas in winter. This had led to a human-based approach, with *Pastoraloup* being an initiative involving eco-volunteers, who help farmers during the summer grazing period, and this may also help to bridge the gap between the two opposing viewpoints: It all has to do with changing habits. In reality, the Pyrenees dogs do not do any harm to hikers, but people do not know how to behave with them, and the sheep they protect, when they see them in the mountains. For this reason, extensive campaigns – also with the support of the EU – are being implemented to teach hikers how to behave in the mountains! And of course, for the farmers, live-stock guarding dogs need food and attention: Carrying dog food up in the mountains represents an extra cost.



French Patou - Pyrenees mountain dog

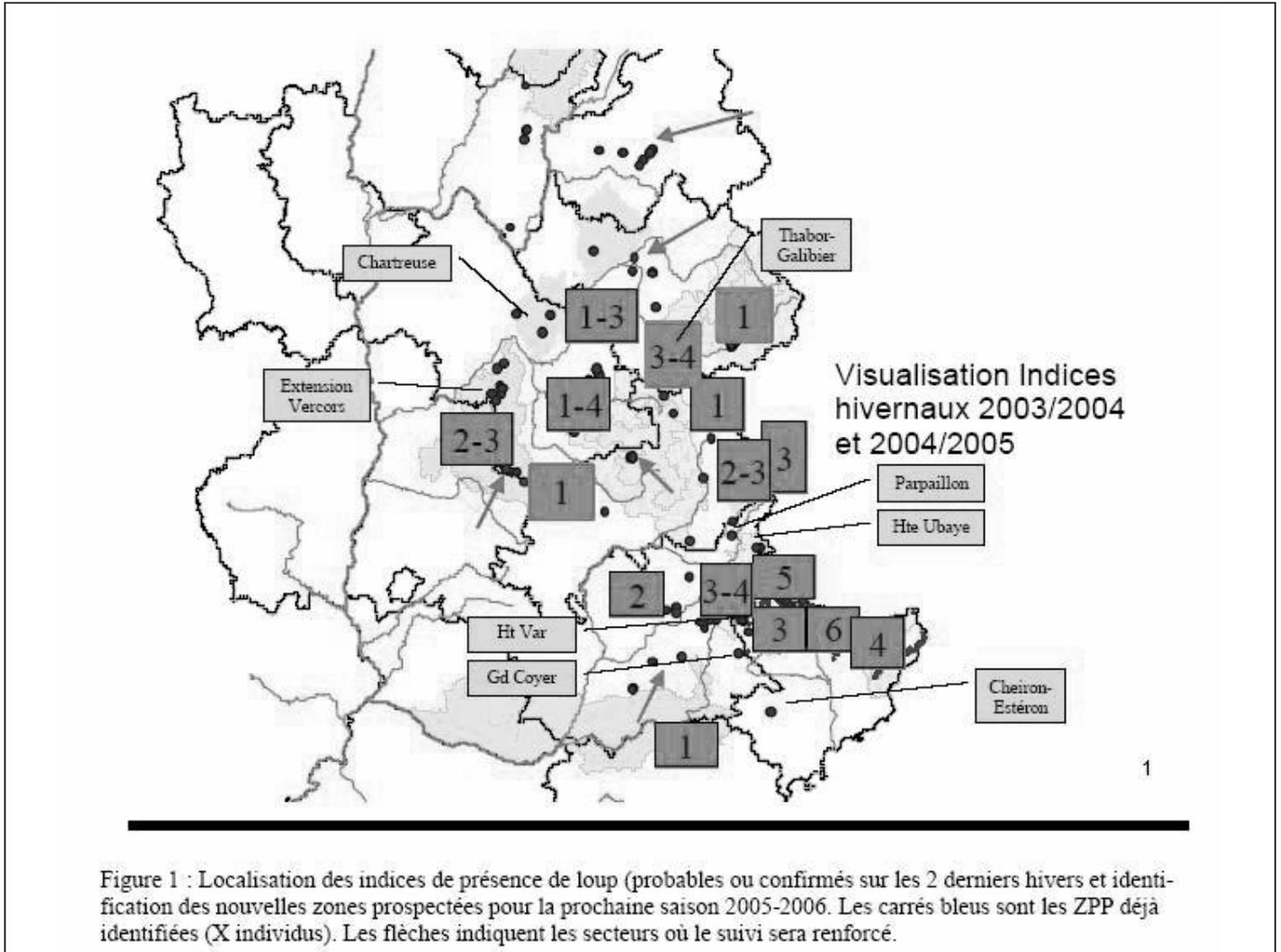


Figure 1 : Localisation des indices de présence de loup (probables ou confirmés sur les 2 derniers hivers et identification des nouvelles zones prospectées pour la prochaine saison 2005-2006. Les carrés bleus sont les ZPP déjà identifiées (X individus). Les flèches indiquent les secteurs où le suivi sera renforcé.

#### ***Killing wolves – a co-habitation enabler?***

Then there is the monetary cost of culling the wolf. In 2004, 1,500 man-days at 260 Euros per day were put into this, amounting to almost 400,000 Euros for the year and resulting in the shooting of two wolves as part of the national wolf management plan (the government had authorized the killing of 4 wolves in 2004). The established criteria requiring wolves to be killed were not adhered to in either case, leading many to the conclusion that they died for no purpose: In order for wolves to be killed, they need to be proven to have done three subsequent attacks within a period of three weeks

on the same flock of sheep. And these sheep must be protected (shepherd, enclosures and guard dog).

#### ***Hunters and Wolves***

So much of the focus seems to be on the problems of farmers and wolves in France that hunters have had very little voice, staying silent on the subject until recently. There are one and a half million hunters in France, and from survey information, they accept that “the wolf is here to stay”. However, hunters do feel that the wolves are taking more of the game species than they would like, and this is having an impact on their quotas. Hunters have also offered to cull wolves for free,

leaving the ONCFS agents available to “do their real job of chasing the poachers that are killing the roe deer in the mountains”.

#### ***The Future for Wolves in France***

Wolves in France face an uncertain future, despite having full legal protection, and despite overall attitudes becoming more positive (79% of people surveyed are in favour of wolves). However, the farming lobby has a strong influence on policy makers, and as this issue of Wolf Print goes to press, the French government’s new wolf plan for 2006 is due to be published in June. Wolf advocate groups believe that this will contain directives for wolves to be killed.



Pro wolf protests in France





## 2005 – an eventful wolf year ...

### **March 9th - Wolf hit in Savoy**

A wolf was killed when struck by a car on the RN 90 highway at Montailleur in Savoy, on March 9th. The *département's* Agriculture and Forests management said in a press release on March 11th that an autopsy indicated she died from a "violent frontal shock". All visual indicators pointed to – and were later confirmed through DNA analysis - her being of the Italian family, *Canis lupus italicus*, whose spontaneous migration across the border first signal a restored wolf presence in France. More detailed dental investigations were scheduled, but indications were that she was two to three years old.

### **March 15th, Paris**

Based on the latest statistics, there are now believed to be 80 wolves in the ZPPs – some of which are cross-frontier areas – but few recent signs of them in the wild, or nearby *communes* (the smallest unit used for French administrative purposes). The conclusion is that the wolf packs have made little progress and are not in a positive state of conservation. Despite this the Nature and Conservation Directorate (DNP) is thinking of allowing shooting, while trapping is also envisaged. A joint letter of protest is being sent by conservation associations. Simultaneously, provision of compensation for livestock loss is to be stepped up.

### **March 17th - Italian wolves in the Pyrenees**

In the French Pyrenees, where a wolf presence was again confirmed during the winter of 2003-04 in Pyrenees-Orientales, their monitoring is being stepped up. Two winters ago, the process began and an organization Bear-Wolf was established, on the lines of Wolf-Lynx in the Alps.

"The 2004-05 cross-country ski-season had been poor, so for a final excursion on March 17th we chose the Isola 2000 sector. The day began well, a bright sun, mild temperature, and we headed swiftly from the hubbub of the ski station toward the Merciere col. We watched a couple of squirrels playing in the snow before I took the lead from my two friends, and was first to reach the col, only to find myself face-to-face with a wolf. Doubtless as surprised as I was, it moved off swiftly and disappeared behind an elevation. I pushed forward, pulling out my camera, only to find that there were in fact two wolves. They moved off again, but without undue haste, and I was able to take several pictures.

The whole encounter must have taken about a minute before they loped off swiftly into the Mollieres valley, and that was that. But what a feeling, what a surge of pleasure. I had seen tracks, and occasionally the remains of a chamois, but never before had I actually seen this magnificent creature that sits at the head of the southern Alpine food chain. I fervently hope this chance sighting will not be the last ..." (David Gueyffier [www.alpes-sud.net](http://www.alpes-sud.net))

### **March 30th - Body of poached wolf found in Alpes-Maritimes**

The desiccated cadaver of a male wolf, dead for more than two months, was discovered beside a railway line between Breil and Saorge on March 30th. The Gendarmerie thought it had been shot, if so, by poachers, and a veterinary laboratory identified two holes in the skull consistent with gunshot. One paw was missing, fuelling strong suspicion it had been first caught in a trap.

FERUS keeps up a constant flow of reminders to the authorities that such poaching activities must be confronted. It urges careful investigation of each incident involving the discovery of a body, since it is illegal and practitioners, where possible, should be prosecuted. To allow some people to take measures into their own hands would seriously undermine all efforts to

sustain 'Plan Wolf'. Such incidents should also be considered when the overall welfare of the species is considered, with statistics revised accordingly.

### **April 28th, Aix-en-Provence**

After an earlier motion that wolf conservation should come first, the Group assembled in the south, closer to the action zone. With the DNP supporting the principle of the ZPPs, this approach is widely accepted as the way to proceed. Here, all concerned – herders, residents and elected officials – are familiar with the conditions. The DNP also acknowledged the opposition to trapping wolves, which would result in continual captivity for those individuals thus taken.

Similarly, any cull would only take place in the ZPPs, the sole locations where the legal considerations are met: Wolf numbers are known and any reduction should be guaranteed not to endanger the species in the area. It was agreed that the effectiveness of such measures can only be judged when all parameters are known and considered.

It was also decided that herders should be swiftly compensated in case of depredation. A genuinely encouraging sign was that none of the many herders who spoke opposed the *principle* of a wolf presence in the Alps, though many expressed concern over any proliferation in their numbers.

### **May, Isere**

**May 3rd:** An attack on heifers near the commune of Biliou, Isere on the night of May 3rd-4th set a disturbing chain of events in motion: The wolf is immediately nominated prime suspect, even though the incident took place 50km from known wolf locations and at the foot of the Chartreuse, a habitat consisting of plains rather than uplands.

A week later during the nights of May 10th-11th and 12th-13th, further attacks took place near the neighbouring commune of St Geoire en Valdaine, also attributed to a wolf or wolves. The *Prefet* (Prefect) immediately ordered a surveillance operation, with a view to scaring the animal off. The wolf was spotted on May 15th at 3am, and on May 18th ran off in the face of warning shots. The Ministry of the Environment (MEDD) decided to take the wolf down with anaesthetic, with a view to sending it into captivity, the following day, although FERUS (a bear, wolf and lynx conservation organisation) immediately protested the decision, calling for a calm consideration of the best course of action. At this stage five cattle had been killed.

This protest was followed up the next day with an announcement, issued in conjunction with WWF, reinforcing the call for calm while clarifying FERUS's understanding of the livestock farmers' concerns and endorsing immediate compensation and provision of assistance. It pointed to the way that Croats, Swedes and Finns in Europe, and of course Americans and Canadians, have successfully deployed electrified enclosures to protect livestock. It also noted that whilst five cattle had died from the predations of wolves, thousands had been routinely slaughtered at the merest indication of BSE in the herd. It cited the extermination of a herd of 8,000 in the nearby *Département* of Isere, after they were contaminated by smoke from an incinerator at Gilly.

**On May 21st,** the *Prefet* grants permission to shoot the wolf: The Agriculture and Ecology ministers took the decision at a demonstration of herders, after repeated insistence by the latter's union that the wolf is incompatible with the raising of cattle, with even a number of local wildlife protection groups anxious not to alienate the herders and so prepared to sacrifice a wolf. The authorities declare that this decision is outside the scope of the



Wolf Plan. So, the hunt began, using nocturnal teams of beaters, during which a wolf was fired upon but missed. Over a few nights, teams of 'counter-beaters' were deployed to disrupt the official operation, and the hunt was briefly suspended for analysis of a series of observations, only to begin again on June 1st.

**On May 25th**, an announcement condemning the hunt as a backward step and in total violation of undertakings by MEDD was distributed, supported by FERUS, WWF, the SPA (Animal Protection Society), ASPAS (a campaign to combat abuse of shooting and hunting, to protect nature), SNPN (National Society for the Protection of Nature), the Brigitte Bardot foundation, SFEP and loup.org (a French pro-wolf organisation). The FNE (France Nature Environment) declined to sign as it believed there was a lack of clarity about shooting in exceptional circumstances. The signatories believed the position was clear enough and that a wide range of signatures was required in the face of "unacceptable behaviour" by MEDD.

**By May 31st**, the FERUS announcement was picked up first by local, then national, newspapers and radio, and a major debate took place at Chambéry. This grew quite rowdy, with the usual misinformation about planned reintroduction, as opposed to the fact of natural recolonisation from across the Italian frontier, and an anti-wolf *Depute* (politician) present. Despite this, many useful contacts were made with the livestock farmers and herders of Savoy (Prof. Pierre Taberlet, of the state university in Grenoble, published a study based on genetic analysis of 300 faeces samples, concluding that the wolf in France was definitely *Canis lupus italicus*).

#### **June 2nd, Wolf Group in Lyon**

The atmosphere is more tense now than on April 28th. The administration outlined its plans for 'wolf measures' for 2005, leaving blank the number of wolves it intended to kill. While FNE accepts the shooting of wolves in "exceptional circumstances" FERUS, the WWF and SPA maintains outright opposition to any killings for as long as the wolf foothold in France remains so precarious. Herders maintain their classic refrain: 'We won't take care of our livestock unless we retain the right to protect them through shooting or poison.'

It is worth noting the presence of two new participants at the meeting. A member of the wildlife commission of the CNPN (National Council for Nature Conservancy) was there, a good thing since this commission had blindly waved through the decision over Isere, under pressure from the Ministry. There was also an appearance by the president of the *département's* Hunters' Federation, though this was low profile. It is to be hoped that words of reason pass down from this representative to the hunting membership, since some fairly harsh language has been used in regard to the wolf, though the opposite message seems infinitely more likely.

Detailed provisions were adopted regarding compensation to herders losing livestock, enough to almost double the overall cost of the measures: Although the market value of a sheep is 50-60 euro, a ewe will be compensated at 100 euro, whilst a ram is worth 300 euro, if killed by a wolf, and this is paid even where wolf involvement cannot be definitively proven, and whether the (subsidised) protection measures have been put in place or not! Mountain farmers also receive over 500 million euro in other subsidies from the government annually. Over June 7th to 9th, MEDD presented its findings, which will be published in the Official Journal, regardless of the result of these consultations.

Though a 'wolf war' did not break out, the overall situation seemed to be deteriorating. *Cosa Animalia* moved to disrupt activities of beaters for the wolf hunt – something FERUS had put on hold as the effectiveness and risks of such measures had not been fully examined. Hunters and livestock farmers had conducted their own counter-demonstration and one militant had been unacceptably manhandled, in his view. Meanwhile,

provocative graffiti was daubed on the road, in front of the house of one of the FERUS leaders, and the slogans shouted by hunters at their public rallies indicated a worrying frame of mind; "the only good wolf is a dead wolf".

#### **June 9th, The hunt is over**

Though the court order of the inter-ministerial authorization ran until the 15th, the hunt is definitively halted on the 9th, having cost some 120,000 euros: A judge of the high court ruled that the correct consultation by the CNPN had not taken place. But fortunately no wolf had been killed.

#### **June 10th, FERUS meets Nelly Olin**

The new Ecology Minister, Nelly Olin, made the decision after just six days in office that six wolves could be culled between now and March 2006 (remember that France is signed up to the Bern Convention which offers wolves full protection under Article 9), helping the European Commission to declare in August that France was in breach of law relating to protection of natural habitats and wildlife. The Minister hosted a two-and-a-half hour meeting with the ten leading nature protection groups in France, including WWF, the SPA, FNE, SNPN, the ROC (a pro-wildlife and biodiversity organisation), the LPO (French RSPB equivalent), Mountain Wilderness, and FERUS. A wide range of subjects was discussed, from Natura 2000 to the national strategy on biodiversity, batted back-and-forth between Education and Environment departments. Obviously, the wolf-bear issue was raised, and an evidently attentive minister was urged to be vigilant on three points: not to allow wolves to be killed to atone for livestock losses in order to placate livestock farmers; to resist the rising power of a hunter-agriculturalist front which viewed the wolf as a 'verminous pest'; and to hold true to the spirit of the wolf plan and avoid panic action every time a wolf appeared in a fresh location.

On bears, the need to boost the existing population was underlined, pushing for the first reintroductions to take place in September 2006. The minister was urged to look to elected representatives in the Pyrenees supportive of the bear, and a climate of public opinion largely favourable to the conservation of these creatures in France. FERUS hopes that the anniversary of the death of Cannelle in November will be less of a wake than a celebration of new bears taking to their lairs (Cannelle – meaning Cinnamon – was a fifteen year old brown bear in the Pyrenees, one of the last fifteen animals in the region, and the only remaining female of pure Pyrenean stock. She was shot by hunters on a wild boar shoot, leaving a ten month old cub, whose survival alone seemed unlikely. *Note:* Miraculously, the cub is known to have survived).

The conclusions from this interview were that on the bear front, the reintroduction programme will not suffer due to the departure of Serge Lepeltier (former Minister for Ecology, and mayor of Bourges), though there must be vigilance on behalf of the wolf.

Maybe this vigilance will be helped by the likes of the thousands of people who turned up to demonstrate in Paris in November 2005, calling for a realistic Wolf Action Plan and an improved environmental protection strategy. This must have seemed like *déjà vu*, as the previous November had seen 4,000 protesters in Parisian streets, gathered to accuse the government of poaching, after they had put a huge amount of time and money into killing two wolves. There are no easy solutions here, but a majority of residents in those areas where wolves have returned are in favour of their continued presence, and do not support hunting of wolves. As is always the case, misconceptions abound, and building communication and trust between disparate stakeholder groups is a long, complicated process, especially when a few vociferous individuals try to impose their views on the majority.

# Preventing the Killing of Wolves in the Tver Region of Russia: Exploring Strategies

by Alistair Williams and Vladimir Bologov.

## Background

The wolf has been hunted and persecuted across the Northern Hemisphere for many centuries, and Russia has been no different. However thanks to the extensive forests, rugged terrain and low population densities the wolf has managed to survive the extensive efforts of man to eliminate it. But whilst many counties across the world have now either protected the wolf or regulated its hunting, this is not the case in Russia, which still retains bounty payments for the killing of wolves.

During last 5 years, between 120 to 200 wolves have been killed in the Tver Region annually, and whilst this falls below the estimated 50% which would have an impact beyond the wolves ability to compensate [Mech 1970], this almost certainly disrupts the social cohesion of wolf packs in the region as well as having a knock on effect on the dispersion of wolves and consequent genetic diversity of local packs.

Education programmes for children, in schools, have contributed greatly to dismissing the many myths surrounding

wolves, and this, along with increased technological access and the growing body of research available to the general public, has led to slowly improving attitudes towards the wolf. Several recent surveys of such attitudes have noted a marked bias in pro-wolf attitudes of populations in urban environments, and the fact that most of the world's population will soon be located in cities will only assist the long term future of wolves. However it will take some time for this to have a significant impact in the rural communities that have the greatest impact on wolves living today. Education programs for adults are somewhat more problematic as any attendees will invariably be pro or neutral in their attitudes towards wolves before attending, thus there are few avenues of approach to influence older generations who may still hold firm the mythological view of the wolf as a blood thirsty monster.

Whilst there are many socio-economic factors which lead to wolf killing in the region and across the northern hemisphere, it may be possible to

generalize these into three broad categories and examine techniques which can, and are, being used to reduce the number of wolf deaths:

## Wolf and Subsistence

There is still a bounty system for the killing of wolves in Russia, thus wolf killing is often carried out by professional hunters and rangers who are down on their luck, whilst the difficulties of hunting wolves in the forests of the region generally precludes individuals from extensive hunting of wolves for a living, and thus such killing will often be more opportunistic in nature.

Additionally, a significant number of rural communities raise livestock, and thus wolf depredation can have a significant economic impact upon individuals, especially as no compensation scheme exists. Therefore, livestock owners may attempt to eliminate the problem wolves, although it is often difficult to actually identify the individual wolves which cause livestock damage, so that often, any wolves are killed in retaliation. However techniques are available for the protection of livestock and work is carried out with livestock owners to educate them in these methods.

At Chisty Les Biological research station, up to 20 volunteers and students assist with field research in a given year; many will be students wishing to undertake projects to achieve their qualifications, but some will be eco-tourists just wishing to lend a helping hand and to see the unspoiled taiga with its diverse flora and fauna. This provides an opportunity for the employment of local guides to assist in locating wolf movements in the area, along with other field work activities. Invariably, the best guides are the local hunters who may otherwise have been killing wolves, and additionally, it quickly becomes evident to them that this additional revenue, which exceeds any sums they could earn through bounty payments, is entirely dependant upon the presence of wolves in the area.

Similarly, although it is much harder to demonstrate the correlation to local



Photo: Chris Senior



workers, the presence of volunteers contributes throughout the local economy, directly and indirectly, by increased consumption of local products and services. Eco-tourism is now a well established phenomenon across the globe, and as Russia experiences a more stable political environment and easier access for tourists, this can only increase in the area, providing additional income and establishing the clear financial benefits of intact and complete ecosystems.

#### **Wolf as Sport**

The wolf is considered by many sport hunters as a clever, devious and dangerous animal which requires a great deal of skill and bravery to hunt, thus many hunters in Russia actually pay significant sums of money for the opportunity to hunt wolves and thereby gain the respect of their peers.

However, some first time hunters do experience mixed feelings as to the morality of killing animal for reasons of prestige, as this quote from Stephan Rosen illustrates [Elander, Widstrand & Lewenhaupt 2002]: "Before shooting it [the bear] I spent an hour videoing it. You feel proud to have shot a bear but at the same time you do ask yourself whether it is not enough just to get it on camera. You feel almost sad because it is a great experience just to get close to a wild bear ..."

As alluded to above, it may be possible to redirect some of the energy from the hunting of wolves to less destructive pastimes such as photography or film; it does, after all, require significantly more skill to be able to approach wild creatures with a view to recording their normal behaviour, rather than killing them, and if the animal is considered dangerous, it could easily be seen as more courageous to do so, especially if unarmed. It may also be possible to add other aspects of research into a more sporting mould, such as locating radio collared wolves, by using skis and snowmobiles in and around the forest. Thus, it may be possible to have a scheme whereby an individual could assist in the capture of a wolf, provide a collar, then spend some time locating the animal within the forest, thus experiencing some of the thrill of the hunt, whilst contributing to the body of research available in what might be described as a more hands-on adopt-a-wolf scheme. There is a significant amount of

money in sport hunting across the world; if even a small percentage of this could be redirected to research and conservation efforts, a great deal could be gained.

This sort of approach would have the additional advantage that individuals taking part would gain a higher level of knowledge of wolf behaviour and biology, and from experience this generally leads to a much higher level of conservational awareness.

Whilst it could be argued that perhaps untrained people attempting this may well cause stress and disturbance to the wolves, it should be kept in mind that the wolves may otherwise be killed. It is also very difficult to promote such activities without funds to do so, hence progress made in attempting to change attitudes in this fashion is slow and difficult, as it is only possible to influence individual sport hunters as and when the opportunity arises.

#### **Wolf as Vermin**

Whilst the majority of wolf killings in the region are derived from (perceived) economic or prestige reasons, there does exist a number of individuals who simply believe that the wolf provides unacceptable competition and is too dangerous to have a place in the ecosystem, and that this enemy of man should be eliminated at every opportunity.

There would appear to be very little that can be done to counter this attitude unless any individuals holding these views can be educated through close proximity to conservation work by employment, as outlined above (Wolf and Subsistence).

#### **Conclusion**

As we have discussed, there are several reasons for the killing of wolves in the region, and no doubt throughout Russia, though some strategies are available to attempt to reduce the number of wolves killed. The most effective short term method to prevent the killing of wolves in



Photo: Vladimir Bologov

the region is the direct employment of hunters from local communities to assist students and eco-tourists with activities in the field: By promoting the incidence of eco-tourism, economic benefits should become more readily apparent to local communities, who will then start to feel the correlation between increased financial benefit and the presence of wolves in the area, as opposed to the current position of wolf depredation leading to financial loss.

In the slightly longer term, there may be opportunity to divert some hunting activities into activities less harmful to the wolf. However, whilst it has been seen that this is possible on a very small scale, it would be difficult to effect a significant step change without large amounts of funding, which can probably only be provided by large companies in the hunting or tourism market.

While these measures may assist in the short term, in the long term we can only hope the changing attitudes of the public will culminate in the removal of the bounty system, alongside regulation regarding the number of wolves that can be hunted.

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Photo: Vladimir Bologov



# Ethos

## Wolves and Human Tragedy

by Bill Lynn

Wolf attacks on people are extraordinarily rare. Yet in early November 2005, the Canadian media reported that a pack of wolves killed a man in northern Saskatchewan. His name was Kenton Joel Carnegie, a 22-year-old student of geo-engineering from the University of Waterloo. Mr. Carnegie died on 08 November 2005 near Points North Landing. His mauled body was found on a lakeside trail, hours after he failed to return from a walk.

How should we respond to such news? As this unfortunate story unfolded, several thoughts came to mind.

My very first thought was that this is a tragedy for Mr. Carnegie's family and friends. The grief and loss suffered by people in such circumstances is wrenching. On this point it is irrelevant whether one is for or against wolf recovery. As I read through the news reports, I felt sorrow at Mr. Carnegie's untimely death, and before I say anything more, I want to extend my sincere condolences to the Carnegie family and his circle of friends.

My next thought came nipping at the heels of the first. When researching this column, I noticed something missing from pro-wolf positions statements about the alleged attack – there were few fulsome expressions of

sorrow and empathy for the family and friends of Mr. Carnegie. The statements were generally factual and dispassionate. The overall message stressed learning to live with wildlife, avoiding the habituation of wolves to humans through direct or indirect feeding (e.g. pet food, unsecured garbage), and the infinitesimal risk wolves pose to human life in comparison to domestic dogs and other events (e.g. bee stings; lightning). The facts were right, the articles were informative, but the tone was wrong. It was a bloodless response that failed to connect at a human level with the pain of others.

There may be a few readers who are quick to minimize the pain and suffering of people in such circumstances. To them I want to say, 'back up'. It is true that humanity as a whole has not done a good job of respecting other animals and the natural world. It is also true that wolves (like other animals) are 'innocents' in that they do not act with unethical intent. Young children are more ethically accountable than wolves. Even so, people are animals too. We evolved as creatures who establish deep social bonds and enduring emotional commitments. What we have done to the world does not justify hardening our hearts to the grief of others. Indeed, empathy is one of the tap-roots of ethics. Properly considered, the death of Mr. Carnegie should move us to open our hearts, and bear witness to the fears and loss and suffering of people whose lives are negatively affected by wolves and other predators. This does not mean disrespecting wolves. It means making manifest our respect and concern for other people.

I then noticed the poor handling of public communications by both the authorities and the news media. The initial reports were based on information from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and wildlife officials within Saskatchewan Environment. Both quickly linked the mauling of Mr. Carnegie with a pack of wolves that had been loitering in the area. As noted by RCMP spokesperson, Heather Russell, 'There is no evidence to the contrary....All of the injuries [examined] at autopsy were consistent with animals [attacking]' (Jeff Mitchell, Wolf Attack Suspected in Oshawa Man's Death, Durham Region News, 13 November 2005, [www.durhamregion.com](http://www.durhamregion.com)).

What should be obvious to anyone who watches legal dramas on TV is this: the absence of contrary evidence is never enough

to support an unfounded assumption. In this case the RCMP assumed that a dead body + canine tracks + bite marks = wolf attack. Now, that equation may be right, but then again, it may not. It could be a coincidence. There could be alternative explanations.

The news media did little better, endlessly reporting the 'theory' of a wolf attack as virtual fact, failing to question the authorities with rigour, and printing sensationalist statements to fan old fears. My favourite example comes from the CTV news website.

'Bill Topping, who makes routine hauling trips to the hinterland regions south of the Northwest Territories border, told The StarPhoenix he had no doubt that wolves were responsible for the student's death. "I've been up there three or four times in the past week, and I've had some close encounters with wolves. They're everywhere," he said. "A bear you can hear walking up and sniffing around. But wolves are sneaky. They're smart, they're fast and they're deadly. They lay in wait" (Wolves suspected in Ontario Man's Death, 11 November 2005, [www.CTV.ca](http://www.CTV.ca), search under 'wolf attack').

Now to be fair, the presence of tracks and bite marks is suggestive evidence, and that might have bamboozled reporters. As for the acute observations of Mr. Topping, they do add human interest. Still, step back a moment and ask yourself what this evidence suggests? That a wolf pack killed Mr. Carnegie? Could it be that another animal or animals killed him? Were the canine tracks from wolves at all, or were they from the feral dogs who were also reported in the area? Might the wolves and/or dogs have found, then scavenged the body? Now ask yourself what else we need to know about the context of this tragedy? Were the creatures wolf-dog hybrids, and thus more aggressive towards people? Were they habituated to people because of unsecured food and garbage near human settlements? Had local communities and companies practiced appropriate waste management? Might someone have been feeding the wolves on purpose, and Mr. Carnegie simply was in the wrong place at the wrong time?

My larger point here is that local authorities and the news media should have raised these unsexy issues, and avoided lurid suggestions of wolves on the prowl. This is all the more important because poor communications and reporting has real consequences for the well-being of wolves and people. It paints wolves in a bad light,

### Can you translate German to English?

Wolf Print is collaborating with Paw Print in Germany, and we need a volunteer who can help us to translate German articles into English.

Wolf Print is published quarterly, and it is likely that there will be one or two articles per issue to translate.

If you have some time to spare to help with this, please contact Denise Taylor by email at [ukwct@ukwolf.org](mailto:ukwct@ukwolf.org).

Or write to the Editor, Wolf Print Magazine, UKWCT, Butlers Farm, Beenham, Reading RG7 5NT, England.

unreasonably frightens people, and in so doing, provides a veneer of legitimacy to ill-advised proposals for wolf control. One can easily envision a worse-case scenario where wolves are (again) framed according to outdated stereotypes of non-human predators. The belief that wolves are inherently dangerous, wreaking unacceptable destruction on innocent people, pets and property (e.g. livestock) has a long history in Euro-American cultures. It remains deeply entrenched in some groups. With such a lurid image in mind, no matter how demonstrably wrong scientifically or ethically, it is a short step to advocating the extirpation of wolves from the landscapes in which people live and work. Even in the Canadian north.

My final thought is this. As important as it is, the life and death of Mr. Carnegie is not the only moral value on the table here. There is the value of his relationships to other people, and the intrinsic value of those people themselves. In addition, there is the intrinsic value of wolves (as individuals, as social groups, as a species), as well as the indispensable role they play in the ecological health of the natural world. In their own way, wolves are intelligent, social and emotional creatures living in extended families we call packs. They have a value in-and-of themselves and to each other that is not dependent on how we view or use them.

We need to learn how to better express and act upon the moral values we share with people, other animals and the natural world. In terms of wolves, that means learning how to live responsibly in wolf country. In terms of people, it means treating them as well as we do wolves. And when conflict arises, it means finding practical and compassionate ways of

sharing a common landscape. Nothing else is morally acceptable for either of our species.

**Further information:**

If you would like to find out more about this issue, there are several sources of information. On the popular side, the website of the International Wolf Center ([www.wolf.org](http://www.wolf.org)) has extensive sections devoted to news and education. You can also find the latest news on wolf-human interactions at the Searching Wolf ([www.searchingwolf.org](http://www.searchingwolf.org)), a wonderful website that features the latest news and analysis. The most recent issue of Wolf Guardian (Spring 2006) from the Predator Conservation Alliance ([www.predatorconservation.org](http://www.predatorconservation.org)) has a number of articles cogently comparing the risk of wolf attacks to other hazards in rural landscapes.

On the academic side, there are several texts of note that are listed below.

- Linnell, John D. C. 2002. *The Fear of Wolves: A Review of Wolf Attacks on Humans*. Trondheim: Norsk Institute for Natureforskning.
- McNay, Mark. 2002. *A Case History of Wolf-Human Encounters in Alaska and Canada* (Wildlife Technical Bulletin 13). Juneau: Alaska Department of Fish and Game.
- Mech, David, and Luigi Boitani, eds. 2003. *Wolves: Behavior, Ecology, Conservation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Of course, all these accounts should be read in light of humanity's depredation on wolves. A few works that track this context include the following.

- Lopez, Barry Holstun. 1978. *Of Wolves and Men*. New York: Scribners.
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Finally, there is an extensive list of articles, books and web sites at Practical Ethics ([www.practicaethics.net](http://www.practicaethics.net)).

Cheers, Bill



**Bill Lynn is the founder and Senior Ethics Advisor of Practical Ethics ([www.practicaethics.net](http://www.practicaethics.net)), and a professor at the Center for Animals and Public Policy at Tufts University ([www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa](http://www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa)). If you have a question you would like to address to Bill, or a comment on Ethos, please write him at [williamlynn@practicaethics.net](mailto:williamlynn@practicaethics.net).**

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# Dead Dogs and Dancing Bears: *Adventures in Bulgaria*

by Chris Senior and Denise Taylor

## ***In the event of being attacked by a bear ...***

In case of bear attack, there are two things which you should not do. Firstly, don't run away, as the bear can outrun you (although there is a certain, cynical view that if you are with others, you only have to run faster than your companions!). Secondly, climbing a tree is also not a good idea, as some bears can also climb. What you should do, depending on the species of bear, is to either curl up on the ground, so that the bear will hopefully ignore you (and if not, you are helping to protect your internal organs), or make yourself look big and fierce, arms outstretched kind of thing, making some noise, and bear will be suitably impressed, leaving you alone.

The smallest European bear currently exploring its new home in front of me, an enclosure with high chain-link fence and an

inner, electric fence, was, apparently, of the type where you should make yourself look large and threatening, if approached. As a bear-sized gap had just been discovered at one point under the bottom wire of the electric fence, allowing it to get right up to the chain-link, these were my instructions, if the bear should come close, in order to keep it away whilst suitable materials were found to reinforce this section of fence. I was hopeful that the bear's exploring would somehow overlook this section, but, of course, it came to investigate, so I made my best attempt at deterring the bear, following this sage knowledge. Whilst the advice may be true for the species in general, this particular bear saw my actions as a direct challenge, and, in a rather more convincing mimic of my actions, threw itself at the fence, skilfully missing the electric wire and coming up against the chain-link

right in front of me, causing the fence to flex alarmingly, and freezing me to the spot, my entire world consisting of this rearing, and not very happy, bear, staring me straight in the eyes with a look of pure anger ...

## ***Signs and Portents***

I'd come to Bulgaria as the fledgling Large Carnivore Education Centre had received a large grant from the Darwin Initiative in the UK (which is a DEFRA project). An excuse to travel, and meet their own resident captive wolf sounded too good to miss, and I was travelling with two other people with similar interests: Denise Taylor, responsible for raising the money for the project, in addition to being Wolf Print's editor, and Alex Hampson, environmental educator, bush-craft expert and didgeridoo player (or pretty much any section of tube or pipe he can find). We'd even been lucky enough to see a fox in the pre-dawn light near the airport, before we even left the country, and felt this boded well for an interesting trip. Little did we know just how interesting it was to get.

A long and very comfortable bus ride from the capital Sofia to Kresna, in the Pirin Mountains of south western Bulgaria, meant that we were all soundly asleep on arrival, and it was only thanks to our kindly driver that we didn't end up wherever the route terminated (Elena Tsingarska, project leader, later told us this would have been Greece – a prospect which made us shudder as we'd already had problems with border control and Alex's passport!). As an ex-communist country, there are still numerous Ladas crawling along the roads, and a lot of labour-intensive agriculture in the fields. Newer Volkswagens and Audis also point to an economy which is prospering, at least in some areas. The farms of the mountain regions have, however, suffered; firstly under the communist regime, where large collective farms replaced smaller family ones, and then the collapse of communism meaning that there was little money for rural infrastructure: The village that was our final



Denise Taylor helping Elena Tsingarska to take a tissue sample from a dead dog. Photo: Chris Senior.



Alex Hampson helping Elena Tsingarska to fit a radio collar to a captured wild wolf. Photo: Chris Senior

just part of the scenery. In the meantime, our trip down to town for supplies had resulted in an unexpected stop for a dead dog, which had been hit by a car within the last hour. Elena proceeded to take a tissue sample, in order to increase data gathered on wild wolves, feral dogs and hybrids. Perfectly normal scientific research, but a little disconcerting to see someone calmly stopping the vehicle for this, when you're not used to it. Then back up the hill, making the routine stop part way to allow the ageing Mercedes van to cool off. A great first day, with a communal evening meal allowing us the chance to chat and pass cameras round to squint at tiny images on their view-screens, comparing photos. There was to be an early (for us) start tomorrow, if we wanted, as there was room for two of us to accompany Elena when she went out to do her daily checking of the traps, set to safely catch a wild wolf in order to radio-collar it, as these data allow mapping of territories and habitat preferences.

#### ***A surprise in the woods***

Well, I'd not expected to make it up at 6am, but as Alex got up, I decided I'd also tag along, aided by the wonderfully strong coffee which is drunk there. So, half asleep, we bounced up another small track in an ageing 4x4, with the sun rising behind the peaks ahead of us offering some compensation for the early start. Elena does this every day, whatever the weather, during the period when the traps are laid, and it is a year since she last found a wolf in her traps. She cannot miss even a single

destination is now devoid of younger people, and this project may provide a future for this one community at least.

A quick drink with our host, Elena, turned into a meal, and then a night out, when we were joined by her partner, Sider Sedefchev, and their son, Hanko, as their wolf research, construction of an education centre, and farming of sheep and goats leave little time for recreation. A warm spring night, friendly company, and some Bulgarian beer meant that we were all relaxed for the drive back up to Vlahi in the mountains, in the dark, along a road of varying quality and width: This proved much less stressful than subsequent trips sober and in daylight.

#### ***Live wolves and dead dogs***

Next morning revealed a beautiful, tiny village, nestling in the foothills of the mountains, parts of which are designated as a National Park. Work was already underway, with the sheep and goats being taken out to graze for the day by shepherds, accompanied by Karakachan livestock guarding dogs, specially bred for a temperament that can turn from placid to ferocious in a second, if the herd or flock is threatened. The sound (and smell) of animals accompanied breakfast, and then, the three of us went to visit Vucho, a three year old male ambassador wolf, in his enclosure. I was initially met with growling, partly as a stranger, and partly because Mrs. Vucho (his unnamed mate) was pregnant: This animosity resolved itself over the next few days, until scratching of his shoulders seemed to be expected whenever I approached the enclosure, even

in preference to the food I brought for him on one occasion. His mate was more elusive, and could only be glimpsed briefly on occasions.

We lost Alex up here, and he returned later having spent several hours near a small pond, taking some amazing photos of insects and reptiles which had revealed themselves, once convinced that he was



Karakachan livestock guarding dog. Photo: Chris Senior



Vucho, the ambassador wolf at Balkani Wildlife Society. Photo: Chris Senior

day, in case some animal is in there. Enjoying the mountains bouncing past my window, we rounded a bend and stopped short. An animal in the trap! At first glance, I thought it may be a wild boar (also residents of these mountains); Alex suspected a deer. Elena just exclaimed “Wolf” and reversed the vehicle back around the bend, out of sight, to prevent stressing the animal further whilst she prepared to tranquilise it with a needle shot from a blowpipe. The chemical used merely immobilises the animal, but it remains conscious, so a blindfold is used to help keep stress levels down, and conversation reduced to necessary whispers only.

I couldn’t believe I’d almost stayed in bed, and now here I was face to face with my first wild wolf. It took myself and Alex to hold the limp but muscular body whilst Elena removed the trap. It looked barbaric at first, but closer inspection of the trap

revealed modified jaws with thick rubber, so as not to cause more than superficial injury to the leg. The blindfolded animal, a young female (later named Nanuk) was then speedily fitted with a stylish new radio-collar, and various measurements taken, along with a tissue sample. Various scars revealed a wolf which has suffered at the jaws of other wolves. Once all was completed, the blindfold was removed and a twitch showed that Nanuk would soon be moving again, at which point she staggered down the slope beside the track, and we observed a healthy wolf give us a rather resentful look, before sitting to let the drug fully wear off. Although this whole process is obviously not without stress for the animal, the data it will provide are of immense use for the project, and the welfare of the animal was of prime concern throughout the entire procedure. On a personal note, it was fantastic to see a wild wolf up close, and I’d never expected to see

one as anything more than a distant movement through a scope.

We returned to a village now basking in the warmth of spring sunshine, all amazed at our luck. No time to rest on our laurels, as there was plenty still to do. The enclosure for the rescued dancing bear was still being finished, and in two days, he would be collected from the zoo in Sofia, three hours away, where they had been looking after him for a year. The tall chain-link was secured to posts bolted into a solid concrete base, with steel cables reinforcing it, and the inner electric fence still awaited a battery and solar-charger. Some concerns had been expressed about the strength of the fence, but it was all securely fitted, and I was confident in it, having checked around its perimeter, little knowing what lay ahead. It would be an improvement over the bear’s home in the zoo, which was of old-school Soviet construction, mainly concrete, and infinitely better than its life as a dancing bear, and had a lovely mountain backdrop (if bears appreciate views at all).

I went back out into the hills with Elena after this, in order to see if the receiver was picking up the signal for Nanuk, and to determine that the wolf had moved from where we had left it, and was therefore healthy. All was fine, and our new test-subject was busily transmitting data. Much to talk about that evening, and more staring at tiny images, and recapping on our luck from the morning.

### **Walkies!**

How to follow a day like that? Well, a walk in the hills with Vucho was our treat for the next day. Also a treat for Vucho himself, as this was the first time he’d been taken out since February. He was accompanied by Elena, the three of us, and Nina Kirova, Elena’s assistant and student biologist. Under intense blue skies, we strolled in the foothills, with myself and Alex at the front, as Vucho was trying to dominate us! Walking with the sound of an enthusiastic wolf panting behind you is a novel experience, and by the end of the walk, Vucho and I seemed to be on an equal footing, whilst Alex had made the (fully understandable) mistake of stepping back at one point, when faced with a snarling wolf whose jaws were aimed at certain parts of his anatomy he wished to protect. Vucho now considered himself to be the dominant one, and became even more focused on demonstrating this.

We stopped on the way back for a quick howl. Well, Elena and Nina howled, accompanied by Vucho, while the rest of us watched and listened. We were rewarded with an answering howl. Another wild wolf out there, and another first for me. Vucho seemed nonplussed by this, but happy to have had a stroll. Who could blame him in such perfect weather.

Alex and I helped out a little in the afternoon, moving some sections of fencing up to the bear enclosure. Before Medo (the bear) moved in, the pool in there was to be used to dip the sheep and goats, and we were making a temporary corral. A warm afternoon, and the uphill walk, carrying one section between the two of us, helped to make us realise that life up here is not easy, especially when one of the shepherds (who works as a ranger when not herding sheep or building corrals), Todor, trotted past us, a single section on his back.

Later, Alex rehearsed for his party-piece; making fire with a bow-drill. This friction-method looks easy, but is actually quite difficult, and making the necessary pieces takes some time. Watched by myself and Hanko, he succeeded in creating glowing tinder. His full evening performance looked even more spectacular, as darkness showed off the glow and the flames slowly being coaxied to life. He was offered a cigarette lighter (this, apparently, always happens!), and the general consensus amongst the remainder of the audience seemed to be that it was a lot of hassle when a match could do the same job: Why make life harder?

#### **Meeting an old friend for lunch**

Another early start next day allowed Alex and myself to accompany Nina for some rather more extensive radio-tracking of Nanuk. It is a fairly simple matter of getting two or more readings from different points, these bearings crossing at the point the wolf is located. Of course, this point is more likely to be a circle, as the wolf will be moving whilst we are getting to the different locations, but it is still a useful way of determining where the pack is, the multiple readings over time giving an idea of territory and frequency of visiting certain parts of it. What this means for the wolf biologist (and us wannabe-biologists too!) is finding a high spot with good coverage into valleys and turning the aerial on the portable receiver whilst listening for where the beeps are loudest. This bearing is then taken, using a

GPS (global positioning system) unit which can be linked to computer maps. Then, off to another location to repeat, enjoying the quiet of the woods and views of the mountains. Meantime, Denise and Elena had gone to pick up Medo from Sofia Zoo, the specialist equipment consisting of ... a van, but at least one with a huge photo of a bear on the side.

On our return to base, I was hanging around when Nina asked if I would like to feed Vucho. After the briefest of pauses (and that only because I am a vegetarian, and wolves are not), I agreed, and took a bucket of food up to his enclosure. This consisted of pig, not a favourite of his, but there had been no road-kill for a while, so he would have to make do. Finding a good rock from which to throw the food in, I launched a pig's trotter into the enclosure, which Vucho treated with indifference. Possibly the choice of menu, and also the fact that I'd not gone to say hello first. I was rather touched that Vucho seemed to prefer a rub on the shoulders to a feed, even using the same hand that I'd handled the meat with. After that, he paraded round proudly with the various pig parts, affording me the chance to get some good photographs. Alex joined us, a little wary still, but Vucho was in a magnanimous mood, and the two of them made up for the previous day's conduct.

#### **A new arrival in the village!**

Meantime, the final preparations were

being made for the arrival of Medo. The transportation cage had been transferred from the van to a truck for the journey up the hill to the enclosure, using nothing more than creative thinking, brute force and some long poles of wood - forward-planning Bulgarian style! Unloading the cage into the enclosure followed a similar methodology, and once it was safely inside, there was the small matter of how to open the sliding front-panel, thus releasing the bear. This had now become something of a spectator sport for ourselves, the shepherds and the guys with the truck, and we watched as a basic A-frame was constructed using a log that was strategically placed at the top of the fence, and a rope thrown over it and attached to the panel. With the electric fence across the gate secured, and the main gate shut, the rope was pulled up to release the bear. Heath Robinson would have been proud, and so were we, when Medo was finally able to emerge, seeming to me to grow considerably in size as he emerged from the confines of the cage.

Medo was now free to explore his new home, taking in the stream-fed pool, selection of bushes and trees and (possibly) the scenic mountain backdrop too. We all watched, while Elena and her team contrived to get Medo into the holding pen inside his enclosure, so that the cage could be retrieved. At this point, the shepherds returned from the pastures with their flocks, and the Karakachan dogs, spotting a



Dipping the sheep. Photo Alex Hampson

new predator on their territory, came over to bark furiously, just as they are supposed to do. It sounded quite fearsome, and I don't doubt that this breed is extremely effective in keeping predators away from the livestock. Although, that said, I did find myself with a dog hiding behind my legs at one point, this obviously being a little larger than anything it had dealt with before!

Eventually, the dogs stopped clamouring, all apart from one which came and stood near me, not at all happy about this new interloper. I'd been strolling about taking photos from all angles, but noticed now that everyone else had disappeared, apart from Alex, who was beckoning me over. Assuming that the plan was to leave Medo alone to settle in, I made my way round, to find that he had been appointed to guard a certain small gap in the electric fence, and was relieved to find me also still there, as he needed to answer nature's call. Giving me my instructions about looking menacing and large, should it come near the gap, he departed leaving me alone with Medo.

... and so it was that I found myself confronted with an angry bear, rearing up, and again seeming much larger than it had before, as it towered over me against the chain-link fence. Frozen as I was, briefly, my senses were overloaded with the sight of bear directly in front of me. There was noise too; people who were not even close by told me afterwards that there was noise, but I don't remember that at all. Just the sight. And calculating that if the bear got in another two or three good charges at the



Medo on the final leg of his journey to his new home.

chain-link, it would probably succeed in getting through, and then it would be just me and it.

Alex, to his credit, reappeared when I shouted, rather than going in the opposite direction (remember, he only needed to out-run me, not the bear!), followed by my new best friend, the still-barking dog. The

three of us, combined with Medo then making contact with the electric fence, suddenly seemed to change his mind about tonight's menu. My fears about the fence were probably justified, though, as in attempting to reinforce the chain-link with some steel bar, pushing it through the eyelets holding the cable popped one of them right off - presumably weakened by the bear's charge. There followed the almost obligatory humour-in-the-face-of-adversity bit, with me composing a letter out loud: "Dear Electric Fence Company", it began, "I have a complaint to make ... I'm currently dead".

The evening was spent staring at small screens again, looking at some video of Medo in the zoo, and much discussion of the days events. I also vetoed mention of a documentary film concerning a couple who lived with bears in the USA, ending up being eaten by them. Just a bit too close for comfort, that particular night.

### **An end to adventures ...**

And so, that was our adventure in the Pirin Mountains. Stunning scenery, friendly wolves, wild wolves, an absolutely furious bear, and some new friends made. Next day, we would go home, and it would seem so tame after this. Well, apart from getting stopped by armed police in Sofia for having a paper licence plate on the back of the car, but that's another story. And Vucho's new family of pups, due to be born the day I sit here writing this. Maybe I'll be going back again soon, but if so, I won't be standing before the bear enclosure looking big and fierce, whatever I'm told.



Medo, the brown bear, exploring his new home in the Pirin Mountains. Photo: Alex Hampson





**In memory of Kenai who sadly  
died on 6 June 2006.**

**A beautiful wolf whose gentle  
spirit will be greatly missed.**

**1994 - 2006.**